CHARACTER STRUCTURE AND THE TRADITIONAL
COMMUNITY IN THREE SOUTHERN NOVELS

by

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Precis

The three novels discussed in this essay avoid the abstraction of ideology without resorting to oversimplification. William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* are, among other things, the presentation of character in context.

In chapters two, three, and four, I consider consecutively the character structures of the protagonists of the three novels in terms of the interaction between the individuals and the communally prescribed character structures of the traditional South which form their context.

With Addie Bundren, Faulkner exemplifies the southerner's preference for stable, primary-colored individuality over the more mobile, versatile, inclusive "individuation" to which he objects because, from his traditional viewpoint, it leaves the individual isolated and alienated with no way of relating his world to the necessarily divergent worlds around him and no way of coping adequately with unforseen human events. Inheriting negation in place of tradition, Addie's death and burial leave the family in a bestially primitive state, existing without benefit of the accumulated experience of history. The traditional society, however, is not the only one that utilizes the experience of past generations.

A perspective of the values and limitations of a family living according to southern traditions as it faces changes in
conflict with its "individuated" members provides a literary view of the workings of a traditional milieu from the inside in *Delta Wedding*.

Welty intimates that real life—the spontaneous action and reaction of an "individuated" being to present phenomena—is more powerful than the restraining and, because dated, erroneous traditions surrounding it.

The protagonist of Ellison's *Invisible Man* moves from a culturally prescribed "preconsciousness" to the furthest extremes of "individuation". The acceptable ways of being black in the South offer so little possibility for the black man that his entire environment can be seen as a maze of traps placed by the culture between the individual and what twentieth-century democratic thought has come to define as basic human freedom.

Falling first into the hands of racists, then paternalists, and finally—the most subtle trap of all—the complex and contradictory concepts of the nature of the black man as conceived by southern black men themselves, the Invisible Man exposes as he experiences the primary facets of southern racism. Breaking through these traditions, the Invisible Man does not attempt to become a white man with a black skin, but locates those elements of his black culture that are viable within the larger perspective of his liberated consciousness.

Finally, Ellison posits the need for an "individuated" personality as prerequisite to the naming of the reality that forms its context. And, as Faulkner has shown with Addie Bundren, individuated
being has insufficient scope for meeting existential exigencies if it is formed without the positive tensions of a broader than individual view—what Ellison calls "myth". As Welty shows, the southern myth is insufficiently inclusive to allow for universal survival through diversified compatibility.
Chapter I

Introduction

Our most forward looking thinkers have noted that we live now as never before in a world that must look to its survival as a whole or perish as a whole. As McLuhan says, "We wear all mankind as our skin." Consideration of any aspect of human relations, then must be "macro-inclusive" as well as "micro-incisive" or we have no way of knowing that our understanding of special case experiences, our solutions to particular area problems, are not belied by the world context of which they are necessarily a part. We must think synergetically.\(^1\)

This need is further complicated by the fact that our understanding of the world and of our beings within it increases in detail at a geometric rate and by the fact that all phenomena are characterized by a process of flux within flux rendering static conceptions worthless.

As a consequence of this complexity, so much knowledge of ourselves and our situation is in doubt that we must consider the understanding of particular phenomena to be the working hypotheses of the hypothetical constructs we call our "selves". That is, every aspect of the thinking, from the thinker to the subject of thought, must be sensed as tentative conceptualization even as it provides the basis for further hypothesis.


\(^2\) For a full discussion of this concept, see chapter one of R. Buckminster Fuller's Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth (Carbondale: 1969).
The social sciences, in their attempts to conceptualize this incredibly complex interaction between modern man and his environment, have themselves become so entangled that the mind of a thoughtful being approaches disintegration (or, rather, never approaches integration) in the unceasing maelstrom of reciprocal deceptions and self-deceptions of their competing ideologies.

The three novels discussed in this essay avoid the abstraction of ideology without resorting to over-simplification. William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*[^3] Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*[^4] and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*[^5] are, among other things, the presentation of character in context. They present, not a statistical analysis of the facticity of human interaction as does the sociologist, and certainly not an interpretation of actual human events as does the historian, but rather the imaginative recreation of human experience itself. In this sense they are both inclusive and incisive. Their powers of perception and communication are not limited by verifiability, but include the entire sense of life, encompassing intuition and the unconscious as inextricable components unified under the cohesive force of this sense.

[^3]: New York: Vintage, 1930. Subsequent references to this novel will be cited internally.

[^4]: New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945. Subsequent references to this novel will be cited internally.

[^5]: New York: Signet Books, 1947. Subsequent references to this novel will be cited internally.
Armed thus with subtlety and scope, these novelists are among the few people in a position to see present reality synergetically. Their map, the novel, is the most direct, subtle, and complete picture we have of present phenomena with their intensity, complexity, conflicting tensions, and sometimes explosive portent. 6.

I propose, then, to consider the character structures of the protagonists of three novels depicting the interaction or lack of interaction between the individuals and the communally prescribed character structures of the traditional South which form their context. Specifically, my ultimate objective is to consider through consecutive analysis of Addie Bundren of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, George Fairchild of Welty's *Delta Wedding*, and the protagonist of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, first, just what the interaction of the southern traditional culture and the being of the individual characters provides, if anything, in the way of advantages to the individual characters and their society: second, the limitations the culture imposes to gain those advantages; and finally, the viability of such culturally defined individuals, black or white, and of their traditional milieu when observed from the world context from which they are, with each passing day, less and less isolated.

6 As McLuhan says, "In this century Ezra Pound called the artist 'The antennae of the race.' Art as radar acts as 'an early alarm system' as it were, enabling us to discover racial and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them." McLuhan, p. xi.
I have chosen Addie Bundren for close analysis primarily because, through her, Faulkner puts forth the most profoundly conceived and fully developed presentation of the limited scope and ugly ramifications of living without recourse to the traditional culture I have found in southern literature. It is clearly necessary to understand not only what the white southern character gains from his culture but what he fears from alternative possibilities as well. If we do not see the fears of alienation, of loss of a framework for the support of human life with all of its contingencies, of loss of a chance to be a fully realized human being, we can not understand why a culture that, on the face of it, is itself so inhuman to all but an arbitrarily selected few "insiders," is so obdurately defended. Faulkner, in producing that vision, has fully realized his capacities as cognitive psychologist and literary artist. The novel as a whole, as he notes himself, is sheer "tour de force."  

In many ways, George Fairchild of Delta Wedding presents the obverse of Addie's predicament. The individual being of each member of the Fairchild family from great-aunt Shannon to the baby, Bluet, develops in tension with the novel's depiction of Mississippi Delta traditions. The positive values of those traditions so inaccessible to Addie are then disclosed in the resulting complex

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of character interaction. John Crowe Ransom is referring to these values when he observes:

What a family sense they have! They look at each other with little starts of love and understanding. They stop to be glad for their own happiness, and then for their faults and failures if necessary, confident that everything is according to the mysterious requirements of the family, as well as knowing that an unvarying beatitude might dull the sense for happiness, which has to run perilously close to the tragic sense.⁸

At the same time, George, who through travel, liberal education (he is a lawyer in Memphis), and thought, has developed an awareness beyond that of his tradition-based family, discloses the limiting features of the traditional framework. His family's reactions toward him also show how the traditions are defended against change.

Together, then, As I Lay Dying and Delta Wedding present a relatively broad and incisive literary picture of white southern attitudes toward inherited traditions, the fears of life without recourse to them as well as the beauty and ugliness of living in tension with them.

Finally, an inquiry into the structures of southern literary characters clearly must consider both the black man and his subcultural traditions. Ellison's Invisible Man is an excellent novel for such consideration.

Whoever his biological ancestors might be, Ellison, as he says himself,⁹ has carefully selected his literary ancestors.

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From Hemingway he has learned how to present not just the emotions of his protagonist, but incidents that in their particularity have precipitated those emotions as well. By presenting the young, black, and pre-conscious Invisible Man as he is subjected to the horrifying, particular experiences of southern racism and, later, of ignorant and unrealistic paternalism, he initiates the reader into these features of the culture from the closest perspective that anyone from outside the black man's experience of the South can obtain.

At the same time he has learned, from Joyce perhaps, among others, to select and present the particular events with an eye toward the communication of a broader symbolic meaning.

The result of this careful combination of the particulars of experience with the generalizable event is the creation in the reader of an incisive and inclusive consciousness of the black man's situation in the South that even the Invisible Man (as I will discuss later) is not allowed.

Before moving to a close consideration of Addie Bundren as Faulkner's presentation of the dilemma of the individual lacking the advantages of southern communal society, I want to consider, first, the theoretical advantages, in general, of such a culture, and, second, what limitations it imposes to gain them.

A communal society has an identity of its own which simultaneously enlarges and limits the scope of being of the participating individual. Because the communal identity is a three-dimensional image (not merely a flat map) of the entire spectrum of interacting beings in the living generation, a sense of community, of mutual
endeavor within a mutually understood and accepted conception of the human condition, develops in the participating individual. This sense of belonging (itself unquestionably real however false the image) circumvents the alienation which is a major problem for most of industrialized America with its disproportionate degree of "freedom from" at the expense of "freedom to."  

If the upholders of the communal image are to maintain this sense of a mutually understood reality, they must practice exclusion. Any inclusion of values, beliefs, experience, or territory of any kind outside its own well-defined perimeters, is sensed as a move just that much closer to the disintegrating explosion of the structure that must follow upon too much inclusion.

Just what are the limitations best suited to a full life and what are the best ways of implementing them at the social level? Melvin Bradford writes, in defense of the southern answer to this question, that the southern community "is inveterately provincial... and has no excessive confidence in self-appointed social prophets or the untested judgement of individual men or even generations of men who would arbitrarily explain or 'adjust' it (from within or


11 Disintegration of the communal structure can logically take place by either inclusion of more territory than the individual can encompass or by inclusion of territory too fast for the community as a whole to keep abreast of what is and what is not included.
Every exclusion thus entails a prescription to the individual member. As Bradford goes on to say,

The values which govern prescriptively the behavior of those who live within it [communal society] we might call (I think of Burke) 'prejudice'. With the pedigree of wide distribution and long establishment, these collective reactions to significant experiences need no discussion among those who are agreed upon them. Their status is assured by their experiential origin and constant reapplication. In function they...render a man's virtue his habit: and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes part of his nature. (p. 432)

Now, obviously, arrival at an answer to this question (Just what are the limitations best suited to a full life and what are the best ways of implementing them at the social level?) is dependent upon what conception of the individual is used, and the answer, in turn, defines the individual, conceptualizes him, prescriptively. Thus, in return for the opportunity to identify with an enlarging cultural image which provides the possibility of realized individuality (as with V.K. Ratcliff in The Snopes Trilogy: or Charles Mallison in Intruder in the Dust, for example), the individual defends the cultural perimeters and accepts these limitations placed upon the scope of his own being which are set by the historically derived and somewhat arbitrary cultural prescriptions. He must "know his place." 13

12 Melvin E. Bradford, "Faulkner, James Baldwin, and the South," Georgia Review, 20, 432. Subsequent reference to this article will be cited internally. The highly connotative diction here is perhaps an indicator of the power a traditional society exercises over its members to defend its perimeters.

13 A broader picture is given by George Shaw in "Sociological Aspects of Faulkner's Writing," Mississippi Quarterly, 14 (summer 1961), 148: "As is the case of all cultures, that of the South was built upon an economic foundation. Upon this foundation developed the appropriate social organization with its power structure, roles, statuses, class and
This phenomenon can be more clearly understood by considering the culturally defined "individuality" in contrast to what Fromm calls the "individuated" personality. In this distinction, individuality is achieved through embodiment of the cultural image. Dilsey, for example, in The Sound and the Fury, is not presented as an admirable character in contrast to the Compsons merely because she had the "courage to be" as Slabey has it, but because she has the courage and the capacity to fill her cultural role while the Compsons are incapable of filling theirs. Dilsey is thus admirable first for accepting her role and caste and only secondarily for defending it firmly, even to the point of facing the wrath of young Jason Compson at the literal risk of her life when that is her "duty" as guardian of the family. But she will never be guilty of questioning the role itself.

Samuel Worsham Beauchamp of "Go Down Moses," on the other hand, has questioned the cultural given and found it lacking. He is, from the culture's point of view, an outcast. The culture demands, however, that Gavin Stevens do what he can for the old grandmother, Mollie Beauchamp, who has shown herself to be a stable caste systems, and the body of traditions, mores, values, myths, and etiquette rationalizing, sanctifying, and attempting to perpetuate the complex whole. Each culture tends toward its own integrated pattern and produces a basic personality type or types. The persons so typed then defend, uphold, and transmit as sacred the culture which has, in large part, made them what they are."

quantity **within the culture**. The reactions of Stevens and of the rest of the town in their paternalistic protection of Mollie show to what extent the cultural individuality (as opposed to an individuated being) can be expected to go in defending not so much another cultural individual, black or white, as the culture itself. The individuated Samuel, on the other hand, has shown himself to be unwilling to stay in his place. He is, from the white southern point of view, only a burden to the culture that spawned him.

Bradford suggests the admirable qualities of the culturally defined individuals in Faulkner's work when he writes:

Dilsey (*The Sound and the Fury*), V.K. Ratliff (*Snopes Trilogy*), Granny Millard (*The Unvanquished*), and Charles Mallison (*Intruder in the Dust*) are among Faulkner's favorites because, as he puts it, they "do the best they can." They "endure" who, what and where they are. They do not whine about how they have been disadvantaged or abused by fate; they do not devote their time to attempt to impose upon the world some self-conceived idea of justice for themselves. (p. 436)

In opposition to culturally defined individuality Fromm presents total "individuation" as the ultimate step in a man's emergence from nature. He characterizes the process as having two aspects:

...one is that the child grows stronger physically, emotionally, and mentally. In each of these spheres intensity and activity grow. At the same time, these spheres become more and more integrated. An organized structure guided by the individual's will and reason develops. If we call this organized and integrated whole of the personality the self, we can also say that the one side of the growing process of individuation is the growth of self-strength. The limits of the growth of individuation and the self are set, partly by individual conditions, but essentially by social conditions. For although the differences between individuals in this respect appear to be great, every society is characterized by a certain level of individuation beyond which the normal individual cannot go (p. 44).
In *As I Lay Dying* (in all of Faulkner, for that matter), that level is short of total individuation. The traditional culture of the South is, as I have pointed out, based upon the assumption of the need for the individual to maintain his primary ties to the culture within which he has developed. Yet, in opposition to this view, Fromm writes:

> The primary ties block his [the individual's] full human development; they stand in the way of the development of his reason and his critical capacities: they let him recognize himself and others only through the medium of his, or their, participation in a clan, a social or religious community, and not as human beings; in other words, they block his development as a free, self-determining, productive individual. (p. 51)

The southern traditional culture thus delineates a "social character" (i.e. a level beyond which the normal individual cannot go) for whites as well as for blacks that lacks the freedom accorded "self-determining" human beings. If this statement seems to be contradicted by the cries for individualism that emanate from southern writers and politicians, it is because the southerner almost invariably has in mind the preservation of "individuality" which is development to a point where reality is judged from one's own point of view—where there is no authority higher than that point of view. It is almost never "individuation" wherein that point of view accepted as one's ultimate authority is free of primary cultural ties.

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16 A case could be made for the contention that only the limited perspective survives, for example; and as William Rosky points out in "As I Lay Dying: The Insane World," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, IV (Spring 1962), 93-94, it is the ignorant Bundrens who survive, endure, and maintain a Quixote-esque kind of dignity.
CHAPTER II

AS I LAY DYING

It's a strange courage you give me ancient star:

Shine alone in the sunrise toward which you lend no part!

-- William Carlos Williams

I

As I Lay Dying is, among other things, a phenomenological document in which a specifically southern perspective of the relationship between the individual and his traditional milieu is discernible. It is phenomenological because, with macabre awe, and a cosmological despair on the one hand, and an existential appreciation, compassion, and even admiration on the other, Faulkner presents the isness, insofar as he can tell, of the human condition. It is specifically southern in that, as one critic puts it, "he has looked at his world as a Southerner and... presumably his outlook is Southern." The Bundrens are not particularized models of southern being drawn from generalized conceptions within Faulkner's mind, not "social characters," but particular characters from which it is, to a degree, legitimate to generalize.

1 This is not the place for an extended discussion of Husserlian phenomenology. My intention here is simply to note that Faulkner carefully presents phenomena without intervening abstract theory.

With Addie Bundren, Faulkner exemplifies the southerner's preference for stable, solid, primary-colored individuality over the more mobile, versatile, inclusive individuation to which he objects because, from his traditional point of view, it leaves the individual isolated and alienated with no way of relating his world to the necessarily divergent worlds around him and no way of coping adequately with unforeseen human events. Though the book as a whole supports this view, I think a close interpretation of the growth of Addie's conceptual reality, of the process of idea generation forced upon her by an impinging reality that is uninformed by traditions, will provide a more incisive perspective. In so focusing, I find that, though her section especially is a tour de force of Faulkner as cognitive psychologist, he fails to do justice to the non-traditional orientation he implicitly repudiates.

II

Unlike most protagonists of southern novels, Addie (Anse too, significantly) has no living family, and the family she once had, left her only a negative attitude toward life: "I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (p. 161). Thus, since it is through the family that the cultural character image is transmitted, she is barred from the possibility of achieving southern individuality and burdened with the ills (though as I will show later, not given the virtues) of individuation in a culture that does not permit its full development. Her heritage, then, is isolation and alienation.
Denied a culturally developed character, Addie adopts (after Cash’s birth) a geometric metaphor to visualize her being: the circle. The only experiences she can relate to fundamentally (i.e. experience as basically real) are those she finds inside her circle, and, at the outset, all that is within that circle is herself.

Her life becomes an attempt to expand her circle by acquiring fundamental experience, and this anguished and determined search must be made by applying a pitifully inadequate dialectic process upon the too-limited area of her individual life experience. Worse, she is not even given an understanding of the limits and techniques of the dialectic she is using.

In a traditional family, as was said earlier, she would be born into not just more words, not just a larger circle, but a full three-dimensional structure large enough to encompass her full human needs and compatible enough with others around her to preclude alienation. Given a totally untutored negativism, however, she can only be hopelessly fragmented, impossibly constrained within her too-small selfhood (and can only pass her predicament on as a legacy to her husband and children, as Olga Vickery notes).

At the outset of her section, she has discovered her alienation in her fundamental sense of separation from the school

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3 The parent does not, of course, merely pass on the word or concept of nihilism. Fromm says that the parent transmits the "psychological atmosphere" as well, that, in fact, "The family... may be considered to be the psychological agent of society" (p. 314).

children. Because they are experienced as totally alien, thus exposing her aloneness to herself, she hates them: "I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by worlds like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching..." (p. 164). Hating them for being outside any real relationship to her, she turns to punitive violence as a possible means of 1) vengeance for mirroring her alienation (Anse gets similar treatment later for being tricked with her into the procreative process even though she knows he is not "at fault"), 2) expression of relief for her hate, and 3) inclusion of the children in a connected relationship through fundamental contact.

But violence alone does not enable her to cope with her experience. It does not effectively include the children. She must hate them still, the blows of the switch giving only the spiteful satisfaction of knowing she is including herself in their fundamental experience. And, even if the violence were totally effective, their inclusion would be insufficient for her maturer needs. The crude logic limited to the area of her personal experience is so ineffective that, considering teaching the hated children to be the only way she can "get ready to stay dead," she says, "I would hate my father for having planted me" (p. 162).

Since Addie's experience is antecedent to her consciousness of its significance, and since she has internalized no cultural
guidelines, she applies an erroneous conception of her predicament. The switching of the children, for example, is at least partially a mistaken attempt to assuage her need to be "violated" as a woman. The description of the spring where she would sit and hate the children has decidedly sexual implications:

> It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in the early spring, for it was worse then (p. 161).

The point is emphasized a page later and this time the image is more specifically sexual. She has just told of Anse passing the school house when she says,

> In the early spring it was worse. 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 out of the wild darkness and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one of the school children to go so I could go down to the spring. And so when I looked up that day and saw Anse standing there in his Sunday clothes, turning his hat round and round in his hands... (p.162, italics mine).

There are, of course, a number of other reasons for "taking" Anse implied in the text. The first "And so I took Anse" comes after her description of her failure to include the school children in her aloneness. The facts she notes about Anse, that he is traveling four miles out of his way just to pass the school house, that he is "beginning to hump" (p. 162), that he looks like "a tall bird in the cold weather," and that, when she goes to the door as he passes, he looks quickly away and does not look back
again, have already told her that she is the more powerful figure, that she can control him (useful information, perhaps, to a woman who feels herself totally alone and expecting from life only that which she can take and hold onto). There are the facts, also, that Anse is without a family, and that he has a good house and farm. The text, however, as the quotations indicate, emphasizes the need to unite through sexual experience as the primary motivation for "taking" Anse.

But then, "taking" Anse, like the sexual urge itself, is only a necessary step toward procreation, which she finally recognizes as "the answer" to the fact that "living was terrible" (p. 163). Thinking of the school children now from the perspective of motherhood she says, "I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights" (p.164). Now that her aloneness had been violated by Cash, it contained two beings: Addie, who is still alienated from the rest of the world ("My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: Time, Anse, love, what you will outside the circle," p. 164), and Cash, who had the fundamental closeness of any child to a mother who fully accepts him.

Significantly, it is not until the birth of Cash that Addie develops her distinction between words and the circle of experience. Until this point she has struggled with her existence as conceptualized in words—those of her father's negativism. Attempting
to cope with negative experience through words, she has misunder­stood her situation. The birth of Cash plants her into an exper­ience beyond words which she conceptualizes geometrically and op­poses dialectically to the emptiness of words. Thus with pro­found verisimilitude, Faulkner shows that the givens of Addie's life are selected for her before she can perceive them or their ramifications.

It is Addie's perception of the distinction between words and experience that gives her that earthbound reality noted by so many critics. By creating her as a being capable of the elemental experience Faulkner so obviously admires, and having her realize the potentialities of her situation, as well as the choices involved in her attempts at expansion, Faulkner strikes not so much at Addie, who, after all, does "the best she can," as at the situation itself. He strikes at the traditionless condition in which nihilism flourishes and in which the "freedom from" traditional character structure imposes a lack of "freedom to" experience an elemental life sufficiently large to contain the fullness of human potential and need.

The time between the birth of Cash and the birth of Darl is a hiatus in Addie's otherwise consistently harried life. It is the only period before the final stoical "house cleaning" when she is not pushed by need. She and he are inside the circle and, for that time, she needs nothing else. Anse uses the word "love," as
Addie sees it, because he is missing the referent. The word "love" is "just a shape to fill a lack; ...when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that anymore than for pride or fear.

Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, let Anse use it, if he wants to" (p. 164). The key word here is "need." It equates in Addie's too-limited circle with "real experience." Before Cash, she has experienced the need to have her circle violated, to feel relationship to other people. Cash temporarily fills that need not only through the violent process of birth, but through entering into a relationship of need with her: he needs her as any helpless infant needs its mother; she needs him to violate her circle, to need her. Anse "says" he loves her but that word, even if meant in his own terms, does not communicate to her enclosed experience. Thinking of Anse she says, "I would think if he were to wake and cry, I would suckle him, too" (p. 164).

The only experience she can accept elementally, here, is dependence. Anse does not show need; therefore according to Addie's simple logic, Anse does not love her. But now she has no need for him to love her because Cash fills that function. "Anse or love...," she repeats, "it didn't matter" (p.164).

The birth of Darl, however, makes of motherhood not an experience definable by spatial analogy but a process understandable only in terms of time. Addie feels tricked by a word "older than Anse or love." Perhaps "sex," "significance," "motherhood," or "life" itself is the word Addie feels has tricked her. The particular word is not so significant, however, as the fact that she
experiences Darl's birth as a trick. From her traditionless (and therefore harshly limited), individually concocted understanding of the experience of life, she has developed the spatial analogy of the circle in terms of which she has sought salvation or the expansion of her circle by acquiring mental experience through which she hoped to obtain peace. But into this Darl has introduced the redundancy of process, duplication within the circle through time. Addie feels that she has been tricked and hurt into meaningless procreation by and for the meaningless continuance of that superfluous nature which nauseates Sature's Roquentin in Nausea's famous oak tree scene. But whereas the more urbane Roquentin perseveres by mainstrength in spite of, almost to spite, that vision, Addie crashes back into a cold and uncompromisingly vengeful nihilism, taking vengeance upon Anse, whom she "knows" to have been tricked the same as she: "And when Darl was born I asked Anse to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong" (pp. 164-165).

Addie's next move is dialectical, just as the previous moves have been, from her individually contrived conception—the circle analogy—logically to the expansion she must have in order to escape the futility of her constrained and redundant present. She

5 Faulkner, in an interview ("Faulkner and the Myth of the South," Mississippi Quarterly, 17 (summer 1961), 131), defined nature as "mind that spawns and produces, it doesn't care whether it will make a poetess or a bricklayer, or lion or serpent, but it still will produce something—a force, a blind force, that by its own standards is neither good nor bad."
identifies with the earth, the nature that she feels (through Darl's birth) has used her. She is now working, not with her too-small circle, but with another spatial analogy, though her distinction is still between that which is elementally real and that which is not. "Words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and...doing goes along the earth, clinging to it..." (p. 165). "Words," in this conception, disappear into nothingness, like ghosts. Anse, identified in Addie's mind since the birth of Cash with the empty word, is therefore "dead": "He did not know that he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think Anse. Why Anse" (p. 165, italics mine). Now Anse has not necessarily changed. Rather, Addie's perspective, tied only to her own individual needs and psychological history, has shifted. The point is repeated, as though repetition were necessary to realize, to claim, to make her own, the identification with the land with which she is attempting to interpret her experience:

He did not know he was dead. I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and his beauty and his sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people's lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the terrible nights... (p. 166).

Hence, the move to identification with the earth motivated by her need to sense the significance of her being, has developed its own configuration willynilly, like a cell in mitosis. Anse, meaningless by a previous image (the circle that excludes him), is now dead without ever having been given a chance to know that he is, or why.

And the process of this development has, in its turn, devel-
oped other and unforeseen consequences of the new image that will further determine the development of her life and the lives of the other family members.

In the quotation above "God" is brought into the conceptualization along with the distinction between words that are deeds and words that are only "gaps in people's lacks." And these additions form the basis for the next development of her conceptual system: God provides the sense of sin which gives Addie's sexual relationship with the minister Whitfield the added force necessary to be "real," and it is through the distinction between deed words and empty words (with the empty words beckoning to her for reality through the geese just as before, the sexual urge did) that she actually moves on to seeking sin with Whitfield.

Addie is now in a position to "discover" the significance of life, the fulfilment of her need: "I believed that I had found it. I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land (p. 166). Breaking from the tightly encircled self into the limitless unmapped territory of the "red bitter flood boiling through the land" which was now herself, she came to believe that her duty was to the alive within her and this duty, as it had been from the time of the school children, is understood in terms of the sexual impulse. Of her meetings with Whitfield she says, "I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air" (p. 167).
She has thus developed a structure wherein she realizes the empty word through the "terrible doing" dictated by her impulse.

At this point, if not before, she seems to have abrogated all codes extrinsic to her own conceptual system, which, as we have seen, are derived from her personal needs and shared with no one. To follow one's own impulses, says Fromm (p. 286), is the ultimate freedom of individuation, but Addie has not arrived at individuation through the growth of "self-strength." In fact, she cannot be said to be sufficiently free to have her own impulses. She has been pushed into her individuated posture by her implacable needs and her isolation. She could not be more alienated.

This development is so unacceptable that the very telling of the discovery of her duty is couched in the past tense and the word she uses, reiterated twice, is "believed" rather than her usual "knew."

The liaison with Whitfield does not last. The reader is not told why, just "Then it was over" (p. 167). But out of this union has come Jewel, who, as his mother sees it, drags the empty word "sin" down to the earth which is herself, and makes it her own. Thus, as Addie sees it, she has done her duty to the "terrible blood"; its compelling force is annihilated through satiation. She has fed her impulse and, her need for the sense of the elemental experience of reality fulfilled, the blood is replaced by
milk with which she will feed Jewel. Jewel, her sin, will be her salvation because, to Addie, his life is the embodiment, the living proof, of the reality of her conceptual structure of being. Having passed the responsibility for the terrible impulsive action on to Jewel, she can fall back into a stoical nihilism and "clean house."

One of the effects of thus allowing Addie to experience what limited success her individually constructed reality is capable of, is to make the ironic tale of the entire novel a disparaging comment upon this kind of success. Saving only herself, she casts those closest to her into a life of existential perdition.

Thus, because the family (as we have seen) is the psychological agent of society, and because Addie, individuated, develops a totally autonomous system wherein she saves only herself, using the others to do so, the Bundrens are not only denied the model of the cultural ikon, but warped irrevocably in their own development by their relationship to Addie. Cash has inherited Addie's limited logical pragmatism with its exact measurement of phenomena and its inability to cope with future events not foreshadowed in the present, its dogged competence and its ultimately ruthless mechanical bias (symbolized at the novel's end by the phonograph). Close to Addie throughout his life, he also shares in her stoical perseverance. Darl, providing Addie with the cosmological perception of repetitious nature using her for the continuance of its meaningless process, is himself cast out into the cosmological perspective so that, while Addie was trapped inside and had to get out, he is trapped outside and destroyed trying to get in.
Jewel, of course, inherits Addie's unbending hatred for the impinging, recalcitrant environment and the perseverance and violence to insist that it bend to his will. Also, as the product of Addie's prideful coercion of the "terrible blood" into the empty word, "sin," a product of the word as deed, Jewel is the embodiment of pride and of inarticulate action. Dewey Dell, only a cipher in Addie's calculations, must begin, like Addie, alone, but the process of becoming unalone through childbirth is so psychologically painful that she seeks an abortion. Vardaman exhibits the same subjectivism in the face of existential dilemma that his mother did. Given no understanding of death from those older than himself, he is forced, as Addie was forced, to come to his own conclusions on the basis of his own limited experience. His conclusion—the reductio ad absurdum of her own—is that his mother is a fish.

Hence the empty ritual of Addie's burial, as Vickery notes, becomes a travesty. What could the Bundrens know of the living symbolic functions of the society's burial rituals? The macabre irony is that, principally because of Jewel, the family, even without the mutual definition of the situation and the organization the communal ikon could have given them, succeeds in getting Addie into the ground, thereby transforming Anse's promise of empty words

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6 Perhaps there is an indication that she does not want to pass this aloneness on to her child as her mother has done to her. She says (p. 382), "I feel my body, my bones and my flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of becoming unalone is terrible."

7 Vickery, p. 235.
into an empty deed. And, the deed accomplished, they sit at the end of the novel without the two most conscious members (one dead, the other insane) munching bananas. The fruit of Addie's inherited negativism is thus, symbolically, a bestial primitive state existing without benefit of the accumulated experience of history.

Implicit in this conclusion, however, is a major misconception held not only by Faulkner, but by the traditionalist in general, concerning the non-traditional individuated personality. Allan Tate exemplified this misconception perfectly when he wrote, "...an untraditional society does not permit its members to pass to the next generation what it receives from its immediate past." On the contrary, the traditional society is obviously not the only one that utilizes the experience of past generations. Even the radical, Eldridge Cleaver, for example, has written, "The world of today was fashioned yesterday. What is involved here, what is being decided right now, is the shape of power in the world tomorrow." And yet Cleaver can hardly be called a traditionalist. Here is his statement of individuation:

I decided that the only safe thing for me to do was go for myself. It became clear that it was possible for me to take the initiative: instead of simply reacting I could act. I could unilaterally—whether anyone agreed with me or not—repudiate all allegiances, morals, values—even while continuing to exist within this society. My mind would be free and no power in the universe could force me to accept something if I didn't want to.

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8 Allan Tate, "What is a Traditional Society?" in Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. 302.


10 Cleaver, p. 5.
Though the traditionalist and the radical are at opposite extremes in the political continuum, then, and though the first would preserve history and the second alter it, both agree that it is tremendously relevant to the present and future of man. The difference, therefore, between a traditionalist and a non-traditionalist is rather in their attitudes toward past experience than in whether they utilize it at all: the traditionalist would pass on past experience prescriptively in the form of the cultural identity, while the individuated non-traditionalist insists upon the option of accepting, rejecting, totally rearranging (in short, manipulating as he sees fit) the past experience of man.

Fortunately one of the effects of modern communications technology may be the death of the single prescriptive and exclusive cultural character structure. As Ralph Ellison says, we know now that "The most beautiful as well as the most ugly inclinations of man are not part of a fixed and biologically given human nature, but result from the social process which creates man." And that may mean that we do not have to accept the uglinesses of our forbears, we do not have to pass them on to our progeny, and that, contrary to the experience of Faulkner's southern characters, our heritage need not be a guilty and inescapable fate. This possibility is the basis for the Invisible Man's movement into determined individuation.

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Before considering Ellison's discussion of the conscious manipulation of the social processes which form men, however, the values and limitations of living within the southern traditional culture of Delta Wedding, and the black man's character and culture in Invisible Man must be explored. This will be the task of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER III

DELTA WEDDING

I have looked, in *As I Lay Dying*, at the traditionalist's insights into the dangers of an existence not provided with a character model and found them to be alienation with concomitant limitation of scope for coping with existential needs. In turn, these needs were found to necessitate the individual creation of conceptual models of existence based upon the too-limited vision of an individual experience. A perspective of the values and limitations of life within the southern nuclear family will provide a view of the workings of traditional culture from the inside. Such a perspective is presented in Eudora Welty's novel, *Delta Wedding*.

Set in 1923, it is a nostalgic view of the immediate past of the South in which social and psychological change are seen breaking up the old pattern of family identity. The novel, centered on a near train accident as George Fairchild attempts to rescue his idiot niece, and moving toward the wedding of Dabney Fairchild to Troy Flavin, the plantation overseer, presents the beauty of the traditional character, yet gives full dignity to a character complex (George's, most conspicuously) which is much more open to present experience, more given to "abstract thought," more consciously existential, and more "individuated" than the traditional model could admit of. Welty sees the necessity for and the fact of a change that is an adaptation to a less provincial, more inclusive reality. Yet at the same time, she eulogizes the tradition which will be a long time dying.
II

Before discussing the various family reactions to the train incident, a general picture of the individual member's relationships to the southern tradition which forms the context of the incident itself and of the reactions to it will be sketched.

From an objective viewpoint, the Fairchilds at the time of Dabney's wedding fall into six basic categories. First, there are the dead members composed mainly of males who, according to family legend, died violently and romantically, and of females who were unremittingly stoical and/or bitter. These are the individuals who, with their contemporaries, conquered the land, lost the Civil War, and developed the attitudes and the means of enforcing them that have come to be the southern tradition.

This group is more important than it might at first appear, for the entire living family relates to the myths of their lives in one way or another. Aunt Shannon, at one extreme, believes them to be actual presences around her. Laura, a visiting cousin, overhears a conversation between her aunt and her dead relatives:

"Denis," she was saying pleasantly, in an after-thought tone of voice, "I meant to tell you, little Annie Laurie's here. Set her heart on being in your wedding" (p. 192).

Here the living people have been replaced by the dead, who
through their deaths, have become ikonic figures in the family legend. In Aunt Shannon's mind, Troy, the living man actually about to be married, and Laura, who really wants to be in the wedding, do not exist.

Aunt Shannon is only slightly more connected to the dead past than is her sister, Aunt Mac, who maintains an animosity toward Aunt Shannon over their relationships to the dead when they were alive:

Far back in Civil War days...some ineradicable coolness had come between them--it seemed to have sprung from a jealousy between the sisters over which one agonized the more abandonedly, over the fighting brothers and husbands. With the brothers and husbands every man killed in the end, the jealousy did not seem canceled by death, but extended by it; memory of fear and the keeping up of loyalty had its rivalries too--made them endless and now wholly desperate, for no good was ever to come of anguish any more and so it never had when anguish was fresh (pp. 118-119).

A third aunt, Primrose, lives predominantly in the present, but romanticizes the past and attempts to pass on the romantic images of the first group to the younger generations. Speaking of Great Uncle George as she insists upon giving a night-light to Dabney as a wedding present, she says,

"He never came back....Nobody ever heard a single word. His brother Battle was killed and his brother Gordon was killed; and Aunt Shannon's husband Duncan Laws, and yet she hoped. Our father and the children all gave up seeing him again in life. Aunt Mashula never did but she was never the same. She put her dulcimer away, you know. I remember her face. Only this little night light comforted her, she said. We little children would be envious to see her burn it every dark night" (p. 45).

Primrose thus tries to keep the dead alive in the younger family members.
Still another way the family members relate to this first group is through identification with the tradition these dead have come to represent. Those who have acquired a character from among the strictly traditional patterns become conspicuous representatives of the culture—living image-models. These may be the real hard core traditionalists such as Battle, the father, and his sister, Aunt Tempe, or, in the case of an outstandingly successful embodiment of the culture, the supreme living figure, the hero. Such a figure was George's brother, Denis Fairchild, before he was killed:

...it was Denis and always would be Denis that they gave the family honor to....Denis was the one that looked like a Greek god, Denis who squandered away his life loving people too much, was too kind to his family, was torn to pieces by other people's misfortune, married beneath him, threw himself away in drink, got himself killed in the war. It was Denis who gambled the highest, who fell the hardest when thrown by the most dangerous horse, who was the most delirious in his fevers, who went the farthest on his travels, who was the most beset. It was Denis who had read everything in the world and had the prodigious memory—not a word ever left him. Denis knew law, and could have told you the way Mississippi could be made the fairest place on earth to live, all of it like the Delta. It was Denis that was ahead of his time and it was Denis that was out of the pages of a book too. Denis could have planted the world, and made it grow. Denis knew what to do about high water, could have told you everything about the Mississippi River from one end to the other. Denis could have been anything and done everything, but he was cut off before his time. (p. 116)

One does not know whether Denis was killed in the war because he was still trying too hard to meet his family's expectations, or because he despaired of ever doing so (his heavy drinking might support the latter view), but he had been made to symbolize
courageous individuality, and, having died, became the model the family would like George to emulate.

Finally, the fringe members of the family, such as George's wife, Robbie Reid Fairchild, and Dabney's new husband, Troy Flavin, relate to this group indirectly through those central members who have a direct relationship which they pass on in the form of attitudes, feelings, ideas, and other aspects of their characters.

Permeating every level of the family structure, the dead members validate McLuhan's statement that "Tradition, in a word, is the sense of the total past as now."\(^1\) It is the pull of this social force that Laura encounters when, entering the library and gazing at the paintings of the dead relatives hanging on the walls, she feels that "in this room where so many dead young Fairchilds, ruined people, were, there seemed to be always consciousness of their gazes, so courteous and meditative they were" (p. 55). And it is this force, too, against which George's individuation must fight for survival if he is to avoid becoming only a living character image, a southern "individuality."

The second group in this family is composed predominantly of older members who do not perceive the change, the dissolution and growth that is going on around them. These include most importantly Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen (George and Battle's sisters), as well as Aunt Mac, Great Aunt Shannon, and perhaps Dabney's young friend from "Look Back Plantation," Mary Lamar Mackey.

\(^1\) McLuhan, p. 263
These people live for the most part as though the Civil War had not yet occurred. Aunt Mac, it is true, is quite venomous about the changes she alone of this group neither fails to note nor ignores. She thinks that if she had to take over the household she "would start by throwing Troy Flavin in the bayou in front of the house and letting the Minnows chew in him" (p. 67). Or, in an argument with Robbie Reid, she says,

"You'll just have to go on back if you're going to use ugly words in here...you're in Shellmound now [the name of the plantation], Miss Robbie, but I know where you were brought up and who your pa and ma were, and anything you say don't amount to a row of pins." (p. 163)

It is not difficult to see what this second group would be like if its members were aware of the failing power of their traditional structure to contain the psychic and social needs of the younger members of the family. The fact is, however, that they are not aware. Even Aunt Mac seems to believe that the pre-Civil War traditional structure is the current reality and that any divergence from it is merely the aberrant behavior of an "outsider."

The third group is composed of the hard core traditionalists who, entrenched and relatively aware, fight to maintain the status quo or to move backward to a more traditional structure. The most powerful resisters of change here are Aunt Tempe and Ellen's husband, Battle.

The area of Tempe's concerns within the family structure is, in her opinion, virtually unlimited. From being "provoked" at a table lamp that "parades" Shellmound's "outdatedness" (p. 97), to telling India, Ellen's daughter, that her mother "has never
learned what is reprehensible and what is not, in the Delta" (p. 20), Tempe "knows" how the family image should be presented to its members and to the rest of the Delta.

She is, of course, aware of her role as dictatorial defender of the traditional values. She parades it like a banner in her statements to various family members: to the females of the family in general she says, "My own daughter married a Yankee. —Naturally, I bring her to Memphis and Inverness to have her babies—and name them" (p. 10). She advises: "Don't ever let this husband of yours, whoever he is, know you can cook, Dabney Fairchild, or you'll spend the rest of your life in the kitchen" (p. 99). Shelley, Dabney's sister, receives the following explanation of Delta social position:

"Well, one thing," said Tempe in a low voice to Shelley..., when people marry beneath them, it's the woman that determines what comes. It's the woman that coarsens the man. The man doesn't really do much to the woman, I've observed."
"You mean Troy's not as bad for us as Robbie," whispered Shelley intently.
"Exactly!" (pp. 205-206)

With the males of the family her devices of cajolery vary somewhat. With Troy, definitely not part of the family in her opinion, she assumes a haughty social superiority and admonishes him before the entire family when he calls a Delta doctor a fool:

"Troy," Aunt Tempe said, leaning her cheek on her forefinger, "You are speaking of one of our closest friends, a noble Delta doctor that has brought virtually every Fairchild in this room into the world." (p. 151)

With George, she expects behavior denoting a southern gentleman/hero, and then lets him know whether or not he has met her expectations.
When she finds that her grand-daughter is near a strange dog, she exclaims,

"Lady Clare's out there talking to a mad dog!" She turned to George—and time was when he would have dashed out of the house to hear that, but not now. He smiled absently and ate a bite of his mackerel. Pattering out the door, Tempe sighed. She ran through the sun as she would run through a pounding rain, and took hold of Lady Clare....

"Don't you know strange dogs may be mad dogs?" she said, running in with her. "Probably are mad dogs." (p. 202)

When she hears of George's near death in front of the train, she projects his emulation of the family hero onto the act: "Naturally..., he did it for Denis" (p. 115). Her role in the family is thus to expect the emulation of the culture's character models from the other members and to project that emulation wherever it might conceivably fit, regardless of what the facts of the situation might be. In this she is not consciously cynical, even though she gains everything and loses nothing by ignoring the facts. As a white southern traditional "individuality," she lives not in a world of observable phenomena, but in the traditional myth, whether supported by present reality or not. The degree to which this is true is most visible in the following passage:

Nobody could really do anything about her ever except Denis. How idle other men were! It was laziness on men's part, the difficulties that came up in this world. A paradise, in which men, sweating under their hats like field hands, chopped out difficulties like the green grass and made room for the ladies to flower out and flourish like cotton, floated vaguely in Tempe's mind, and she gave her head a toss. (pp. 187-188)

Tempe does not see specific human beings, but rather members of the traditional clan participating in a mutually defined world and defended against anyone or anything not part of that clan
and that world. She and her brother Battle, acceptable themselves for the most part as living character models rather than human beings, are the principle living definers and defenders of the traditional myth within which they exist.

Battle has, of course, adopted a traditional masculine character. As his name indicates, he confronts the realities of plantation life with aggressive determination, shaping the Shellmound world, in so far as he is able, into the traditional pattern. He is harsh in a good natured way with "his Negroes." He even has a reputation for paternalistic interference into the lives of black people for miles around: "When Negroes clear to Greenwood cut each other up, it was well known that it took Uncle Battle to protect them from the Sheriff or prevail on a bad one to come out and surrender" (p. 12). He commands his household in the same benevolently gruff manner. Admonishing Laura for calling the town doctor a fool, he says, "'You could have cussed him out if you wanted to, and we'd all listened. But you call him a fool, or anybody in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta a fool, and I'll blister your behind good for you'" (p. 151). He tells his son, "'Stop crying, Ranny....Bluet can cry her eyes out if she wants to, because she's a girl, but you can't, or I'll take the switch to you promptly!'" (p. 91).

In this way, he forces those around him to shape themselves to the contours of his conception of reality. Like Tempe, he is no more concerned with phenomenological data than he needs to be to shape his immediate environment to the outmoded attitudes, opinions,
and values of his ancestors. He coerces his children into the shape of the past by breaking them of being left-handed or by insisting that Laura eat gizzard because her dead mother liked it (p. 12). He is aware of his failure in this endeavor only when the individuated members of the family successfully defy him. When his daughter Dabney insists upon marrying the overseer, a mountain man almost totally ignorant of Delta social traditions, he is reduced to a hopeless attempt to bribe her away from her decision: "'You're sure you wouldn't rather have a trip to Europe than get married?' Battle remarked into the air off the porch" (p. 205). When his younger brother George is mentioned, he is derisive of the signs of individuation, but lacks power to command him to revert to the traditional structures. Thus, he introduces George to the minister, Mr. Rondo:

"I suppose you've met at some time or other my brother George, though he never put foot in a church that I know of. Fooling with practicing law in Memphis now—we're hoping he'll give it up and move back. He did plant the Grove over on the river, before he went to war." (p. 57)

Thus Battle and Tempe, backed implicitly by the members of the dead and old family, are the force of tradition in the Fairchild family. It is against them that the members of the next three groups must contend as they move toward individuation.

Between the traditionalists and the truly individuated members of the family, a fourth group is composed of people who do not merely maintain an unquestioning acceptance of the tradition, yet who do find their being within its bounds, and who therefore provide a relatively conscious evaluation from within. The
principal people here are Battle's wife Ellen and their eldest daughter Shelley.

Ellen is the first individual discussed so far who has a vital relationship with the present. Caring for her own large family, seeing to the needs of her husband's relatives, managing the household servants, gardening around the grounds, or simply observing the human interaction around her are never a matter of squaring phenomena with tradition, of projecting character images, of cajoling or commanding other members of the family into agreement with favored attitudes and responses or of assuming ikonic significance herself. She observes, not in gross categories involving bunches of people mixed together in an inextricable hodgepodge as her husband does, but with psychological subtlety and concern for each individual who comes into her experience. This is not to say that she fails to observe sociological phenomena. The difference between her group observation and that of the traditionalists is that she replaces prescriptive projection with subtle phenomenological observation. Noting the defensive posture in the assumption of a traditional character, she thinks:

How the Fairchilds did talk on about their amazing shortcomings, with an irony that she could not follow at all, and never rested in perfecting caricatures, little soulless images of themselves and each other that could not be surprised or hurt or changed. (p. 30)

Her implicit objection here, too, contains an inherent and primary

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2 "'Your mother lacks ways!' Aunt Tempe always said to the girls, darkly" (p. 185).
concern for the individual beings as such.

It is this urgency, this directness of relationship to the present, that Laura senses when, receiving Ellen's commiseration for having been sick, she feels "...the steady head held so near to hers with its flying soft hair and its erect bearing of gentle, explicit, but unfathomed alarm" (p. 11), and feels the urge to say, "Aunt Ellen, you must never mind" (p. 11). Her kind of human concern for the immediate situation leaves her vulnerable to the exigencies of events in a way that a traditional being never has to be. Thus, she is so intensely involved in the people and events surrounding George's lover's quarrel with his wife over the train incident and in the wedding of her daughter with all of the problems inherent there, that, in the crisis of George and Robbie's reunion, the tension becomes too great for her to bear and she faints.

It is also true that by failing to maintain the distance afforded through the mediation of the traditional structure, she obviously misses a complete understanding of aspects of events around her. She over-reacts to Laura's sickness, for example, or she fails to understand the subtleties of traditional defences, as in the perfecting of caricatures her family indulges in. It is nonetheless true, however, that she is more aware and alive than anyone in the preceding group by virtue of her capacity for concerned yet unbiased observation of the present moment.

Ellen's vital urgency and her relatively objective awareness raise significant questions about the origin and development of
such a character structure in this traditional southern milieu. There seems to be nothing in the traditional groups to generate it. However, Welty is careful in every case to provide contact outside the deep South for every character exhibiting a degree of individuation. Ellen was a Virginian before marrying and moving to the Delta, just as George had the "outside" experiences of his education and his travels during the war. With these individuated members in the family, the younger generation can develop through emulation.

Once generated in this culture, it is not difficult to imagine the simple survival of individuation with its immediate and objective comprehension of the present moment, and its aliveness. The battle against the more confined mind, for all its solidarity, is an unequal one. As Laura notes, "There was nothing at all abstract in Uncle George's look, like the abstraction of painted people, of most interrupted real people. There was only penetration in his look, and it reached her" (p. 56). His life readily asserts itself over the relative death of the statically defined individuals around him. With Ellen as with Shelley, however, there is apparently no such open battle between herself and the more traditional members of the family. Both seem to fit quite smoothly into the family structure.

A look at Shelley's character structure will shed some light on the seeming paradox that Ellen, for all her individuation, is able to found her positive being within the confines of an embattled traditional context. Beginning with a highly developed traditional bias, Shelley has begun to move toward an individuated perspective
presumably through having studied and taken a college degree, and through emulation of George. Her trip to Europe, to take place a short time after Dabney's marriage, may further her individuational development, but for the two weeks depicted in the novel, she is a hybrid case.

She has acquired the habit of more or less objectively considering her experience in a diary. In it, she writes:

We never wanted to be smart, one by one, but all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside. Does the world suspect? that we are all very private people? I think one by one we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient. I think Uncle Q takes us one by one. That is love— I think. He takes us one by one but Papa takes us all together and loves us by the bunch, which makes him a more cheerful man.... (p. 84)

Somewhat later, she adds: "I feel we should all be cherished but not all together in a bunch—separately, but not one to go unloved for the other loved. In the world I mean" (p. 84). Grasping not only the fact of their clannishness and the fear of aloneness that is a primary motive for it, but the fact that these attributes constitute a block to the emotions that constitute individual love, she moves on to accept a macro-inclusive belief in individual love. The attitudes as well as the perspective itself are totally disconnected from the traditional milieu. Apparently because of the intellectual nature of her outside perspective, however, the struggle between her abstract beliefs and the traditional springs of her character is an unequal one. Her reactions to immediate experience are almost invariably dictated by the tradition. She is among the most
prejudiced members of the family in her response, for example, to the dispute between George and Robbie:

Shelley came in chasing Blust, and listened stock-still, "She'd better not try to come here!" she cried, when she understood what Robbie had done. Her face was pale, "We wouldn't let her in. To do you like that—you, Uncle George." (p. 51)

All she needs to know in order to defend George and to feel a venomous animosity toward Robbie is the fact that Robbie has left George. Her psychological subtlety, her objective perspective are not allowed to focus in the face of this real fact. And when an abstract concept does contradict a traditional attitude, it is again the traditional attitude that prevails. She has said, for example, that everyone should be loved "separately, but not one to go unloved for the other loved..." (p. 84). Yet later, as she considers that the outsider Troy knows that George is troubled, she writes, "I think T likes to size things up. I could never love him. I think he could tell tonight that Uncle G has something on his mind, those sweet worry-lines across his brow and eyes..." (p. 85). Then, having seen Troy successfully solve a dispute among the black field hands, she could only think in her anger of the convincing performance Troy had given as an overseer born and bred. Suppose a real Deltan, a planter, were no more real than that. Suppose the behavior of all men were actually no more than this—imitation of other men. But it had previously occurred to her that Troy was trying to imitate her father (suppose her father imitated...oh, not he!). (p. 196)

Shelley, like her mother, is capable of understanding phenomena with an objectivity that is not available to the more traditional
individuals in groups one through three. The rule seems to be, however, that when objective abstract understanding detracts from the perfection of a loved one, it is the love and not the abstraction that takes precedence. In Welty's depiction it is the superior strength accorded to family love that keeps Shelley acting and reacting smoothly with the traditional structure while maintaining as individuated a character as that smoothness will allow, just as (as will be discussed later) it is family love that enables the younger members to see George's individuation not only without alienating him, but with the positive acceptance implicit in emulation. Ellen is more capable of sustaining an outside perspective of her family while remaining smoothly within it than Shelley is, but the reason is the same: traditional love of family. She so unquestionably loves the particular members of the family that she can perceive them critically without diminution of affection.

The fifth group is composed of those individuals who have come from within the family and therefore know and love it as no one coming from the outside could, but who, for one reason or another, have developed a perspective of the culture from the outside (i.e. totally free of primary ties) which they defend even against those they love.

The most insightful view of George's relationship to his family comes from his sister-in-law Ellen. Observing from within the family structure and yet not limited by the restricted perspectives of strict tradition, she is the only older person able to observe his separateness with clarity and love. She notes, for example,
his actions affect the family’s attitude toward him in a way that Denis’s actions never did:

How in his family’s eyes George could lie like a fallen tower as easily as he could be raised to extravagant heights! Now if he was fallen it was because of his ordinary wife, but once it had been because he gave away the grove, and before that something else. The slightest pressure of his actions would modify the wonder, lower or raise it. Whereas even the daily presence of Maureen [Denis’s idiot child] and the shadowy nearness of Virgie Lee [Denis’s insane wife] had never taken anything away from the pure, unvarying glory of Denis. (p. 63)

Denis, succeeding in becoming what the family projected, could not affect their attitudes toward him. Almost deified, any action he took that the family deemed positive was magnified to the heroic proportions of the southern character structure upon which he was modeled. Any action deemed negative was given the status of tragedy. Of course he drank too heavily. Of course his child was dropped on her head and was deranged as a consequence, and his wife went insane. Of course he was killed in the war. His life was a foregone conclusion.

George, in contradistinction, insists upon the individual significance of his life and actions. If he is concerned for the members of his family, if he loves them, it is because he chooses to, not because it is expected. Ellen, at one point in the story, watches him carry a tray of food to Aunt Shannon, who will eat for him only:

...she wondered whether, if it had never been for Denis, George might not have been completely the hero to his family—instead of sometimes almost its hero and sometimes almost its sacrificial beast. But she thought
that she could tell (as George turned on the landing and gave her a look as sweet as a child's of not wanting her to be anxious), that he was more remarkable than either, and not owing to Denis's spectacular life or death, but to his being in himself all that Denis no longer was, a human being and a complex man. (pp. 63-64)

Now it may be that Aunt Shannon eats for George because, to her, he is the family hero (she might even think of him as Denis), but George takes her the tray because he chooses to and Ellen is not the only one who perceives that fact.

She is, however, the only one capable of seeing it in a positive light. When, for example, Robbie appears at Shellmound to be reunited with George only to find him gone to visit his sisters, Battle says, "Why isn't George here where he belongs? What are we all going to do, sit here crying and asking riddles: Excuse me! That boy's never here, come any conceivable hell or high water!" (p. 159) In response Robbie thinks:

How unfair! Why, it's the exact opposite of the truth! Robbie looked up at Battle furiously. That's always when George is here—holding it for you, she thought. If he were here and I came in he would make everything fine—so fine I couldn't even say a word... and never tell them what I think of them.... (p. 159)

The fact is that George has gone to have dinner with his sisters, not to avoid trouble as Battle implies. Nor is his function in the family simply to hold off trouble as Robbie thinks. In Robbie's opinion, George is

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3 It is this very insistence upon making the experiences of his life his own, of coming to his own conclusions and acting upon those conclusions as he himself sees fit, that, commingled with the family attitudes toward it, constitute the central conflict of the train incident.
...sensitive to all they asked of life itself. Long ago they had seized on that. He was to be all in one their lover and protector and dreaming, forgetful conscience. From Aunt Shannon on down, he was to be always looking through them as well as to the left and right of them, before them and behind them, watching out for and loving their weakness. If anything tried to happen to them, let it happen to him! He took that part, but it was the way he was made, to be like that. (pp. 212-213)

She is not far wrong in her understanding of the family's expectations of George. But her assumption that George "takes that part" is the very root of her miscomprehension of his individuation and the primary cause of their misunderstanding over the train incident.

She has qualified the assumption that he accepts the image projected onto him by thinking that "he was made to be like that," and she further qualifies it by noting, "There was enough sweetness in him to make him cherish the whole world, but in himself there had been no forfeiture. Not yet. He had not yielded up to that family what they really wanted! Or they would not keep after him" (p. 213).

Again, she is partially correct. He has not given himself to his family as they would like him to, and this is the reason they "keep after him," but her assumption that he is in danger of such a forfeiture to them, or for that matter, to herself, is a grave error.

What the family expects is reciprocated expectation. They want even more than that. When Robbie tells Aunt Mac that she married George because he begged her to, Ellen reflects:

The family of course had always acknowledged by an exaggerated and charming mood of capitulation toward George that George was mightily importunate—yet they had to reproach him, something made them or let them, and they would reproach him surely that they had never
been granted the sight of him begging a thing on earth. Quite the contrary! Surely he took them for granted! So he begged love—George? Love that he had more of than the rest of them put together? He begged love from Robbie! They would disbelieve. (p. 162)

The traditional structure of the family is based upon a reciprocated need: a need that each member expects to be met by the other members. It is this need and its fulfilment that provided the solidarity of the traditional family structure. George's individuation is, in effect, a bald statement that he does not have that need, that he can make it on his own, that he meets their expectations just so far as he is able to without capitulation, and will commit himself no further. His need is to be seen and loved as the particular being that he is, and this is a need that cannot be met within the family structure. Thus he begs love of Robbie who is capable of meeting that need.

It is Robbie's inability to perceive this admittedly rather complex situation that leads her to believe that George capitulates to the Fairchilds' expectations in the train incident because they expect it: "For her his danger was the epitome of the false position the Fairchilds put him in" (p. 188). Ellen did not make this mistake. She "saw clearly enough that George was not a challenging man at all....He was magnificently disrespectful—that was what Ellen would have called him. For of course he saw death on its way, if they did not" (p. 188). That is to say, Ellen sees that if George threw his life away, it would be for the same reason that he did anything else: he chose to do it, given the circumstances
as he saw them.

In contrast to George's mature individuation, Dabney attains an external perspective of the family by virtue of a naive, egocentric hedonism. Her character results from the interaction of her self with the traditional family structure, but it is due in part to the particularly protected socio-economic status of this family. She is "spoiled." That is, her perspective precludes seeing anything antithetic to her own privileged condition:

"Nobody had ever told her anything—not anything very true or very bad in life" (p. 122). Foreseeing only rosy prospects, her very pleasure is a means of getting outside herself and her family structure:

Something, happiness—with Troy, but not necessarily, even the happiness of a fine day—seemed to leap away from identity as if it were an old skin, and that she was one of the Fairchilds was of no more need to her than the locust shells now hanging to the trees everywhere were to the singing locusts. What she felt nobody knew. (pp. 32-33)

It is from this limited and hedonistically biased point of view that she is able to see her culture and to separate herself from its prescriptive attitudes:

Honor, honor, honor, the aunts drummed into their ears, little Denis and Battle and George, Tempe and Annie Laurie, Rowena, Jim Allen and Primrose. To give up your life because you thought that much of your cotton—where was love, even, in that? Other people's cotton. Fine glory! Dabney would not have done it.

The eagerness with which she was now going to Marmion, entering her real life there with Troy, told her enough—all the cotton in the world was not worth one moment of life! It made her know that nothing could ever defy her
enough to make her leave it. How sweet life was, and how well she could hold it, pluck it, eat it, lay her cheek to it—oh, no one else knew. The juice of life and the hot, delighting taste and the fragrance and warmth to the cheek, the mouth. (pp. 120-121)

Thus her hedonism becomes the basis for defiance of her culture when, and only when, they conflict:

"I will never give up anything!" Dabney thought, bending forward and laying her head against the soft neck [of her horse]. "Never! Never! For I am happy, and to give up anything will prove it. I will never give up anything, never give up Troy—or to Troy!" (p. 122)

Though for different reasons and to different degrees, George and Dabney are the most individuated members of the immediate family. Because they are loved, they are not rejected and alienated by the family for their individuated attitudes and actions (even when, infrequently, the individuation is perceived as such). And, because they are not controlled by the family, they are responsible for the interjection of totally external perspectives (Robbie's and Troy's) into the family structure. Finally, their individuated perspectives are constantly in tension and conflict with the strictly traditional definitions of persons and situations as they arise in the day to day life of the family. For these reasons, they constitute, in Welty's depiction, the most powerful elements of change within the communal structure. (Such external forces of change as economic and technological factors as well as the powerful black protest movement are conspicuously lacking in this novel.)

The final group is composed of new members of the family who have internalized none or very little of the traditional culture.
They are the "outsiders" who have been included by the individuated members of the family, and who have their own individuated attitudes to reveal and defend. For the purposes of this discussion it is only necessary to consider one of these characters, Robbie Reid.

Robbie's only connection with the family is her love for George. She sees the rest of the family as a group of enemies with whom she must vie for George's love and from whom she must protect her husband. Ringing the Shellmound door-bell in the hopes of reuniting with George,

She drew her breath in fiercely as always when the fond, teasing, witty play of the family love for George hung and threatened near. Nothing was worthy of him but the pure gold, a love that could be simply beside him—her love. Only she could hold him against that grasp, that separating thrust of Fairchild love that would go on and on persuading him, comparing him, begging him, crowing over him, deceiving him, confessing and yielding to him, tormenting him...those smiling and not really mysterious ways of the Fairchilds. (pp.148-149)

In her all-out battle for George's love she offers a perspective of the family that no one on the inside of the family could offer. And, neither loved by them nor loving them in turn, there is little she thinks that she is unwilling to say. Speaking of the dead relatives she says, "'You still love them, and they still love you! No matter what you've done to each other! You don't need to know how to love anybody else. Why, you couldn't love me!'" (p.165)

Of the family in general she says: "'...you all—you don't ever turn into anybody. I think you are already the same as what you love. So you couldn't understand. You're just loving yourselves
in each other—yourselves over and over again!" (p.165). Because, in her opinion, she is fighting the entire family, she offers the most vindictive perspective her upper-middle class, materialistic, city-oriented mind can develop:

"Mrs. Laws! You're all a spoiled, stuck-up family that thinks nobody else is really in the world! But they are! You're just one plantation. With a little crazy girl in the family, and listen at Miss Shannon. You're not even rich! You're just medium. Only four gates to get here, and your house needs a coat of paint! You don't even have one of those little painted wooden niggers to hitch horses to!" (p.163)

This thrust at the family ego brings out an important fact about Robbie's particular individuation. Though her perspective offers some truth about the family, that truth is only another element in an emotional outburst that is calculated to be the fastest way to antagonize an opponent in an ugly argument. Her individuation, in short, lacks a macro-inclusive consciousness. Like Dabney she can see the culture from outside its perimeters, but not from outside of her own.

She has access to truth in her own immediate experience without recourse to consciousness. In her relationship to George's family, for example,

She had never stopped for words to feelings—she felt only—with no words. But their smile had said more plainly than words, bow down, you love our George, enter on your knees and we will pull you up and pet and laugh at you fondly for it—we can! We will bestow your marriage on you, little Robbie, that we sent to high school! (p.158)
It is to this limited but certain knowledge rather than to any traditional structure that she gives her allegiance. It is, in fact, this basic emotional truth that she finds George fulfills so well:

Robbie desired veracity—more than she could even quite fathom, as if she had been denied it, like an education at Sunflower Junior College; from a kind of poverty's ambition she desired it—as hard and immediate a veracity as the impact of George's body. It meant coming to touch the real, undeceiving world within the fairy Shellmound world to love George—from all she had spent her life hearing Fairchild, Fairchild, Fairchild, and working for Fairchilds and taking from Fairchilds, with gratitude for Shelley's dresses, then to go straight through like parting a shiny curtain and to George. He was abrupt and understandable to her as the here and now.... (p. 149)

She seeks and finds this truth in the emotions of the particular moment, whether loving George or fighting his family. Perhaps even more than Ellen, she gains a depth of involvement with the impinging environment. Her sense of the truth of her revaluation of events is almost palpable, it is so definitely felt, so personally experienced. And yet, like Faulkner's Addie Bundren, she misses the clarity of an inclusive perspective. Able only to understand phenomena in terms of how they affect her emotionally, she cannot see the real love of the family for George, cannot understand the nature of his love for them, and it is this failure that brings about her misunderstanding of and her separation from George.

Of the entire family, however, it is only Ellen and perhaps George himself who are capable of perceiving the nature of her
perspective, and of her individuation based as it is upon a belief in the truth of her emotional experience. She is such an open and sincere individual that the other members of the family, with their more indirect relationship to phenomena, are shocked. Shelley, for example, sees Robbie crying in the nearby town of Fairchilds: "Robbie's tears shocked her for being unhesitant—for being plain, assertive weeping for a man—weeping out loud in the heart of Fairchilds, in the wide-open store that was more public than the middle of the road" (p. 138). Shelley, accustomed to reacting to experience with the social consciousness of a Mississippi Deltan, cannot understand what she sees. Even Ellen is surprised at Robbie's openness as she confronts the family (with George absent):

This child was so unguarded—in an almost determined way. She would come, not timidly at all, into Shellmound at a time like this! Shelley sat actually cringing, while Dabney was giving her mother a conspirator's look, as if they should have expected this. Aunt Tempe's elevated brows signaled to Ellen. As if she would ever truly run a way and leave him! Ellen could have asked Tempe: she never would. She would say that she would, to have them thinking of explanations, racking their brains, at a time like this, and then run back and show herself to make fools of them all. (p. 156)

They would be even more surprised if they knew just how irrelevant they were to Robbie's motives for coming to Shellmound. She lets Troy know when he, in the process of commiserating with her says, "...they're all high-strung. All ready to jump out of their skins if you don't mind how you step. Course it would be worse for a girl, marrying into them" (p. 141). She replies, "I didn't marry into them! I married George!"
Taken together, then, these six groups constitute a complex and dynamic set of relationships to the traditional southern communal structure. From the basis in the ancestors through group two with its unconscious acceptance, and group three with its adamant defense, to groups four through six with their varying capacities for individuated perspectives, the entire family is engaged in a struggle between the enclosed, defensive, prescriptively unified, traditional sources of being, or character, and the alternative of more individuated being with its greater freedom and concomitant greater risk. It is in the near train accident and the family reactions to it that this struggle is shown in dynamic flux and the trend toward individuation is to be seen in action.

III

"The whole family but Papa and Mama, and ten or twenty Negroes with us went fishing on Drowning Lake. It will be two weeks ago Sunday. And so coming home we walked the track. We were tired—we were singing. On the trestle Maureen danced and caught her foot. I've done that, but I know how to get loose. Uncle George kneeled down and went to work on Maureen's foot, and the train came. He hadn't got Maureen's foot loose, so he didn't jump either. The rest of us did jump, and the Dog [the train] stopped just before it hit them and ground them to pieces." (p. 19)

With this terse narrative, Orrin establishes the elements of the theme which, as it is orchestrated by the several members of the family, develops in turn the basic pattern of tension between the more tradition-bound and more individuated characters. In Welty's depiction, the fact of change upon which the novel rests
is the result of the superior power of George's individuation—the freely indulged and carefully defended spontaneous action and reaction of a living being to the contingencies of the present moment—over the traditional structure of character ikons with their sense of the past as present.

India's telling of the incident within the family setting and the various reactions to it disclose the family's attitudes:

"...I was singing a song I know. 'I'll measure my love to show you, I'll measure my love to show you—!'
"That's enough of the song," said Dabney tensely.
"'—For we have gained the day!' Then Shelley said, 'Look! Look! The Dog!' and she yelled like a banshee and the Yellow Dog was coming creep-creep down the track with a flag on it."
"A flag!" cried Dabney.
"I looked, if you didn't," said India. "We said, 'wait, wait! Go back! Stop! Don't run over us!'
But it didn't care!"
"Mercy!" said Mr. Rondo. Bluet, who had never taken her eyes off him, laughed delightedly and circled around him. George watched her, a faint smile on his face.
"It couldn't stop, India, it wasn't that it didn't care." Dabney frowned. "Mr. Doolittle was asleep. The engineer, you know."
"..."The whistle was blowing," said India, "but the Dog was not coming very fast. Aunt Robbie was crying behind us and saying 'Come back, George!' and Shelley said 'Jump, jump!' but he just stayed on the trestle with Maureen."
"Path of least resistance." Battle beamed at Mr. Rondo fiercely. "Path George's taken all his life." (pp. 59-60)

As India's song implies, the drama develops in terms of (and the relative power of the various factions is a function of) the various bonds of affection pulling in different directions upon George. With the exceptions of Battle, who has his own reasons for suspecting the nature of George's act, and Ellen, who sees it for what it essentially
is, those members of the immediate family in groups one through four who are sufficiently aware of the present to relate to it at all, perceive George's act as an heroic individual manifestation of their culture, upholding the ikonic values of selfless unwavering courage in the face of an implacable fate. By implication George thus upholds the cultural structure itself. Tempe, as was noted earlier, exclaims without the slightest hesitation or consideration: "Naturally,...he did it for Denis" (p. 115). The others show their understanding of the act as they bring the force of their in-group animosity to bear upon Robbie for her audacity in assuming more significance as an individual being in George's life than the tradition itself could claim.

Battle, though doubting that George did, in fact, defend the southern heroic character image by his act, is nonetheless angered by what he takes to be Robbie's assumption of superiority to that image. Dabney and Shelley are likewise perturbed:

"Tell what Robbie said when it was all over, India," said Battle, turning the corners of his mouth down, "Listen, Mr. Rondo."

"Robbie said, 'George Fairchild, you didn't do this for me!' Battle roared with cross laughter from his stool. Dabney cried, "You should have heard her!" Shelley went white. (p. 61)

Later, when the disagreement over this incident has erupted into an argument between George and Robbie and they have separated, the family attempts to defend George from the consequences of his act, disregarding any consideration of what the rather complex facts might be. From the outset, they blame him only for
having married Robbie to begin with. Battle's first concern upon hearing of the separation is to protect the truly traditional members of the family from the knowledge that it has happened at all:

"And we can't let poor Tempe know--she just couldn't cope with this," said Battle in a soft voice. "Hard enough on Tempe to have Dabney marrying the way she is, and after Mary Denis married a Northern man and moved so far off. Can't tell Primrose and Jim Allen and hurt them." (p. 52)

Of course Tempe discovers the separation immediately, though Primrose and Jim Allen never do, and, when she hears that Robbie might come to the wedding, she has a ready attitude toward her and a ready defense of George: "'I'd like to see her! She'll get no welcome from me, flighty thing,' said Tempe. 'Bless George's heart! he lost his Fairchild temper.' She smiled" (p. 106).

When the confrontation finally does take place, it is Tempe who leads the attack, blandly assuming that a traditional structure encompasses the entire event: "'Why have you treated George Fairchild the way you have?' said Tempe...'Except for Denis Fairchild, the sweetest man ever born in the Delta?"' "'How could you?' Shelley suddenly gushed forth in tears" (p. 158). Thus the members of the family defend George, the closest thing to a living family hero now that Denis is Dead, from the consequences of his act, some without even suspecting the connection

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Tempe says, "You have to tell the Delta something when your wife flies off and you start losing your Fairchild temper. Right at the point of another wedding! You should have thought of that when you married her." (p. 114)
between the events of the train incident and the separation of husband and wife.

It is significant that never once has anyone in the family asked George or Robbie what their underlying conflict is. Nor has anyone (with the exception of Ellen) made any effort to see the subtleties of the incidents. As Ellen notes, they are unwilling to see beyond the shallow surface of events. Watching Maureen, she thinks, "Here in the long run so like them all, the mindless child could not, as they would not, understand a miracle. How could Maureen, poor child, see the purity and dullness of fact? Which was miracle" (p. 188). There is good reason for this obtuseness. For the more clearly the real event is seen, the less well it will fit into the rigid and antiquated traditional structures. Since myths are to be created using the old southern mythical structures, this event, especially since it is in reality a repudiation of the very claim upon his free choice that the traditions would impose, must be kept simple indeed. Thus it is that Tempe, acting immediately upon the barest surface knowledge of the actual event, fits it into the mythical structure, and sets about defending George against Robbie as she would against anyone who opposed him.

The result of this process is the virtual extrication of the particular man, George Fairchild, from the actual event. His particularity is lost to the degree that his family, in their interpretations, force his actions into an embodiment of the tradit-
ional character structure. Further, the particular event itself is lost insofar as they project the form onto the facts in preference to observation of the event itself. They defend thus, not George against Robbie, but the culture's mythical projections against any interference from reality.

This is why Ellen, unable to understand the workings of the Delta traditional structures, is confused by the family's reactions to the event:

...the family would forever see the stopping of the Yellow Dog entirely after the fact--as a preposterous diversion of their walk, resulting in lover's complications, for with the fatal chance removed the serious went with it forever, and only the romantic and absurd abided. They would have nothing of the heroic, or the tragic now, thought Ellen, as though now she yielded up a heart's treasure. (p. 188)

While it is probably true that the romantic and the absurd are nearly all that abide in the children and in Dabney and Shelley, the more traditional members, consciously or unconsciously, struggle here for the survival of their culture as they have come to know it. That it is "after the fact" is almost only coincidental. It is totally beside the fact, as has been shown, that these members relate to the event. George is not heroic as a particular man because his act has been appropriated for the purpose of supporting the dying character image. Attention is thus focused upon the image rather than the man. That those involved at least sense some discrepancy between the event and their imposed meaning is evident not only from Tempe's over-hasty
attempt to fit the facts onto the mythical structure and Battle's disparagement of the act as the "line of least resistance," but from the very fact that it is not taken to be a heroic event by these members. If Denis had done it, since he would have done it for the "right reason," he would unquestionably have been considered a hero for it. The fact that George does not like being a hero (p. 189) may be, as Ellen assumes, the result of an unwillingness to project a definition onto events after they have occurred. He may be unwilling to lose the intimate contact with the event by amputating its nuances with an interposing definition of words. But this is not true of the traditional family members, for they have never consciously contacted the real experience in the first place.

Had it been George's fate to be killed by the train, the family would have had no difficulty fitting the "tragedy" into an acceptable meaning. As it is, however, they must contend with a living man, and, by attempting to force the event into the various perspectives the family has of it (a fate as death-dealing to his individuation as the train would have been had it failed to stop in time), they encounter his resistance. Though they ignore it as Tempe does, overtly object to it as Battle does, or withhold the complete hero image of Denis (whose largest tragedy was to allow the family perspectives, the images, to be his fate) as all of the elders but Ellen do, his resistance is not shaken. George refuses to react to the event of the moment
as though the past were more spiritually significant than the present.

Robbie's vision of the train incident, in contrast to that of the rest of the Fairchilds, is that of a totally individuated being who, although in possession of the external facts of the family relationship, cannot understand the real reason for George's act. She realizes, as was noted earlier in the discussion of George's individuated character, that the family expects something from George that he has not yielded to them. At one point she thinks:

... of course those women knew what to ask of their men. Adoration, first—but least. Then, small sacrifice by small sacrifice, the little pieces of the whole body! Robbie, with the sun on her head, could scream to see the thousand little polite expectations in their very smiles of welcome. "He would do anything for me!" they would say, airily and warningly, of a brother, an uncle, a cousin. "Dabney thinks George hung the moon," with a soft glance at George and so, George, get Dabney the moon! (p. 146)

Robbie's relationship to George is that of one individuated being to another and does not depend upon the structure of expectation and sacrifice that, as she sees it, makes up George's relationship to his family. But, seeing the train bearing down upon him, she does not want him to die. By analogy, then, from her observation of the Fairchild women's effect upon him, she attempts to use their tool to get him to save his life:

... at the head of a railroad trestle, in high heels, fuming and wondering then if she had a child inside her, complaining to him that she worshiped his life, she had tried and been reproved, denied and laughed at, teased. Then she jumped up for him to look back
at and heed, not knowing how love, anything, might have transformed her, it was in terror that she had held the Fairchilds' own mask in front of her. She cried out for him to come back from his danger as a favor to her. And in his forthright risk of his life for that crazy child, she had seen him thrust it, the working of the Fairchild mask, from him, on his face was an elation of throwing it back at her. He reached out for Maureen that demanded not knowing any better.... (p. 146)

As Robbie sees it, George has a choice between responding to a request from his wife or responding to a request from his family and the family request has won over her own:

After the Yellow Dog went by, he had turned on her a look that she would call the look of having been on a debauch. She could not follow. Sometimes she thought when he was so out of reach, so far away in his mind, that she could blame everything on some old story.... For he evidently felt that old stories, family stories, Mississippi stories, were the same as very holy or very passionate, if stories could be those things. He looked out at the world, at her, sometimes, with that essence of the remote, proud, over-innocent Fairchild look that she suspected, as if an old story had taken hold of him—entered his flesh. And she did not know the story. (p. 191)

Robbie has failed to realize that George has not been a total captive of the traditions she sees grasping at his life through the family, and that, in fact, he ultimately repudiates their right to control him by this means, giving only what he can without losing himself (as Denis did) to it. "His family and Robbie are both aware that he has not succumbed to their impor­tunity. Robbie, however, has never had occasion to attempt to coerce him from his decision and, consequently, has never before experienced his self-asserting rebuff. His family knows, as Ellen articulates, that
Sometimes he, the kindest of them all, would say a deliberate wounding thing... It was always some fact—all true—about himself, just a part of the fact, which was the same as a wild, free kind of self-assertion—it was his pride, too, speaking out. (p. 79)

What Robbie sees, then, is not the repudiation of her mask in favor of that of the family, but rather the repudiation of the mask itself.

As Welty presents it, it is George's unwillingness to be moved from his own interpretation of events as he experiences them, his riding of the tensions between the family and the rest of the world, that puts him in a position to move the provincial family (and through them, the traditional culture itself) nearer to compatibility with the rest of the world from which they are defensively estranged. His relationship to the present is direct and open, yet his actions spring from antecedent abstract thought rather than from "Fairchild impulse." He is alive and he knows it. As Ellen notes (p. 222), he expects a lot out of that life which, for him, has a significance, a weight, and which he lives with sharp intensity (p. 189). He will not be held either inside or outside but insists upon mobility between them. This entails a defense of either position against what to others is its opposite; a defense he accomplishes while giving as little hurt to others as they will allow, yet maintaining his freedom of thought and action. In his insistence upon being a "sport of the original tree" (p. 22), his refusal to accept the exacting and strictly delimited role of cultural hero projected upon him by his family, and his vehement rejection of Robbie's attempt to
force his actions by "wearing the Fairchild mask," he shows the tensions under which he operates and which, as Ellen notes, threaten to destroy him: Robbie, admitting that she has come to fight the Fairchild family, wrongly accuses George of having fled the scene to keep her from being pulled to pieces by it (p. 162).

Ellen responds:

"There is a fight and it's come between us Robbie," said Ellen, her voice calm and a little automatic. "But it's not over George, we won't have it. And how that would hurt him, and shame him, to think it was, he's so gentle. It's not right to make him be pulled to pieces, and over something he did, and very honorably did. There's a fight in us, already, I believe—in people on this earth, not between us, and there is a fight in Georgie too. It's part of being alive, though you may think he cannot be pulled to pieces."

(p. 163)

Robbie's answer to this statement shows George's predicament clearly: "If there's a fight in George, I think when he loves me he really hates you—hates the Fairchilds that he's one of!"

(p. 163) The fact is, then, that he has not been given his individuation. His is a totally abnormal condition in southern culture.

This has tremendous significance to the family (and the culture as a whole), for what it means is that, by being forced to spend his energies simply maintaining himself as a free individuated being, he has little time or energy left to apply that free being to the larger social situation he is part of. The effect he has upon his family and their society as a whole is almost totally limited to the exemplification of that individu-
uation to the young who are in a position to accept his example.

Of course, the attitudes, characters, the very ways of being of the younger members of the family are affected by the complex interaction of the entire group. There is no question, however, that the principal force moving the family toward a freer and less closely knit family structure, is George. Remembering George as he took a knife from a Negro boy and bandaged the wounds of another, Dabney thinks:

He stood looking not like a boy close kin to them, but out by himself, like a man who had stepped outside—done something. But it had not been anything Dabney wanted to see him do. She almost ran away. He seemed to meditate—to refuse to smile. She gave a loud scream and he saw her there in the field, and caught her when she ran at him. He hugged her tight against his chest, where sweat and bayou water pressed her mouth, and tickled her a minute, and told her how sorry he was to have scared her like that. Everything was all right then. But all the Fairchild in her had screamed at his interfering—at his taking part—caring about anything in the world but them. (p. 36)

She almost ran away. The Fairchild prescription of resistance to outside phenomena was nearly enough to alienate her from George. But when it came to a choice she ran toward him, thereby including a loved one who had reached out beyond the closed and defensive traditional structure. By thus accepting an individuated act, she moves toward individuation herself. Again:

It was actually Uncle George who had shown her that there was another way to be—something else... Uncle George...he was different, somehow. Perhaps the heart always was made of different stuff and had a different life from the rest of the body. She saw Uncle George lying on his arm on a picnic, smiling to hear what someone was telling, with a butterfly going
across his gaze, a way to make her imagine all at once that in that moment he erected an entire, complicated house for the butterfly inside his sleepy body. It was very strange, but she had felt it. She had then known something he knew all along, it seemed then—that when you felt, touched, heard, looked at things in the world, and found their fragrances, they themselves made a sort of house within you, which filled with life to hold them, filled with knowledge all by itself, and all else, the other ways to know, seemed calculation and tyranny. (pp. 33-34)

Through experience and contemplation of how George is, Dabney begins to conceptualize and experience an individuated way to be. From this beginning, her own individuation develops.

Shelley, less alive to experiential knowledge of George, becomes aware of his difference from the rest of the family through her intellect. She discovers his awareness and states it in her diary: "Life may be stronger than Papa is. He let Troy in, and look, Troy took Dabney. Life is stronger than George, but George was not surprised..." (pp. 85-86). Likewise, she sees the strength of his individuation: "It occurred to her that he suffered no grievance against the hiding and protesting that went on, the secrecy of life. What was dark and what shown fair neither would stop him" (p. 193). As was noted earlier, this intellectual knowledge, in Shelley, is not sufficient to bring her to her own individuated being. She becomes "traditional" in the crisis of experience and action. But, as her thinking here clearly shows, what ability she does have to accept and consider non-traditional behavior, she owes largely to George.
Laura McRaven senses the directness and concern and life that is part of George as a consequence of the awareness and individuation that Shelley notes:

As if by smell, by the smell of his pipe, she knew that he out of all the Delta Fairchilds had kindness and that it was more than an acting in kindness, it was a waiting, a withholding, as if he could see a fire or a light, when he saw a human being—regardless of who it was, kin or not, even Aunt Ellen, to whom he called and waved now—and had never done the first thing in his life to dim it. (p. 75)

She sees that he is kind to a fellow human being because he appreciates the human being and not merely because of the concept of kindness (as would be sufficient to uphold the ideal of "Southern hospitality"): that he loves not because it is good to love, but for the more direct reason—that he loves. This makes him, to Laura, as "weighty and real and as cutting (and perhaps as filled with dreaded life) as a seashell she had once come on, on the seashore, and unwittingly seized" (p. 76).

It is thus as a rather romantically conceived, yet very really sensed and loved individuated being that George moves the younger members of the family—and by implication, the culture—toward acceptance of non-traditional attitudes, characters, and life. But these younger ones fail to see the very real predicament George is caught up in. Ellen, however, sees it clearly:

It was not love or passion itself that stirred him, necessarily, she felt—for instance, Dabney's marriage seemed not to have affected him greatly, or Robbie's anguish. But little Ranny, a flower, a horse running, a color, a terrible story listened to in the store in Fairchilds, or a common song, and yes, shock, physical
danger, as Robbie had discovered, roused something in
him that was immense contemplation, motionless pity,
indifference...Then, he would come forward all smiles
as if in greeting--come out of his intensity and give
some child a spank or a present. Ellen had always
felt this in George and now there was something of
surprising kinship in the feeling; perhaps she had
fainted in the way he was driven to detachment. (p. 186)

Being pulled by the various loving demands of the family members,
loving each conflicting being with a direct intensity, and yet
fighting to maintain the free perspective he has achieved, prove
to be too much strain. George must detach himself from the con­
cern in order to remain free; or, failing that, be psychically
crushed by the strain.

This tension, created by the pull of the conflicting forces
of individuation and tradition, is a problem not only for George
but for anyone whose character is divested of "primary cultural
ties." In the final scene of the novel, with the family going
on a picnic, Welty shows the power of the traditional culture to
persevere. Ellen and Battle, never in the novel having engaged
in personal communication now, "comfortable and silent," are
shown moving toward the picnic area "breathing a little heavily
in rhythm that brought them sometimes together" (p. 240). The
assumption of a mutually agreed upon, culturally given relation­
ship--giving them not each other, but a third thing, like breath­
ing, to participate in together--is an inchoate characteristic
of their relationship. They move toward the old mansion, Marmion,
in horse-drawn wagons. The assumption that all is more or less
as it has been and will be is implicit in the procession: "They
rolled on and on. It was endless. The wheels rolled, but noth­
ing changed. Only the heartbeat played its little drum, skipped
a beat, played again" (p. 240). They sing traditional ballads in
Scottish dialect:

Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fair! (p. 240)

Indeed, they are "fair children," protected for a time by a social
and economic condition that exalts them above the masses of
people who make this condition possible. The flowery banks can
bloom "sae fair" because of their naive, provincial egocentrism
and, as Hardy notes, they are probably capable of defending that
obtuseness indefinitely. 5

India whispers to Laura that her mother is going to have a
baby named Denis Fairchild and George says that if he moves back
to the Delta he will change things (p. 243), but the novel ends
with the family communing closely together and the ambivalently
pessimistic statement that "Things almost never happened, almost
never could be, for one time only! They went back...started
over" (p. 244).

IV

The deep South has obviously changed from the 1923 depicted
here by Welty. Perhaps a certain amount of ugliness in the form

5 John Edward Hardy, "Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol," Sewanee
Review, 60 (Summer 1952), 416.
of cultural proscriptions against individuation has even been lost. But the facts of what Ransom calls its "moral obtuseness," especially to the black people, show conclusively (as the next chapter will indicate) that the rest of the world cannot sit back and "let George do it." He is insufficient to the task, as we have seen. It was not his fate to be run down by the train, nor to allow the various perspectives of the event to determine his actions or his character. But it was his fate to allow these various perspectives to form the matrix within which he must struggle to maintain his free being, and this, as we have seen, contains him within too tense and too constricting a milieu to do anything with that freedom!

In contrast, then, to the alienated individual who lacks the macro-cosmic view provided by history and whose conceptual models of reality must therefore fluctuate willynilly with the exigencies of the moment (as they did with Addie Bundren), the member of a traditional southern family has love and a feeling of community. But because the entire community is alienated from the universe of flux in which it exists (i.e. the rest of the world), the love becomes a weapon of coercion with which the traditional members attempt to determine the character structures of their progeny and of other "insiders." As a result, the "social character," the normal condition for an individual of

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6 John Crowe Ransom, "Delta Fiction," Kenyon Review, 8 (summer 1946), 507.
this culture, is far from individuated. George, especially in 1923, is a man who, being individuated, is the exception anywhere. But in the South he is a rarity indeed. It may be true as Welty intimates, that real life, the spontaneous action and reaction of an individuated being to present phenomena, is more powerful than the restraining and, because dated, erroneous traditions surrounding it; but the rarity of the occurrence (especially again from the black man's perspective) is such that the concept of waiting for the South to solve its own difficulties is shown to be ludicrous. The analysis of white southern character that Welty gives in *Delta Wedding* belies the possibility.
CHAPTER IV

INVISIBLE MAN

The battles for freedom were fought by the oppressed, those who wanted new liberties, against those who had privileges to defend.

--Erich Fromm

A study of personality structure in relation to traditional culture in southern literature must include a consideration of the place of the black man within it. Such a consideration will show that, just as the southern white reaches the peak of acceptable "self-growth" at "individuality," so the southern black man reaches his peak of acceptable growth at a point antecedent to "individuality" that can be called "preconscious." That is, the white southern ideal is individual embodiment of the culture at maturity, but the black man is supposed to remain a child, never reaching that embodiment—hence the phenomena of the eighty year old southern black man still hailed as "boy!" This limitation has been enforced, until very recently at least, by the black as well as the white community.

Ellison's Invisible Man, being a novel "about innocence and human error, a struggle through illusion to reality..." is, then, the story of a young man whose culture requires pre-consciousness. But he moves, in the course of the novel, to the furthest extremes of individuation. This is an advance, perhaps even beyond many contemporary black views of "proper" black character which, because

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of the culture's need for unity of action, would seem to espouse a black "individual" character structure or set of structures rather than an individuated man from the black culture as their ideal.

The fact that the Invisible Man leaves the South before his consciousness is developed, does not weaken the point I am making. On the contrary, it supports it. As Ellison notes, "...the narrator's development is one through darkness to light; that is, from ignorance to enlightenment; invisibility to visibility. He leaves the South and goes North; this, as you will notice in reading Negro folktales, is always the road to freedom --the movement upward. You have the same thing again when he leaves his underground cave for the open." The Blues of Bukka White, Big Joe Williams, or "Lightnin'" Hopkins (to name a few) parallel the folk tale in this respect.

In any case, I will confine my discussion here to those aspects of the southern complex of attitudes and existing structures which, interrelating, contradicting, always in tension with both black and white sources, form the vortex within which the black man must find his individual being in the South.

Consideration of the context within which the Invisible Man exists discloses a complex pattern of extreme tensions which are designed to contain him within his pre-conscious state. The

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possible channels for black character development in the South in general have been horribly limited. Ellison, speaking of Richard Wright, notes for example that

...there were three general ways for Negroes to confront their destinies: they could accept the role created for them by the whites and perpetually resolve the resulting conflicts through the hope and emotional cartharsis [sic] of Negro religion; they could repress their dislike of Jim Crow social relations while striving for a middle way of respectability, becoming—consciously or unconsciously—the accomplices of the whites in oppressing their brothers; or they could reject the situation, adopt a criminal attitude, and carry on an unceasing psychological scrimmage with the whites, which often flared forth into physical violence.  

These possible ways of being black in the South offer so little possibility for the Negro that his entire environment can be seen as a maze of traps placed by the culture complex between the individual and what twentieth-century democratic thought has come to define as basic human freedom. These traps are analogous to those faced with so much intellect and consciousness by Joyce through his characters in *Dubliners* and through his protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but such consciousness in a southern black man is a criminal offense.

The most obvious trap is that of the "racism" experienced by the Invisible Man at the "smoker" where he goes to deliver a speech upon graduation from high school. Arriving, he is ushered to the front of a ballroom where he and nine other Negro boys are confronted with a naked white woman. They are threatened if they look, threatened if they don’t, and filled with fear and desire. It is a ceremonial degradation. Next, for the amusement

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3 "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 82. First published in the *Antioch Review, 3*, No. 2 (1945).
of the town's leading white citizens, he, along with the others, is ordered into a boxing ring: "There was nothing to do but what we were told. All ten of us climbed under the ropes and allowed ourselves to be blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth." Symbolically blinded by the more powerful white culture, the ten boys direct their anger not at the whites, but at each other and proceed to beat each other senseless. Finally, after suffering a series of indignities, fears, and extreme pain for the delectation of the white observers, the Invisible Man is allowed to make his speech. Because of hecklers and because of the blood dripping down his throat from the free-for-all, however, he commits an error:

"Social...."
"What?" they yelled.
"...equality--"

The laughter hung smoke-like in the sudden stillness. I opened my eyes, puzzled. Sounds of displeasure filled the room. The M.C. rushed forward. They shouted hostile phrases at me. But I did not understand.

A small dry mustached man in the front row blared out, "Say that slowly, son!"
"What, sir?"
"What you just said!"
"Social responsibility, sir" I said.
"You weren't being smart, were you, boy?" he said, not unkindly.
"No, sir!"
"You sure that about 'equality' was a mistake?"
"Oh, yes, sir," I said. "I was swallowing blood."
"Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times...." (p. 33)

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The white racists operate upon the assumption that black men are domestic, yet potentially dangerous, animals who must be taught their places and trained to stay in them—a training process which the whites apparently enjoy. In response to this training the Invisible Man has given a speech which, except for the mistake cited above, is an ostensible acceptance of the rectitude of black subservience and humility. It is true that he does not really believe that this is right but only that it works (p. 21). He is aware of the fact that attitudes expressed by these racists must be overcome. But, by attempting to become a successful race leader through becoming more acceptable to these whites on their own terms, he has been manipulated into the repression of his objections to Jim Crow social relationships and is well on his way to becoming an accomplice to the white racists in the oppression of his people.

The white racists prefer to believe and project the mythical conception of the Negro as a potentially dangerous domestic animal rather than face the reality. By dehumanizing and bestializing black men, they combat the historically incurred, deep-rooted, and by now well-founded, fears of them. This is why, when the individual black man reinforces the myth of his bestiality with a particular fact, such as Trueblood did in his incestuous relationship with his daughter, it is capitalized upon by the whites.

Their tactics, as the "smoker" incident shows, are so blatant that all but the most subjugated Negroes must be aware of them.
The racists are so vicious and powerful, however, that most black men, until very recently, have found it easier to accept the degraded position than to fight back even though the environment was so bad that Ellison writes: "Whatever else the environment contained, it had as little chance of prevailing against the overwhelming weight of the child's unpleasant experiences as Beethoven's Quartets would have of destroying the stench of a Nazi prison," And the pretended acceptance of these conditions, as we shall see, has had grave consequences for the psychic development of the Invisible Man.

A more subtle trap is that of paternalism represented in Invisible Man by the rich northern philanthropist, Norton, who believes that the black man is a poor and degraded degenerate who must be trained to become a successful and a respectable middle-class white man with a black skin. He is totally unaware of the positive features of black culture that would be destroyed if his program were successful. He does not know that it could not be successful because, in Ellison's words, "...most Negroes could not be nourished by the life white southerners live. It is too hag-ridden, it is too obsessed, it is too concerned with attitudes which could change everything that Negroes have been conditioned to expect of life." Norton's "good

5 Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 82.
works" are not questioned, but his motives are suspected. He and the other white "observers" of the campus life fail to see real human beings engaged in real human endeavors. Norton explains his position to the Invisible Man:

"I have wealth and a reputation and prestige—all that is true. But your great Founder had more than that, he had tens of thousands of lives dependent upon his ideas and upon his actions. What he did affected your whole race. In a way, he had the power of a king, or in a sense, of a god. That, I have come to believe, is more important than my own work, because more depends upon you. You are important because if you fail I have failed by one individual, one defective cog...." (p. 45)

Earlier, he has said,

"Yes, you are my fate, young man. Only you can tell me what it really is. Do you understand?"
"I think I do, sir."
"I mean that upon you depends the outcome of the years I have spent in helping your school. That has been my life's work, not my banking or my researches, but my first-hand organizing of human life." (pp. 42-43)

As the black doctor from the insane asylum points out, Norton sees the students and teachers of the college as marks on a score card of his own accomplishments and power, a means of sublimating guilt, anything but real entities in themselves. It is years, however, before the Invisible Man is aware that he personally

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Albert Gerard, in his essay, "Humanism and Negritude: Notes on the Contemporary Afro-American Novel," *Diogenes* 37 (Spring 1962) trans. by S. Alexander, p. 122, says "...the racial problem torments American conscience because the actual situation is in complete opposition to those Christian and equalitarian ideals which the American people pretend to believe in; if northern philanthropists endow the college, it is not so much because of love for the Negroes, as rather to appease their own consciences."
has not even been seen by Norton; it is years before he knows that he is invisible.

The paternalists, then, for their own almost unrelated reasons (and therefore with little or no insight into the actual situation), espouse the "middle way of respectability" for the black man, and thus lead him, if he will follow, into the trap not only of being indifferent to the black community but actually oppressing his race to maintain his Jim Crow respectability.

It is just this trap, as the Invisible Man discovers, that Bledsoe has fallen into. Having been chastised for his acquiescence to Norton's wishes in taking him to the black slum area, the Invisible Man asks: "...in the chapel on Sunday evenings upon the platform hadn't he [Bledsoe] always taught us to live content in our place in a thousand unambiguous words" (p. 96). Later, when questioned about the troublesome "insane" doctor, the Invisible Man describes him: "He talked like a white man ...except that his voice sounded southern, like one of ours..." and receives Bledsoe's reply: "I'll have to investigate him.... A Negro like that should be under lock and key" (p. 125). And when he is brought before Bledsoe and Norton, he finds that Bledsoe is not only unfair to him, but that he talks as though he were a white man:

"Don't be kind, sir," Dr. Bledsoe said. "You can't be soft with these people. We mustn't pamper them. An accident to a guest of this college while he is in the charge of a student is without question the student's fault. That's one of our strictest rules!" Then to me: "Return to your dormitory and remain there until further notice." (p. 95)
The ironic fact is that the Invisible Man is so nearly as brain-washed as Bledsoe that he is still unable to see what the man is doing. He obeys the directive. Years later, having long since understood that Bledsoe was a man who would relinquish his people's chances for real equality in order to defend the position he had attained under the paternalistic system, the Invisible Man recalls a campus statue:

I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding. (p. 37)

A third trap is composed of the complex and contradictory concepts of the nature of the black man as conceived by southern black men themselves. These concepts have had to develop in the extremely unfavorable social ecology of the racist South and therefore observe the cardinal rule of pre-consciousness, or, adopting a criminal attitude and fighting the white culture, fail most often to survive at all.

The Invisible Man faces this prescription of pre-consciousness symbolically while blindfolded in the ring:

I wanted to see more desperately than ever before. But the blindfold was as tight as a thick skin-pickering scab and when I raised my gloved hands to push the layers of white aside a voice yelled, "Oh, no you don't, black bastard! Leave that alone." (p. 25)

Kept from perceiving the real situation by the powerful whites, the black men hysterically fight each other with no plan beyond
individual survival.

The white blindfold does more than cover the eyes. The insistence upon pre-consciousness through the techniques of race hatred is so attractive that the black man carries the prescription as part of his being as well (the tight blindfold is likened to a "skin-puckering scab"). A man at the Golden Day tavern explains who he and his friends are to Mr. Norton: "'We're patients sent here as therapy....But,' he smiled, 'they send along an attendant, a kind of censor, to see that the therapy fails!'" (p. 75).

The censor, "Supercargo", is symbolically, as his name implies, the official man in charge and the unconscious morality embedded within the black consciousness by the white culture. He appears at the top of the stairs (another corroboration of his symbolic function as super-ego) and shouts down into the crowd of the Golden Day: "'I want order down there...and if there's white folks down there, I wan's double order!'" (p. 76). The whites do not even have to be present for the black man to feel and act as though they were.

The asylum inmates symbolically remove the censor by knocking him on the head with a whiskey bottle and dragging him down the stairs. The inmate doctor explains the danger to Mr. Norton:

"They might suddenly realize that you are what you are, and then your life wouldn't be worth a piece of bankrupt stock. You would be canceled, perforated, voided, become the recognized magnet attracting loose screws. Then what would you do? Such men are beyond money, and with Supercargo down, out like a felled ox,
they know nothing of value. To some, you are the great white father, to others the lynchers of souls, but for all, you are confusion come even into the Golden Day." (pp. 35-36)

Ellison suggests here that the pre-conscious state is a necessary condition of peaceful acceptance of the racism and the paternalism the whites perpetrate upon the blacks. He also implies that the condition of pre-consciousness is not a mentally healthy state to be in--Norton might become the "recognized magnet attracting loose screws." The white southerner, then, must either maintain the pre-conscious state of the Negroes around him, thus continuing the unstable circumstances of southern race relations until they explode as "loose screws" or he can allow the Negro to become conscious of his plight and the explosion will be immediate. The third alternative is for him to remove his own blindfold and adopt a more realistic and human attitude toward the black man, but, as chapter three has indicated, this is not a real alternative since only an insignificant minority of whites would be capable of it.

Two of the three general ways in which black men can approach existence, then, fulfill the dominant white culture's prescription of pre-consciousness, while the third does not. We can observe these three possibilities more closely now by selecting three characters from *Invisible Man* who have each one of these approaches to existing as a black man in the South.

Jim Trueblood has followed the first possibility, that of
accepting (albeit unconsciously) the role created for him by the whites and resolving the resulting conflicts through the hope and emotional catharsis of Negro religion (backed up in his case by Negro folk music, the blues).

The Invisible Man observes the defensive, fearful reactions of Trueblood and his family as they face Norton: "They became silent, their faces clouding over, their features becoming soft and negative, their eyes bland and deceptive. They were crouching behind their eyes waiting for him to speak..." (p. 50). Discovering that Norton is not going to be hostile, however, Trueblood assumes that he has come to hear the story of his incest, which he proceeds to tell without shame.

The story itself, with its ludicrous humor, symbolizes the predicament of the man of pre-conscious acceptance. Having told of how he sexually entered his daughter while both she and he were asleep, he explains his plight upon awakening:

"...once a man gits himself in a tight spot like that there ain't much he can do. It ain't up to him no longer. There I was, tryin' to git away with all my might, yet having to move without movin'. I flew in but I had to walk out. I had to move without movin'. I done thought 'bout it since a heap, and when you think right hard you see that that's the way things is always been with me. That's just about been my life."

(p. 58)

He is always in an impossible predicament with no knowledge of how he got there. By hard thinking, he is able to make the generalization that this has always been the case with him but he is unable to connect his situation with its primary causes. He
explains to Norton:

"You see, suh, it was cold and us didn't have much fire. Nothin' but wood, no coal. I tried to git help but wouldn't nobody help us and I couldn't find no work or nothin'. It was so cold all of us had to sleep together; me, the ole lady and the gal. That's how it started, suh."

The entire causal sequence that leads to his having no coal, to his having no job, escapes him though, and he holds no animosity for anyone.8

Trueblood, as his name indicates, remains true to his experiences of the moment as his past has taught him to do. But the past is a complex set of cultural forces that are set against him and he has remained totally unconscious of them. He is in a predicament and he must get out. This is the extent of his concern:

"I thinks and thinks, until I thinks my brain go'n bust, 'bout how I'm guilty, and how I ain't guilty. I don't eat nothin' and I don't drink nothin' and cain't sleep at night. Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin', I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sung before, and while I'm singin' them blues I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but muself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen." (p. 63)

He escapes his plight as best he can with the catharsis of religion and the blues and virtually accepts the role created for him by the southern whites. They, of course, are pleased to support such an obvious verification of their myth of the black

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8 He is, in fact, a perfect example of Negro endurance so admired by Faulkner. He endures his fate just as Molly Beauchamp or Dilsey endure theirs.
man as domestic animal:

The niggus up at the school come down to chase me off and that made me mad. I went to see the white folks then and they gave me help. That's what I don't understand. I done the worse thing a man could ever do in his family and instead of chasin' me out of the county, they gimme more help than they ever give any other colored man, no matter how good a nigguh he was. (pp. 64-65)

Unconscious, then, of the meanings and motivations that form the larger context of his existence, he accepts what on the face of it seems good and rejects what, on the face of it, seems bad.

Trueblood's situation epitomizes the problem of the black myth of "soul" which, while offering positive perspectives that are salvageable even at the individuated level, have been unhealthily anti-conscious and anti-intellectual, in keeping with the white culture's prescription of pre-consciousness. As Ellison sees it, the aspects of "soul" usually attributed to either the close connection to the earthy realities of the black environment or, in the South especially, to some innate quality inherent in the race—such aspects as the sensual rhythmic quality of their dialect, their music, and their dance, the intricate and expressive gesturing and the attunement to the present moment without regard to past or future and their "excessive" sexuality—are directly attributable to the lack of consciousness forced upon them by the dominant culture.

...the "physical" quality offered as evidence of his [the black man's] primitive simplicity is actually the form of his complexity. The American Negro is a Western type whose social condition creates a state which is almost the reverse of the cataleptic trance:
Instead of his consciousness being lucid to the reality around it while the body is rigid, here it is the body which is alert, reacting to pressures which the constricting forces of Jim Crow block off from the transforming, concept-creating activity of the brain. The "eroticism" of Negro expression springs from much the same conflict as that displayed in the violent gesturing of a man who attempts to express a complicated concept with a limited vocabulary; thwarted ideational energy is converted into unsatisfactory pantomime, and his words are burdened with meanings they cannot convey.  

He argues that, contrary to the "soul" myth which portrays the Negro as an emotional rather than an intellectual being, sensibility and intellect are positively correlated:

Intelligence tests have measured the quick rise in intellect which takes place in Southern Negroes after moving North, but little attention has been paid to the mutations effected in their sensibilities. However, the two go hand in hand. Intellectual complexity is accompanied by emotional complexity; refinement of thought, by refinement of feeling. (p. 88)

The point is not, as Ellison is careful to emphasize, that the Negro is innately primitive. He argues rather that the South, "recognized as a major part of the backward third of the nation," cannot nurture in the "black, most brutalized section of its population" the high degree of sophisticated sensibility attributed to them.

As Trueblood's extrication of himself from his emotional impasse through the catharsis of the blues shows, "soul" is often simply a means of surviving and enduring when the culturally limited intellect is incapable of discovering a way out. Ellison's

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9 Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 89.

10 Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 87.
solution to this problem, as we shall see, is to infuse the better aspects of soul with the better aspects of intellectual insight and consciousness in a less harshly limited character image of the black man.

The Invisible Man, for as long as he remains in the South and long after he moves northward, exemplifies the second kind of black character development. Thinking of himself as a potential Booker T. Washington, he represses his dislike of "Jim Crow" social relations while striving for a "middle way" of respectability, and becomes unconsciously (as Bledsoe became consciously) the accomplice of the whites in "the more effective blinding of his race."

He ignores the most blatant facts of inequality. Remembering the songs the white visitors "loved," for example, he remarks:

Loved? Demanded. Sung? An ultimatum accepted and ritualized, an allegiance recited for the peace it imparted, and for that perhaps loved. Loved as the defeated come to love the symbols of their conquerors. A gesture of acceptance, of terms laid down and reluctantly approved. (p. 100)

Observing the "insane" doctor as he, in turn, unsmilingly observes Mr. Norton, the Invisible Man notes that, "Men like us did not look at a man like Mr. Norton in that manner" (p. 83). Even when Bledsoe chastises him with statements such as "...you don't even know the difference between the way things are and the way they're supposed to be..." (p. 127), or "My God, boy! You're black and living in the South--did you forget how to lie..."--even then, the Invisible Man is able to believe that
campus life has the freedom and equality he is looking for.
He has heard speeches verifying this obvious error: "...your parents followed this remarkable man across the black sea of prejudice, safely out of the land of ignorance" (p. 109), and seen Bledsoe proffer "...an old leg shackle from slavery which he proudly called 'a symbol of our progress'..." (p. 126), and he has believed, because he chose to believe, that that sea has been crossed, that the progress already made should be protected at whatever cost to the freedom and equality still to be attained.

The reasons for this intelligent Negro's obtuseness, here of course, are psychological and social ones. Bledsoe's position impresses him:

...he was the example of everything I hoped to be: influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife. What was more, while black and bald and everything white folks poked fun at, he had achieved power and authority; had, while black and wrinkle-headed, made himself of more importance in the world than most Southern white men. They could laugh at him but they couldn't ignore him. (p. 92)

These are, indirectly, culturally dictated responses. The desires for personal dignity, power, prestige, even of this questionable quality are naturally heightened in a culture where they are denied to all but a negligible percentage of the population.

The Invisible Man's obtuseness remains even after Bledsoe has given him overwhelming evidence of the moral reprehensibility
of his position, even after he has told him, "I don't even insist that it was worth it, but now I'm here and I mean to stay—after you win the game, you take the prize and you keep it, protect it; there's nothing else to do" (p. 128).

The Invisible Man, then, seeks to follow Bledsoe in becoming the thing that he must be in order to win the game, not realizing that since the southern whites have established the rules, there is no way that it can truly be won. As Albert Gerard says, "By working for his personal success, Ellison's hero cuts himself off from his people, he destroys within himself the vital feeling of communal solidarity, he de-Negrifies himself, he prepares to become a deserter, a man without roots."  

There is more here than the determination of a man to move ahead in the world. He has been trained, as has been shown, to pre-consciousness by the white culture. Moreover, the black culture has enforced that training with what Ellison elsewhere calls "mis-education." He explains that

Within the ambit of the black family this takes the form of training the child away from curiosity and adventure, against reaching out for those activities living beyond the borders of the black community. And when the child resists, the parent discourages him; first with the formula, "that there's for white folks. Colored can't have it," and finally with a beating.  

The combined efforts of the two cultures have left the Invisible Man with no access to an objective, inclusive view of his situ-

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11 Gerard, p. 122

12 Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 91.
ation. Thus, when he tries to imagine what has happened to him, his intellect falters: "How had I come to this? I had kept unswervingly to the path placed before me, had tried to be exactly what I was expected to be, had done exactly what I was expected to do..." (p. 131). Instead of finding fault with the structure within which he is working (where his experience shows, in fact, that the fault lies), he protects that dream of a place of eminence for himself in the only way it can be done. He accepts responsibility for the predicament with little more intelligence (and no more accuracy) than Trueblood had used when he accepted the punishment for his predicament: "Somehow, I convinced myself, I had violated the code and thus would have to submit to punishment. Dr. Bledsoe is right, I told myself, he's right; the school and what it stands for have to be protected" (p. 131).

He protects the dream because he has nothing else. How much he is willing to forfeit for just the possibility of keeping his hopes for dignity and significance alive are apparent when, driving back to the campus with the shocked Norton, he senses the imminent loss of this identity:

Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it. In this brief moment of passage I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams. I wanted to stop the car and talk with Mr. Norton, to beg his pardon for what he had seen; to plead and show him tears, unashamed tears like those of a child before his parent; to denounce all we'd seen and heard; to assure him that far from being like any of the people we had seen I hated them, that I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and
soul, and that I believed in his own goodness and 
kindness in extending the hand of his benevolence
to helping up' poor, ignorant people out of the mire
and darkness. (p. 91)

The black culture in the South is so degraded, offers so negative
a prospect to the Invisible Man that there is no indignity he would
not suffer to simply have the chance to believe the illusion of
the possibility of something better. Certainly, nothing he hears
is going to make him see how he is being manipulated, for the
doctor at the Golden Day explains what has been done to him plainly
enough. Speaking to Norton in the presence of the Invisible Man,
for instance, he says;

He believes in you as he believes in the beat of
his heart. He believes in that great false wisdom
taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is
right. I can tell you his destiny. He'll do your
bidding, and for that his blindness is his chief
asset. He's your man, friend. (p. 87)

He explains the mechanics of the psychological block that the
Invisible Man has developed through acceptance of "Jim Crow"
relationships:

"You see," he said turning to Mr. Norton, "he has
eyes and ears and a good distended African nose, but
he fails to understand the simple facts of life.
Understand? It's worse than that. He registers with
his senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has
meaning. He takes it in but he doesn't digest it.
Already he is--well, bless my soul! Behold! A walk-
ing zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only
his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a
walking personification of the Negative, the most per-
fect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical
man!" (p. 86)

Later, after Bledsoe has expelled him, the Invisible Man meets the
doctor on the bus, where he (the doctor) prescribes conscious-
ness as the best remedy for the disease he has diagnosed. He
does not take a high moral stance. He does not tell him not to
play the game. He suggests only that he

"Learn how it operates, learn how you operate--I wish
I had time to tell you only a fragment. We're an ass-
backwards people, though. You might even beat the
game. It's really a very crude affair. Really pre-
Renaissance--and that game has been analyzed, put down
in books. But down here they've forgotten to take care
of the books and that's your opportunity. You're hidden
right out in the open--that is, you would be if you only
realized it. They wouldn't see you because they don't
expect you to know anything, since they believe they've
taken care of that...." (p. 137)

The trap of middle of the way respectability, supported by
paternalism, and protected by the culturally instilled pre-con-
sciousness, is still so powerful that the Invisible Man continues
the dream in New York. Depending upon a number of letters Bledsoe
has given him (which really tell the prospective employers to be
nice but not to hire him), he considers how he will behave in
order to be accepted back at college:

...I would make the best of my contacts. When I met
the big men to whom my letters were addressed I would
put on my best manner. I would speak softly, in my
most polished tones, smile agreeably and be most po-
lite; and I would remember that if he ("he" meant any
of the important gentlemen) should begin a topic of
conversation (I would never begin a subject on my own)
which I found unfamiliar, I would smile and agree.
My shoes would be polished, my suit pressed, my hair
would be clean and my armpits well deodorized--you had
to watch the last item. (p. 140)

The Invisible Man, then, reaches his individuated perspective
through a series of accidents. If he could have chosen, he would
have been a Bledsoe, a Booker T. Washington, accepting a halfway kind of equality and forcing those under him to do the same. Everything in his experience in the South was arranged to keep him from perceiving what real equality was, and it was only a series of fortunate falls that allowed him to escape the "place" that the southern whites had arranged for him.

The "insane" doctor is an example of the third kind of possible southern black character. Contrasting with the kind of failure to be human exhibited by Bledsoe and the Invisible Man (before he leaves the South), he has taken the advice he gave to the Invisible Man to "Be your own father..." (p. 139). Rejecting the cultural dictates of both the black and white community, he sees the situation as it appears to his objective and lucidly conscious mind. Quite predictably, he has been removed to an insane asylum for such a transgression.

The Doctor's character, including as it does consciousness, is even now an infrequent occurrence in both the South and, to a lesser extent, the North. Not only does the white culture, as we have seen, channel the blacks away from his clarity of vision and stamp it out whenever it is recognized, but the black community too has done everything it can to support the white culture's dictates. Ellison gives the reason and describes the process:

The pre-individualistic black community discourages individuality out of self-defense. Having learned through experience that the whole group is punished
for the actions of a single member, it has worked out efficient techniques of behavior control. For in many Southern communities everyone knows everyone else and is vulnerable to his opinions. In some communities everyone is "related" regardless of blood ties. The regard shown by the community for its members, its general communal character and its cohesion are often mentioned....this personal quality, shaped by outer violence and inner fear, is ambivalent. Personal warmth is accompanied by an equally personal coldness, kindliness by cruelty, regard by malice. And these opposites are as quickly set off against the member who gestures toward individuality as a lynch mob forms at the cry of rape.13

The doctor's character structure is, then, the object of extreme social ostracism (for micro-cosmically valid reasons) by the black communities themselves whose "social characters" have not had the fortune to reject and escape the mental castration by the white community. Individuality, as a matter of fact, is not a development from within the southern black community at all. Just as individuation comes from outside to the southern whites, so does it with the southern blacks. Significantly, the doctor has been to France:

"...how long were you in France?" Mr. Norton asked. "Long enough," he said. "Long enough to forget some fundamentals which I never should have forgotten."
"What fundamentals?" Mr. Norton said. "What do you mean?"

The vet smiled and cocked his head. "Things about life. Such things as most peasants and folk peoples almost always know through experience, though seldom through conscious thought...." (pp. 83-84)

Similarly, the Invisible Man develops his individuation slowly after a long time in the North. The "criminal attitude" Ellison speaks of as characteristic of the black man who escapes pre-

13 Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," p. 90
consciousness is apparent in the Invisible Man when he explains symbolically that he has stolen consciousness from the whites: "It won't matter if you know that I tapped a power line leading into the building and ran it into my hole in the ground. Before that I lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see, I've illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa" (p. 16).

It is significant too that the consciousness, represented by Ellison as stolen from the whites, still lights up a black situation. That is, these characters, in contrast to the characters under the wings of paternalism, do not attempt to become white men with black skins, but find those elements of black culture that are viable within the larger perspective of their consciousness. Let me conclude this chapter, then, by looking at what a conscious view of the black tradition discloses.

Negro character structures and traditions in the South have developed out of Negro reactions to a history of systematic subjugation and repression by the dominant white racist culture. The negative effects of slavery upon the Negro psyche have been so detrimental, as Stanley M. Elkins sees it, that "The only mass experience that western people have had within recorded history comparable in any way with Negro slavery was undergone in the nether world of Nazism."14

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The hopes of reconstruction, the seeming closeness of success,\textsuperscript{15} suddenly reversed in the decades on either side of the turn of the century, and the splitting of the black community itself into conflicting factions during the long protest movement, make up the rest of the sordid history in reaction to which the American black man has built his traditions and survived. It is beyond conceivability that development through reaction to such a history could fail to cause some basically negative attributes in the individuals involved. As we have seen, the Invisible Man exhibits these negative attributes until well after he has left the South.

In spite of these conditions, however, the black race has developed a solid basis of positive accomplishment. Ellison speaks of "the faith, the patience, the humor, the sense of timing, rugged sense of life and the manner of expressing it which all go to define the American Negro."\textsuperscript{16} He considers this sheer ability to survive to be a source of moral strength,\textsuperscript{17} for both black and white Americans. The art forms of jazz and the blues, too, have developed in reaction against the tensions of their perverse en-

\textsuperscript{15}See Silberman's analysis (Crisis in Black and White, p. 22) of the loss (beginning around 1890) of rights gained during reconstruction. The price of reconciliation between whites of the North and South was most of the freedom the black man had gained during reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{16}Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure," p. 21.

\textsuperscript{17}Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure," p. 17.
vironment itself. These are indeed, as Ellison points out, too precious—and too much has been paid—for them to be lost.

A look at Invisible Man from this perspective discloses the inaccuracy of Gerard's statement that "...Ellison's novel rejects both paternalistic reformism and revolutionary Communism but does not even try to offer a valid alternative...." On the contrary, Ellison has set forth the experience of movement from pre-consciousness to individuation in the character of the Invisible Man. The perspective he offers is at once true to black experience and macro-inclusively aware. Further, he has pointed out what an in-depth understanding discloses as rejectable in the black psyche and what should be kept. He thus delineates a positive direction for the black culture to move in.

Rejecting a merely sociological approach to black culture (especially the tendency to reduce the black personality to a question of civil rights), Ellison burdens the black race with the responsibility of accepting themselves, developing conscious insight into their situation, and, by demanding their rights, moving upward to human equality. As Kostelanetz says, Ellison makes the point that "while discrimination and prejudice are nothing but pernicious and objectionable, they do not totally encumber or determine a Negro's existence." This is not a

19 Gerard, p. 126.
capitulation to the white power structure. As Gerard notes, he puts the entire white race "on trial" and finds them to be the cause of the situation. He simply insists that the Negro need not be totally debilitated by the traps set by the dominant culture. Attempting to bridge the historically incurred gap between the "self-improvement" school advanced by Booker T. Washington and the civil rights school of DuBois, and to include (through conscious literary technique) the human subtleties missed by both, Ellison would have the black man exercise the dignity and the power that are his, to climb up out of the hole of merely reacting to white racist prejudices and transcend the white culture's dominance.

Insisting, then, upon growth (especially the acquisition of consciousness), within the black community, Ellison can stand as a competent and self-assured man and demand that he be treated as such (and now) by the white community. He can offer the threat that, if the white race does not show its responsibility here, the black race will, and their sense of responsibility will be backed by a clarity of vision that will no longer accept guilt or punishment for the situation as Trueblood and the Invisible Man did. Ellison portrays this sense of responsibility as the Invisible Man considers an encounter with a white racist in New York:

Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement. Take the man whom I almost

22 Gerard, p. 124.
killed: Who was responsible for that near murder—I? I don't think so, and I refuse it. I won't buy it. You can't give it to me. He bumped me, he insulted me. Shouldn't he, for his own personal safety, have recognized my hysteria, my "danger potential"? He, let us say, was lost in a dream world. But didn't he control that dream world—which, alas, is only too real!—and didn't he rule me out of it? And if he had yelled for a policeman, wouldn't I have been taken for the offending one? Yes, yes, yes! Let me agree with you, I was the irresponsible one; for I should have used my knife to protect the higher interests of society. (pp. 16-17)
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Considering the characters studied in chapters two, three and four, I conclude that, while there is obvious validity in Faulkner's depiction of the plight of the individual alienated from a cultural model as in *As I Lay Dying*, and, while the slow loss of the provincial, familial traditions depicted in *Delta Wedding* does entail the loss of a kind of beautiful life to the select few who stand at the top of the southern socio-economic pyramid, the fact is (as will be discussed below) that the southern limitations put upon the growth of the individual, black or white, have made the entire system non-viable for the majority.

Certainly, even with the prescriptive limitations placed upon the individual, the traditional structure is an improvement upon the totally isolated condition of Faulkner's Addie Bundren. As was pointed out in chapter two, however, the alternatives are not limited to the extremes of total isolation or communal prescription, and, though the South has a larger sense of community, a more closely-knit unity, than the North has, such a sense can only be of positive value if it connects the individual macro-inclusively. And, as *Delta Wedding* indicates, the connection at the level of the southern family and the immediate community has been bought at the price of exclusion of the larger world context.¹

¹ Obviously, the Fairchilds are not the most cosmically aware members of the southern community. The general tendency to exclude the rest of the world--to consider other beings as threat-
Even worse, the static definitions of the communal structure entail what Ransom calls a "moral obtuseness"\(^2\) on the part of the whites toward the large black community with whom they must relate on a day to day basis. In order for the community to remain intact in the manner to which the whites have become accustomed, they must pretend that the black man is something less than human. As Ellison points out, even literary artists fail to do the black man justice (\textit{Delta Wedding} is certainly a case in point here):

Too often what is presented as the American Negro (a most complex example of Western man) emerges as an oversimplified clown, a beast or an angel. Seldom is he drawn as that sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality, which great literary art has projected as the image of man.\(^3\)

\textit{Invisible Man} does not present reasons for the white racists' projection of simplicity upon black men; it notes rather that they do project simplicity and what this means to the Negro psyche. One reason, however, indicated in \textit{Delta Wedding}, is that the southern caucasian suffers from a nearly total incapacity to face changes (here, again, they differ from people of other cultures only in degree). Even relatively small changes within

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\(^2\) Ransom, p. 507.

the family unit are for the most part reacted against with the closed-minded righteousness of a character from a Victorian novel (as with the addition of Robbie Reid Fairchild or Troy Flavin to the family in Delta Wedding). To admit such complexity as Ellison sees in the black man would be to face a much greater change in attitude than they are capable of. They, therefore, must not only believe in the simplicity of the black man, but do all they can to make it true that black men are simple. Even if they chose to get rid of the tradition of imposed pre-consciousness as a tool for keeping Negroes "in their place," they would need to maintain the tradition in order to avoid the effect of the black consciousness upon their consciences and their sense of community. The escaped slave, Frederick Douglas, shows how scathing such consciousness can be:

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity are, to him, more bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages....

It is not difficult to imagine that this kind of consciousness in the minds of the masses of black men and women in the South would undermine the present traditional structure.

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4 Quoted in Soul on Ice, pp. 75-76. The speech was delivered on July 4, 1852 in Rochester, New York.
The "social character" of the southern caucasian, then, has not been constructed along lines that are compatible with the world context it can never really secede from. This is, of course, true of western man in general—it is simply true to a much higher degree of the southerner, who, because of his guilt and his static definition of community, cannot adapt to impinging change; who, in fact, has no adequate apparatus of adaptation.

With the Negro, the case has, of necessity, been otherwise. The black southern "social character" has been, as we have seen, constructed along lines of adaptation for survival. Finally, unable and unwilling to accept the situation they are born into, many have been forced to make themselves becomes. The difficulty has been and still is that, becoming the character that survives such a caste system as that of the South where the range of white attitudes (with perhaps a few exceptions) runs from a minority of paternalistic misconceptions to a sadistically violent hatred, has not always, as we have seen, constituted positive adaptation to the world as a whole.

Both races are, in general then, in need of radical change, but the southern whites have largely preferred to yearn nostalgically for the past rather than look to the ominous future. Many members of the black race, in direct contrast, have, with political, social, and economic insight into the total situation, envisaged radical movement forward. James Baldwin, for example, in the article

Over the years, especially since the turn of the century, the fight with the South has developed widened perimeters as black men have more and more moved northward and escaped the handicap
lampooned so venomously by Melvin Bradford (see chapter one),
attacks the "middle of the road" policy advocated by Faulkner:

...he is simply speaking of the hope—which was always unrealistic and is now all but smashed—that the white Southerner, with no coercion from the rest of the nation, will lift himself above his ancient, crippling bitterness and refuse to add to his already intolerable burden of blood-guiltyness. But this hope would seem to be absolutely dependent on a social and psychological stasis which simply does not exist.  

It is easy to argue, as Bradford does, that black men do not understand what they are asking when they demand change now and not tomorrow, but, of course, many do. They have had to adapt immediately time after time to the demands of the white majority. Baldwin shows his understanding of what change entails in the article Bradford objects to:

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or thought one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long

of southern pre-consciousness, and more and more developed a sense of the unity of black humanity in America. The best insights into the predicament of the southerner, black or white, thus do not necessarily come from the South.


7 It is ironically noted by Silberman (Crisis in Black and White, p. 24), that segregation was effected after reconstruction in only six or seven years.
possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges. All men have gone through this, go through it, each according to his degree, throughout their lives. It is one of the irreducible facts of life. And remembering this, especially since I am a Negro, affords me almost my only means of understanding what is happening in the minds and hearts of white Southerners today.

Every movement into a gestalt, then, that irrevocably conflicts with its own components, entails real pain and perhaps psychically detrimental tensions to those members who must face the conflicts and change basic conceptions of reality in order to survive. No one knows this, experientially if not cognitively, better than the black man. It is time, in the opinion of many Negroes, for the white Southerners to face some of these conflicts, to experience the pain, rather than running from it or forcing the Negro to do all of the changing. In fact, they are going to insist upon it no matter how the white majority reacts. As Cleaver says, "the elders who, in the tradition of privileged classes or races, genuinely do not understand the youth, trapped by old ways of thinking and blind to the future, have only just begin to be vexed—because the youth have only just begun to rebel." 10

Both blacks and whites are humans reacting as humans to situations they find themselves in. To lay the fault to any present

8 Baldwin, p. 100.

9 The Fairchilds exhibit their tendency to run when Robbie appears at Shellmound. Ellen notes that "It was not anything but pure distaste that made them run; there was real trouble in Robbie's face, and the Fairchilds simply shied away from trouble as children would do." (p. 159).

10 Cleaver, p. 69.
faction is not only to be too simplistically moralistic, but to make a tactical error as well. The blame is in the situation itself and it takes humans to change an arbitrary situation into a human one. Ellison, by analogy with the job of the jazz musician, suggests that both blacks and whites learn the workings of the instruments of human relations and become virtuosos upon these instruments.\(^\text{11}\)

As Ellison sees it, both the problem and the solution lie in the mythic structures—and hence the character models—in terms of which both the black and white cultures are operating. The democratic myth theoretically espoused by both cultures has not only become, as Ellison says, "too shaky a structure to support the furious pressures of the artist's doubt," but is contravened regularly by the everyday experiences of the black man in the streets. And (Ellison again) "when the belief which nurtures a great social myth declines, large sections of society become prey to superstitions."\(^\text{12}\)

Such superstitions are readily apparent in both the black and white cultures of today. One of the inmates of the asylum in *Invisible Man* says, for example: "I'm a student of history sir....The world moves in a circle like a roulette wheel. In the beginning, black is on top, in the middle epochs, white holds


the odds, but soon Ethiopia shall stretch forth her noble wings:
Then place your money on the black" (p. 75). This mythical inter­
pretation of the race conflict is becoming a relatively pop­
ular black dream today. Elijah Muhammad, for example, explains
that,

The white devil's day is over.... His time was up in 1917. These are his years of grace—seventy of them. He's already used up most of those years trapping and murdering the black nations by the hundreds of thousands. Now he's worried, worried about the black man getting his revenge.\textsuperscript{13}

The white myths, as Silberman points out, are no more credible.
The White Citizens Council of Mississippi has officially suggested
that a book containing the following passage be admitted as a third
and fourth grade text in Mississippi schools:

\begin{quote}
God wanted the white people to live alone. And he wanted colored people to live alone. The white man built America for you. White men built America so they could make the rules.... The white man has always been kind to the Negro. We do not believe that God wants us to live together. Negro people like to live by themselves. Negroes use their own bathrooms. They do not use white people's bathrooms. The Negro has his own part of the town to live in. This is called our Southern way of life. Do you know that some people want the Negroes to live with the white people? These people want us to be unhappy. They say we must go to school together. They say we must swim together and use the bathroom together. God has made us different. And God knows best. Did you know that your country will grow weak if we mix the races? \textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Such myths are simply not sufficiently inclusive to lend a very

\textsuperscript{13} Silberman, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{14} Silberman, p. 149.
high degree of probability to the possibility of human survival on this planet, especially considering the fact that current tendencies toward polarization could make them the norm.

"The superstitious individual," says Ellison, "responds to the capricious event, the fate that seems to explode in his face through blind fatality." Unable to see and name the historical, social, psychological, and economical causes behind phenomena, he develops such scopeless and impracticable myths as those of the Black Muslims and the white racists above. What is lacking, then, in the South (the United States, and the world as well) is an inclusive myth. Since this whole picture does not exist, the character images for the various short-sight factions are incompatible. Like Addie Bundren, the southerners have been forced to create a reality out of the exigencies of an arbitrary history which, no matter how different it might have been, given foresight and consciousness of the world context, becomes the reality mythologized and deified by the traditional culture. This is to leave their fate in the hands of an arbitrary procession of circumstances the negative trend of which already spells chaos. Obviously, the white southern traditionalist's answer—to hang onto an unworkably mythologised past and struggle to maintain its survival in the face of any contingency—is simply inadequate.

Ellison, on the other hand, would develop workable myths. As he says, "...men determine their own social weather, and human

15 Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction...," p. 41.
fate is a creation of human confusion."16 The variable affecting man's ability to creatively control his social weather rather than give in to "fate" is, for Ellison as has been pointed out, "light" --understanding of the confusion surrounding the action and reaction that constitutes human relations. Speaking of reality as a "tar baby," he says

...we give him our sharpest attention, we question him carefully, we struggle with more subtlety; while he, in his silent way, holds on, demanding that we perceive the necessity of calling him by his true name as the price of our freedom. It is unfortunate that he has so many, many "true names"--all spelling chaos; and in order to discover even one of these we must first come into the possession of our own names. For it is through our names that we first place ourselves in the world. Our names, being the gift of others, must be made our own.17

An individuated personality, then, according to this view, is a prerequisite to the naming of the reality that forms its context. And, as Faulkner has shown with Addie Bundren, individuated being has insufficient scope for meeting existential exigencies if it is formed without the positive tensions of a broader than individual view--what Ellison calls "myth." Ellison posits the need, then, for individuated being as a model within a mythical structure which is related to reality's givens--and hence believable--yet capable of universal survival (i.e. having macro-inclusive, micro-incisive validity) through diversified compatibility.

The Invisible Man is his contribution to this myth.

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17 Ellison, "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," p. 147.
The one ingredient that can generate the rest is that very tool that has been specifically denied the black man in the South—consciousness. As Ellison says, "...nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth" (p. 10).

In Ellison's analogy, we have been dreamers and sleepwalkers, not knowing ourselves nor our situation and certainly not seeing how or why we thrive or fail to thrive as a whole. All the world has been our skin for centuries but we have not realized the truth nor the full implications of that fact until recently. We cannot really exclude anyone or absolve anyone because "all dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all" (p. 17).
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