

THE BYSTANDER IN FAULKNER'S FICTION

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Abstract

In much of his fiction Faulkner used a type of character which one might call the "bystander." The bystander is important not as a participant in the action of a novel or short story, but rather as a witness to the actions of other characters, the protagonists. Frequently, however, the focus of the author's attention falls upon the perceptions and feelings of the apparently irrelevant witness instead of upon the ostensible action of the work. Faulkner analyzes closely the effects the action has upon the bystander who may become involved in events which, strictly speaking, should not concern him. Reciprocally, the protagonists very frequently are conscious of the watching eyes of the bystander (or bystanders) and adapt their actions to placate or defy the watching consciousness. There is, therefore, a complex relationship between the two types, protagonist and witness.

Many critics have seen individual bystanders in Faulkner's fiction as mouthpieces of the author, but this dissertation attempts to refute this interpretation. The first four chapters of the dissertation consider the choric or collective bystanders, the problem, important to Faulkner, of perception and the subjectivity of vision, the use of irony in treatments of the bystander,

and the use of the youthful bystander. Each of these topics reinforces the assertion that Faulkner views the bystander figure inevitably as limited and fallible and not as an authorial spokesman. Because Stevens appears more frequently in Faulkner's work than any other bystander figure, and because he has attracted more adverse criticism than any other character in Faulkner's fiction, the last five chapters focus upon him and discuss in detail the works in which he appears. The dissertation shows Faulkner's portrayal of Gavin Stevens to be complex and effective, not the failure it is often claimed to be.

Indeed, a discussion of the bystander casts new light upon several of Faulkner's less famous works and indicates how those works extend the treatment of themes recognized in the major successes of the 1930's. The influence of the town in Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris, the significance of the mysterious figure of the Reporter in Pylon, the importance of the experiments in Knight's Gambit, all appear by means of this investigation. Similarly, this dissertation shows how bystander figures play important parts in nearly all of Faulkner's novels and in many of his short stories.

The dissertation reveals Faulkner's continued interest in the passive bystander who only witnesses the



actions of the protagonists but who yet exerts a powerful influence upon their actions. Thus the treatment of this type in Faulkner's fiction indicates both the powers and limitations of perception. The bystanders are frequently sympathetic, intelligent, and morally aware, but they are, at the same time, ineffectual, passive, or escapist. Furthermore, because Faulkner's stance as an artist is often that of the non-involved witness, a study of his use of the bystander leads ultimately to a consideration of problems central to his conception of fiction.

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## INTRODUCTION

In much of his fiction Faulkner used a type of character which one might call the "bystander." The bystander is important not as a participant in the action of a novel or short story, but rather as a witness to the actions of other characters, the protagonists. Frequently, however, the focus of the author's attention falls upon the perceptions and feelings of the apparently irrelevant witness instead of upon the ostensible action of the work. Faulkner analyzes closely the effects the action has upon the bystander who may become involved in events which, strictly speaking, should not concern him. Reciprocally, the protagonists very frequently are conscious of the watching eyes of the bystander (or bystanders) and adapt their actions to placate or defy the watching consciousness. There is, therefore, a complex relationship between the two types, protagonist and witness.

For this reason, the term "bystander" admittedly does not define the characteristics of this type in all its manifestations. The nature of the bystander is ambivalent; the character sometimes merely watches, sometimes feels compelled to participate in the action of the novel or short story. Indeed, it will be the concern of this

dissertation to demonstrate the way in which Faulkner characteristically turns the focus of his fiction not upon the actors but upon the bystander-interpreters in his stories. Quentin Compson is as important as Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!; Gavin Stevens is more important than Flem Snopes in the last two novels of what has been called the Snopes Trilogy.

The term "bystander" is meaningful, however, in that it describes the typical stance of many of Faulkner's characters. Even when these characters become centrally involved in the action of a novel or short story, they are involved as reacting consciousnesses. In other words, their interest for the reader is not what they do but how they perceive. Moreover, even when the bystander acts, he is distanced from the action either by his inability or by his unwillingness to become involved. He wishes, like Gavin Stevens, to be immune and unscathed. In the case of Darl Bundren of As I Lay Dying, the bystander even becomes a witness to his own actions, referring to himself in the third person.

In spite of this uninvolvedness, the bystander often achieves an imaginative identification with the protagonists which substitutes for actual involvement. Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon in Absalom, Absalom!

identify with Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon. The Reporter of Pylon fuses with the drowned Schumann. Horace Benbow becomes in his own imagination the raped Temple Drake in Sanctuary. Instead of living a vital existence of his own, the bystander lives within his perceptions of others' actions.

Often Faulkner manifests these perceptions by rendering them as first-person narration. Or, if an omniscient narrator is used, the bystander may appear as a register, a consciousness whose growing perceptions we follow but whose own appearance and actions are part of the fiction. Because of this technical use of the bystander, it is easy to regard Faulkner's bystanders as authorial spokesmen within the fiction, and many critics have at one time or another described Faulkner's intentions in these terms. It will, however, be one of the major tasks of this dissertation to show the fallacy of describing the bystander as an authorial representative.

Faulkner's concern with the nature of perception manifests itself in the repeated use of the bystander to render a subjective and unreliable point of view. One can, therefore, see the use of the bystander combining thematic concerns with literary techniques to create an organic work of art. The themes inevitably

manifest themselves in particular structures. Throughout his canon, Faulkner considers the characteristics of human consciousness and by emphasizing it asserts the primacy of vision over action. Not only does vision appear more interesting and complex, but it also affects and controls action. Therefore, it is a characteristic of Faulkner's novels that their protagonists often seem shadowy and indefinite, while the bystanders may usurp the position of protagonist, focussing the reader's attentions on interpretation rather than plot.

As early as Soldiers' Pay, his first novel, Faulkner revealed his interest in the figure of the bystander, but in the novels of his major period from The Sound and the Fury to Absalom, Absalom!, he developed this concern into one of his major preoccupations. It has been infrequently recognized, however, that in the works of his later years, particularly in those works which involve the character of Gavin Stevens, Faulkner continued to explore the implications of the bystander figure. For this reason, this dissertation focusses primarily upon what may be called the "Gavin Stevens Fiction" in order to suggest its value as a literary achievement.

In order to prepare the background for the

later works, I have considered a number of closely related topics which define the nature of Faulkner's use of the bystander. In each case, I have concentrated upon a small number of works which best represent the particular topic, but I also make clear that the characteristics of the bystander discussed are relevant to most of the other works considered. Indeed, every topic discussed builds one aspect of the structure necessary to understand the evaluation of The Town and The Mansion in the last two chapters.

The dissertation falls into two related sections: the first four chapters which deal thematically with a number of aspects of Faulkner's use of the bystander, and the last five which focus specifically upon those novels concerned with Gavin Stevens. Chapter I deals with the communal or collective bystander as choric voice; Chapter II concentrates upon the individual bystander and demonstrates Faulkner's use of him as a subjective and interpreting witness to the action. Chapter III documents Faulkner's ironic treatment of the bystander in several novels and short stories, while Chapter IV deals with a particular ironic pattern associated with the child as innocent and non-comprehending bystander. Chapter V demonstrates that the innocent and inexperienced witness

in Faulkner's fiction is not always a child; it deals with the character of Horace Benbow in Sanctuary. Moreover, Chapter V discusses Benbow as the prototype for Gavin Stevens. The last five chapters discuss the works in which Gavin Stevens appears. Chapter VI deals with his appearance as a minor figure in three works, Chapter VII with his role as detective. Chapters VIII and IX deal respectively with his appearance in The Town and The Mansion.

Cleanth Brooks has suggested that Faulkner's strong sense of community originated from his experience of life in a small, rural town and that this communal sense had a strong influence on his fiction. Clearly, as will be shown in Chapter I of this dissertation, Faulkner's awareness of a watching community is an apparent source for his concern with the relationship of bystander to protagonist. In Soldiers' Pay, Sartoris, and As I Lay Dying, Faulkner portrayed the communal consciousness as a kind of choric voice commenting upon the actions of the protagonists. As collective bystander, the town counterpoints the action, comments upon it, and, to some extent, controls it. In "A Rose for Emily", indeed, Faulkner used the voice of the town as a plural first-person narrator. In virtually all his Yoknapatawpha



fiction, Faulkner used this sense of the community, revealing the town's innate conservatism and the powerful effect of its censure upon the individual.

In the masterpieces of his major period, Faulkner concentrated more specifically upon the perceptions of the individual bystander as opposed to the collective voice of the community. An examination of characters like Miss Rosa Coldfield in Absalom, Absalom! makes clear, however, that this distinction is, to some extent, arbitrary. Nevertheless, Chapter II of my dissertation considers primarily the nature of perception as described in The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying, and Pylon, concentrating on the subjectivity of the bystanders' perceptions. Not only does the bystander appear paired with the protagonist in a complex relationship, but also the bystander's use of perception as an alternative to action is seen as the adoption of an inadequate and constricting life. Characters like Quentin Compson, Darl Bundren, and the Reporter inhabit a waste land from which they view barrenly the actions of corrupt but vital protagonists. An examination of these novels reveals Faulkner criticizing the individual bystander as severely as he does the choric voice.

Faulkner's treatment of the bystander, even when that bystander functions as the first-person narrator is consistently ironic. Chapter III of my dissertation suggests how, both stylistically and structurally, Faulkner used the bystander to create ironic counterpoint or, as frequently, viewed the bystander himself ironically. In Soldier's Pay and Sartoris, Januarius Jones and Miss Jenny du Pre are used in both ways, to criticize the romanticism of the novels' protagonists but also to stand as ironic subjects on their own. In Light in August, the travelling furniture dealer provides an ironic vision of the Lena Grove-Byron Bunch idyll. In several stories from Go Down, Moses, the irony is structural in that the positioning of the bystander, be he white or black, reveals certain truths about the South's racial situation. Finally, in The Hamlet, V.K. Ratliff provides an ironic vision of the action but is ultimately encompassed by irony himself. Irony coloured all Faulkner wrote, but the ironic treatment of the bystander figure helps to reveal this type as subject to the author's vision rather than a simple vehicle for authorial statement.

Perhaps the most frequent type of bystander in Faulkner's fiction is the innocent or ignorant youth coming to terms with new experience. By using the youth

as a perceiving intelligence, the author is able to introduce the reader gradually into an unfamiliar situation and, at the same time, achieve irony by playing off the limited intelligence of his bystander against the more worldly knowledge of his reader. Not infrequently, the ignorance or innocence of the child shows to advantage. With the exception of The Reivers, Faulkner's use of the child as bystander appears largely in short stories and short story sequences. Chapter IV of this dissertation examines "My Grandmother Millard", "Barn Burning", "Uncle Willy", "That Evening Sun", "That Will Be Fine", The Unvanquished, and Go Down, Moses as well as The Reivers. In most of these stories, Faulkner portrays a youth attempting to comprehend the corruption and the complexities of his society. In "That Will Be Fine" and "That Evening Sun", however, he reveals a child as corrupt as the society he does not understand. Whether innocent or merely ignorant, however, the child provides a logical limited consciousness through which the author may view his subject.

In Sanctuary, Faulkner introduces a bystander who, while not a child, is childlike. Horace Benbow, the subject of Chapter V, is representative of a common Faulknerian type, the inadequate intellectual whose per-

ceptions of reality are not matched by a corresponding ability to act upon them. In some ways as innocent as a child, Benbow pursues unknowingly the course of enlarged knowledge and inevitable disillusionment. He is doubly interesting in that many of his characteristics are similar to those of Gavin Stevens for whom he seems to be a kind of rough draft.

Gavin Stevens is Faulkner's most frequently used bystander and as such he deserves considerable attention. Moreover, Faulkner's use of Stevens has been criticized more frequently than that of any other bystander, and it is, therefore, fitting to describe what Faulkner has in fact achieved in the later fiction in order to answer the criticism that has been levelled against it. In order to deal with Stevens' development as a bystander, I have divided consideration of his appearances into four chapters. Chapter VI discusses Stevens' appearances as a minor figure in fictions which for the most part do not involve him as a character. In "Hair", Light in August, and Go Down, Moses, Stevens seems almost an afterthought on the part of his creator, appearing only in the last few pages of the work. Clearly his importance and his use are limited; he serves the purpose of providing an alternate perception or epitomizing

a theme implicit earlier in the work.

In the works examined in Chapter VII, Stevens is of much greater importance. In Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun, the district attorney appears as an amateur detective, investigating the mysteries of an unsolved crime. Faulkner seems to have attempted an adaptation of the form of the detective story to his own ends, with varying success. In each book, Stevens' role as bystander expresses Faulkner's concern with the mysteries of the human personality and the difficulty in achieving communication.

Finally, in Chapters VIII and IX, I deal with the bystander in The Town and The Mansion, the last two volumes of the Snopes trilogy. All the perceptions about the bystander defined in the four earlier chapters are relevant here. The subjectivity of human perception figures in the presentation of Gavin Stevens. Chick Mallison is another of Faulkner's youthful innocents, and the attempt to understand the enigmatic Flem Snopes once more reveals the difficulty of probing human motivations. V.K. Ratliff functions as ironic bystander applying a sardonic wit to the events viewed so seriously by Gavin Stevens. In the background of both novels, the community continues to function as the collective choric bystander,

exerting a powerful influence on the action. It is therefore appropriate to conclude with a detailed discussion of these two novels; they are brilliant and frequently underrated pieces of fiction, developing recurrent Faulknerian themes by means of one of Faulkner's most typical literary techniques, the use of the bystander.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE COMMUNITY AS BYSTANDER

An awareness of the social milieu of a small Southern community is essential in understanding the background of Faulkner's use of the bystander in his fiction. Unlike the other major novelists of his generation, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, who choose either an urban or an international setting, Faulkner portrays most frequently a rural community. In such a community, neighbours and their opinions exert a powerful influence which is largely absent from city life; this influence is pervasive in Faulkner's fiction, particularly in the Yoknapatawpha works, which focus upon the small town of Jefferson. As Cleanth Brooks points out in his discussion of Light in August, "the community is the powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself in so much of Faulkner's work. It is the circumambient atmosphere, the essential ether of Faulkner's fiction."<sup>1</sup> Often the action is played before a background of the townspeople who comment upon it; thus Faulkner provides an interior commentator separate from the authorial voice. Instead of the intrusion of an omniscient narrator into the action, we have an integrated commentary made credible by its similarity to the backfence gossip of a small town. Even more important than the repercussions of the protagonist's

actions upon a mass of reflecting observers is the force that social mass exerts upon the actions of the protagonist. From young Bayard of Sartoris to the Flem Snopes of The Town, Faulkner's central characters act with an awareness of a watching, collective consciousness which records and evaluates their behaviour.

In his first novel, Soldiers' Pay, published in 1926, Faulkner describes the return of the veterans of the First World War to a small Southern town whose inhabitants have for the most part been unaffected by the shattering experiences endured by the returning soldiers. It is as if a group from Hemingway's "lost generation" were introduced into a small rural community. Soldiers' Pay, therefore, reveals the clash between the two disparate groups, the physically and emotionally shattered veterans who include Donald Mahon, Joe Gilligan, and Margaret Powers, and, on the other hand, the citizens of Charlestown, whose comments typify the conservatism and narrowness of a small town. The town views the soldiers as outsiders with different values and strange "newfangled" ideas. As a result, ingratitude is the only coin these soldiers will receive in pay.

The citizens of Charlestown in Soldiers' Pay are identified as The Town and speak in the manner of the



chorus of Greek drama. When the news of Donald Mahon's arrival breaks at the post office where Mr. Mahon, the rector, appears as the center of a gathering of townsfolk, Faulkner explains the town's function as the collective bystander:

The gathering was representative, embracing the professions with a liberal leavening of those inevitable casuals, cravatless, overalled or unoveralled, who seem to suffer no compulsions whatever, which anything from a captured still to a Negro with an epileptic fit or a mouth organ attracts to itself like atoms to a magnet, in any small southern town -- or northern town or western town probably.<sup>2</sup>

As Mr. Mahon relates the news of Donald's arrival, his speech is counterpointed by the parenthesized comments of the Town:

(One of them airy-plane fellers)  
(S'what I say: if the Lord had intended folks to fly around in the air He'd 'a' give 'em wings). (111)

In this first portrayal of the choric voice, Faulkner presents us with an interesting, and traditional, contrast. The innate conservatism and caution of the mass, its inherent anti-heroic attitude serves as a foil for the hero whose actions have virtually destroyed him. Donald Mahon, the soldier whose service of his country has resulted in a serious injury, is regarded by the unheroic town as odd and, perhaps, unnatural. Faulkner

reveals, in a similar fashion to the Greek dramatists, the duality between those who dare and those who dare not. The cautious town choruses its disapproval of the unusual.

Later in the novel we find the choric voice referred to specifically as "The Town," and its sentiments provide the mixture of accepted morality and vicarious curiosity we would expect:

I wonder what the woman that came home  
with him thinks about it, now he's  
taken another one. If I were that  
Saunders girl I wouldn't take a man  
that brought home another woman right  
up to my door. . . . Funny goings-on  
in that house. And a preacher of the  
gospel, too. . . . That girl . . .  
time she was took in hand by somebody.  
Running around town, nearly nekkid.  
Good thing he's blind, ain't it?  
(261-262)

As we shall see in a later chapter, this choric comment is particularly relevant to the actions of Cecily Saunders, who tends to be theatric in everything she does, but in her case, the audience is more often the individual ironic spectator, Januarius Jones.

In the case of Donald Mahon, however, the chorus of townsfolk serves a different purpose, that of leading the reader in speculation about the mysterious and unknowable protagonist. Donald speaks hardly at all and communicates never; seriously wounded, he remains

for all an enigma. Olga Vickery points out<sup>3</sup> that the novel presents the collision of two groups, one scarred by the experience of war, the other untouched. The town speculates about the returned soldiers and particularly about Donald Mahon. But neither the town nor the reader can know what goes on behind the blank impassivity of Donald's face. Speaking of Mahon, Michael Millgate suggests a parallel with The Sound and the Fury in that "other characters are judged in terms of their behaviour towards him much as the characters in the later novel are judged by their treatment of Benjy."<sup>4</sup> Thus Margaret Powers and Joe Gilligan, who treat Donald kindly, are positive characters, but characters like Cecily Saunders or the townspeople in general reveal their inhumanity and selfishness by their disregard for him.

Occasionally, the collective voice manifests itself in an individual person, but the function and the tone remains the same. One such figure is Mrs. Burney, the town gossip, who probes Mrs. Powers for information about Donald: the similarity of the choric voice to back-fence gossip is here most apparent:

"I hear you are going to have a marriage up at your house. That's so nice for Donald. He's quite sweet on her, ain't he? . . . folks never thought she'd wait for him, let alone take him sick and

scratched up like he is. . . . He's  
all right, ain't he? . . . I mean for  
marriage. He ain't---it's just---  
I mean a man ain't no right to palm  
himself off on a woman if he ain't --"  
(257-258)

In Soldier's Pay, Faulkner portrays the combination of lascivious curiosity and narrow selfishness typical of a small town's attitude. Characters like Mr. Mahon, the rector, who exhibit generosity are few, and the superficiality of people like Cecily Saunders seems much more common. By allowing the town to function as commentator upon the central action of the returning soldiers, Faulkner is able to portray simultaneously the disillusionment of the veterans and the ingratitude of their community, an ingratitude which accentuates the disillusionment.

Faulkner creates a similar pattern of protagonist juxtaposed with a watching town in Sartoris, (1929) the first of his Yoknapatawpha novels. Bayard Sartoris, the romantic and troubled young war hero, returns to Jefferson bearing a nameless guilt and tormented by an indefinable restlessness, and the town reacts to the returned warrior in much the same way it did in Soldier's Pay, with excited speculation and conservative disapproval. Cleanth Brooks suggests that Bayard's "plight is set off the more sharply because it has for its background a traditional society in which there is a true community.

which means that there is a community of values as well as an organic society."<sup>5</sup> As is the case in Soldiers' Pay, the young men returned from the war (Bayard Sartoris and Horace Benbow) with their modern disillusionment and ennui, confront an old, conservative society largely unaffected by the forces of the twentieth century.

This community watches the returning soldiers with a combination of excited curiosity and reproach. Aunt Sally Wyatt, like Mrs. Burney in the previous novel, follows Bayard's actions with interest: "Why, jumping off water tanks and going up in balloons just to scare folks. You think I'd have that boy around me? I'd have him locked up in the insane asylum," she says.<sup>6</sup> Narcissa immediately replies that it was John, not Bayard, who went up in the balloon, but Aunt Sally's statement is interesting, nevertheless, for its implication that Bayard's actions are motivated by a desire "to scare folks."

That Bayard's actions are motivated to any extent by a concern for the reactions of an audience composed of his neighbours throws new light on his personality, for his character, like that of all the Sartorises, is essentially theatrical. Bayard, like his ancestor of the same name who fought in the Civil War with gallant

abandon and glorious futility, appears at first to be completely indifferent to the attitudes of the town, but he shares his ancestors' love of the grand gesture.

The novel ends with an evocation of this Sartoris theatricality as Narcissa plays the piano for Miss Jennie:

The music went on in the dusk softly;  
the dusk was peopled with ghosts of  
glamorous and old disastrous things.  
And if they were just glamorous enough,  
there was sure to be a Sartoris in them,  
and then they were sure to be disastrous.  
. . . there is death in the sound of it,  
and a glamorous fatality, like silver  
pennons downrushing at sunset, or a  
dying fall of horns along the road  
to Roncevaux. (380)

In this scene, Jennie and Narcissa have just returned from the graveyard, and even there the Sartoris men make their final gestures for the enlightenment of the Jefferson audience. John Sartoris' inscription seems "like a boastful voice in an empty church" (374), and his great-grandfather's grave exhibits an inscription so defiant that part of it was erased on the demand of the family of the man who killed him. Only Bayard's grave lacks braggadocio because, as Miss Jenny thinks, there was "no Sartoris man to invent bombast to put on it" (374). Even in death, the Sartorises speak grandly to the community that watches them.

The code of honour which all Sartorises affirm demands that certain things be done, and the watching town is witness to the hero's fulfilment of the code. Thus, much of the novel's action is rendered as self-conscious gesture; even such a minor event as old Bayard's departure from home to go to work has its audience:

"Bayard got into the carriage and Simon clucked to the horses, and the onlookers, halted to admire the momentary drama of the departure, fell behind" (4).

Miss Jenny, who (as we shall see in a later chapter) is one of the critics of this Sartoris dramaturgy, is nevertheless one of its original stage managers. Narcissa's visit to the Sartoris home is rendered, once more, as a drama:

Behind these dun bulks and in all the corners of the room there waited, as actors stand within the wings beside the waiting stage, figures in crinoline and hooped muslin and silk; in stocks and flowing coats, in gray too, with crimson sashes and sabers in gallant sheathed repose . . . . Miss Jenny sat with her uncompromising grenadier's back and held her hat upon her knees and fixed herself to look on as her guest touched chords from the keyboard and wove them together, and rolled the curtain back upon the scene. (60 - 61)

It is obvious that Bayard has inherited his love of display and posturing from a long family tradition, a tradition encouraged even by its most severe critic,

Miss Jenny.

The novel reveals, moreover, that this tradition is by no means limited to the Sartoris family. Belle Mitchell, Horace Benbow's adulterous lover, as a product of this Southern theatric mentality, stages similar productions for herself and Horace:

They sat thus for some time while the light faded, Belle in another temporary vacuum of discontent, building for herself a world in which she moved romantically, finely, and a little tragically, with Horace sitting beside her and watching her and watching both Belle in her self-imposed and tragic role, and himself performing his part like the old actor whose hair is thin and whose profile is escaping him via his chin, but who can play to any cue at a moment's notice while the younger men chew their bitter thumbs in the wings.  
(194)

Notice, however, the difference in Horace's reaction to this self-conscious game-playing. Unlike Bayard, who throws himself fully into the role he plays, Horace is unaware of the dramatic potential of his various scenes. One need only compare their respective returns to Jefferson to see the difference. Horace arrives in "wretchedly-fitting Khaki" and laden with parcels, and upon meeting his sister at the station, stands saying "'Dear old Narcy,' stroking his hands on her face, utterly oblivious of his surroundings" (162). Bayard,



on the other hand, jumps off the train before it reaches the station and arrives at his home belatedly, more like a legend than a flesh and blood man. Ironically, Bayard, who hopes to enter Jefferson in a manner which will inspire the least public comment, in fact creates more of a stir than Horace, whose arrival is unspectacular and therefore less worthy of comment.

Bayard's unusual arrival is typical of his behaviour. Ostensibly, he is unconcerned about what people think, but in actuality, his actions all seem designed to create the most public furor. This paradox characterizes also his relationship to Narcissa Benbow, the woman he eventually marries. As Bayard rampages through Jefferson, he is haunted by the face of one who watches him with "a sense of shrinking, yet fascinated distaste of which he or something he had done was the object" (136). This face, he finally realizes, belongs to "that Benbow girl" (151), and their mutual fascination constantly pulls them together until Narcissa cries:

"You beast, you beast, why must you  
always do these things where I've got  
to see you?"  
"I didn't know you were there," Bayard  
answered mildly, with weak astonishment.  
(218)

It seems that Bayard is compelled to perform for an audience similarly compelled to watch. The bystander and

the participant share a symbiotic relationship neither of them is willing (or able) to break.

Bayard is concerned throughout the novel with what people will think of him, and he marries Narcissa Benbow, the woman who seems to be his prime critic among the watchers, perhaps in order to manifest more fully his vague feelings of guilt concerning his brother's death. Bayard's actions, indeed, may be explained as an attempt to come to terms with a guilt which torments him largely because it has no discernible basis, but his actions ultimately result in a crisis, an objective event powerful enough to correlate to his undefined emotions. He wrecks the car in which he and his grandfather are driving and, as a result of the accident, the old man suffers a heart attack.

After the grandfather's death in the motor car, largely as a result of the grandson's negligence, Bayard flees Jefferson for the farm of the McCallums where his guilt is unknown. Here he finds a peace he has not known since his return to Jefferson; he shares the McCallums' tranquil communion with nature and the land. Similarly, when he can submerge himself in the routine of working the soil, he can forget his fear and guilt temporarily:

For a time the earth held him in a hiatus that might have been called contentment. He was up at sunrise, planting things in the ground and

watching them grow and tending them . . . . Without being aware of the progress of it he had become submerged in a monotony of days, had been snared by a rhythm of activities repeated and repeated until his muscles grew so familiar with them as to get his body through the days without assistance from him at all. (203 - 204)

Episodes like these, however, are glimpses of a lost contentment that only accentuate the tormented existence Bayard usually lives.

When one of the brothers decides to visit town, Bayard fears the discovery of his guilt: "Then he realized that Rafe, Lee, whoever went, would talk to people, would learn about that which he had not the courage to tell them" (333). He must therefore flee his sanctuary. Finally, Bayard is driven away from Jefferson by his guilt and dies in an unflyable aeroplane, making a last senseless gesture equivalent to the one made by his brother, John, who jumped from his burning fighter plane, thumbing his nose.

Narcissa Benbow herself becomes, in another subplot of the novel, the person watched rather than the watcher. Here, and in a short story which develops this plot, "There Was a Queen," Faulkner continues his examination of the nature of honour and reputation. Early in the novel, Narcissa shows Aunt Jenny an obscene and

anonymous letter she has received; when Jenny insists she go to the authorities, Narcissa protests:

"No, no; please! I don't want anybody else to know about it . . . . I'll tear it up . . . . I would have sooner, but I wanted to tell somebody. It -- it -- I thought I wouldn't feel so filthy, after I had shown it to somebody else."  
(68 - 69)

Aunt Jenny suggests obliquely that the letters have struck a chord in Narcissa's being and the fact that she saves subsequent letters helps to confirm this. Finally, when Snopes, who has been the author of the letters, steals them back from her room, she is frantic with worry:

what she had done with those other letters she could not remember, and not being able to gave her moments of definite fear when she considered the possibility that people might learn that some one had had such thoughts about her and put them into words. (301)

What Faulkner is attempting to do with this particular subplot of Sartoris is not quite clear, but when we read it in relation to "There Was a Queen," much more about it, and about Sartoris as a whole, becomes obvious. Faulkner has developed the theme of true honour versus reputation as manifested in the atmosphere of a small town. Narcissa is disturbed not by the obscene letters but by the possibility the town might learn about them and thereby think of her in terms of their contents.

Similarly, Bayard, forced by the Sartoris tradition to play out the role of hero and gentleman, is at peace only when he is divorced from social opinion as a whole; at McCallums', where no one knows of his recent actions, he is honorable until Lefe goes to town, where he will presumably learn of the grandfather's death.

In "There Was a Queen," Faulkner develops this contrast explicitly. Narcissa, now Bayard's widow, is confronted by a detective who has found the Snopes letters written so long ago. In order to regain them, she offers herself to this stranger. In other words, to avoid the reputation the letters might give her, she sacrifices her previously inviolate honour, ironically thereby making the fiction a fact: "I had to do it. They were mine; I had to get them back. That was the only way I could do it. But I would have done more than that. So I got them. And now they are burned up. Nobody will ever see them."<sup>7</sup> Aunt Jenny has taken a different attitude to the situation; she has said: "it was better for the world to know that a lady had received a letter like that, than to have one man in secret thinking such things about her, unpunished" (739). Elnora, the ex-slave who is the bystander of this story, expresses contempt for Narcissa, who, she says, is not "quality" like Aunt Jenny,

but Elnora never learns about the reason for Narcissa's trip to Memphis (where the exchange of honour for reputation takes place). This is significant, for it is just to prevent the Elnoras of the world from learning of her "disgrace" that Narcissa sacrifices her honour. For Aunt Jenny, a member of the older generation and a true queen, honour and reputation are inextricable, but for Narcissa the two have become discrete. Both Narcissa and Bayard pattern their lives to satisfy the unspoken demands of a communal voice which, though not as distinctly formulated as in Soldiers' Pay, nevertheless exerts a powerful influence upon the protagonists of Sartoris.

In As I Lay Dying, (1930) Faulkner transforms the chorus which we have seen presented in Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris into an integral part of the novel's structure and significance. Northrop Frye, in his Anatomy of Criticism, makes a comment about the chorus which is relevant to this novel: "The chorus or chorus character is, so to speak, the embryonic germ of comedy in tragedy, just as the refuser of festivity, the melancholy Jaques or Alceste, is a tragic germ in comedy."<sup>8</sup> In subsequent chapters we will see the relevance of this statement to a number of Faulkner's bystander figures, but here we are

concerned only with the collective bystander or chorus.

Previously, we saw in Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris that the town represented a conservative, cautious group contrasting markedly with the protagonists. In Frye's terms, if Bayard Sartoris partook of the mood of Jefferson, he would have settled down happily with Narcissa rather than pursuing his self-destructive course. In As I Lay Dying (1930), the contrast is not so simple. In that novel, the eight narrators who are not members of the Bundren family, the "reverberators" as Olga Vickery calls them, view the agonies and trials of the family from a distance which mutes the pain and accentuates the comic aspects of the pilgrimage: "What is horror and pain for the family becomes farce for those who are not themselves involved and who merely observe with the physical eye."<sup>9</sup> In filmic terms, one might say that close-up is for sympathy and distance shots for comedy. When we, the audience, view too closely the comic victim, our laughter turns to sympathy. What Faulkner has done is to mingle the two responses, the sympathetic and the comic, to a large extent by means of the choric device. From a distance we can do little but laugh at the ludicrous nature of the Bundrens' comic odyssey with Addie's ill-used and rapidly decaying body. But as we enter the

tormented and obsessed minds of each member of the family in turn, we react to them sympathetically. It is not that we experience a gradually developing awareness of character as might have been the case with an omniscient narrator. Rather we experience simultaneously both modes, the tragic and the comic, because of the layered structure of the novel, Bundren protagonists juxtaposed against the watching chorus of bystanders. The juxtaposition results ultimately, as Edmond L. Volpe says, in "the reader's awareness of the amusing and tragic incongruities between the individual's vision of himself and his neighbours' views of him."<sup>10</sup>

Barbara M. Cross, in her "Apocalypse and Comedy in As I Lay Dying,"<sup>11</sup> reveals another aspect of this structure; she sees a contrast between the regenerative potential of a self-less ritual, the funeral procession, and the selfish interests that transform the journey into a farce. It is true that, as she says, members of the family like Anse and Dewey Dell participate in the funeral procession into Jefferson for reasons other than respect for the dead, but this divergence of motivations is not the essential component of the complexity many critics have noted in the novel, the fusion of tragedy and comedy. For it is when we are close to the preoccupations



of Dewey Dell, Vardaman, and the others that we feel sympathy; only when we are removed to the position of a bystander do we fully appreciate the humour. Anse's is a slightly different case, for we are very seldom offered any insight into his mind; he has only three of the narrative chapters and those very short ones. But in the case of the other Bundrens, we are constantly aware of the contrast between the power of their own emotions and the amusement with which others regard them.

Dewey Dell provides the best example. We share her panic and despair when she fears to ask Dr. Peabody for help:

But I know it is there because God  
gave woman a sign when something has  
happened bad. It's because I am alone.  
If I could just feel it, it would be  
different, because I would not be alone.  
But if I were not alone, everybody  
would know it. And he could do so  
much for me, and then I would not be  
alone. Then I could be all right alone.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, all of the Bundrens, like Dewey Dell, are in a very real sense alone. They each bear a personal pre-occupation which they are unwilling or unable to communicate. Indeed, this sense of aloneness and isolation is a pervasive quality of the book, to a large extent because of the choric structure. Dewey Dell, whom we have seen

suffering ("I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God." [424]) becomes the object of a traditional country joke, the story of the deceived maiden, in the MacGowan chapter. MacGowan's remarks have the quality of crude country humour: "You come back at ten o'clock to-night and I'll give you the rest of it and perform the operation . . . . It won't hurt you. You've had the same operation before. Ever hear about the hair of the dog?" (522) But while we can appreciate the comedy of the episode from the druggist's point of view, we still do not forget Dewey Dell's anguish as it has been presented to us.

The ruminations of Cora Tull best illustrate this duality between personal concerns and choric distance. Again and again, Faulkner demonstrates the error of Cora's opinions and moral judgements by juxtaposing her thought and the thoughts of another character. Michael Millgate's comment that "A major source of ironic, and often comic, effects in As I Lay Dying is the frequency with which characters are completely mistaken in their judgements of each other, and of themselves,"<sup>13</sup> applies most closely to Cora's evaluations. For instance, in one of Darl's chapters, we watch him persuading Anse and Jewel to leave with the wagon to earn three dollars

carting wood in spite of the fact that Addie, his mother, is dying. But in the subsequent section we find Cora Tull, and indirectly her husband Vernon, interpreting the departure in a very different fashion:

It was the sweetest thing I ever saw.  
It was like he knew he would never  
see her again, that Anse Bundren was  
driving him from his mother's death-  
bed, never to see her in this world  
again. I always said Darl was different  
from those others. I always said he was  
the only one of them that had his mother's  
nature, had any natural affection.  
Not that Jewel . . . . Not him to miss  
a chance to make that extra three dollars  
at the price of his mother's good-bye  
kiss . . . . Mr. Tull says Darl almost  
begged them on his knees not to force him  
to leave her in her condition. But  
nothing would do but Anse and Jewel must  
make that three dollars. (352)

These judgements are so wrong they are comic, as are most of Cora's opinions about the Bundrens. She sees the journey as a sign of the family's indifference instead of as a pilgrimage (in part) to do their mother's will: "she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it. Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens" (353). As even Vernon Tull points out, the journey was Addie's wish, but Cora refuses to recognize any fact that does not fit her rigid moral system, and therefore she is constantly mistaken in her

perceptions.

This conservative morality which we saw to be an essential element of the choric response in Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris, is represented further in As I Lay Dying by Moseley, the first druggist Dewey Dell visits. His moral indignation at being asked to aid in abortion is comic: "Me, a respectable druggist, that's kept store and raised a family and been a church-member for fifty-six years in this town. I'm a good mind to tell your folks myself, if I can just find who they are" (192). Like Cora, Moseley reacts to Dewey Dell in terms of his personal preoccupations; his moral outrage excludes sympathetic perception.

Armstid is another of the choric bystanders who views the Bundren odyssey from a distance and, as a result, reaches conclusions the reader feels to be inaccurate. Seen from Armstid's point of view, Anse's trading of Jewel's horse to Snopes for a team of mules emerges as another comic episode even though we are aware of the intense feeling Jewel has for his horse. As Jewel reacts to the latest of Anse's many outrages, Armstid says:

I be durn, if a man can't keep the upper hand of his own sons, he ought to run them away from him, no matter how big they are. And if he can't do that, I be durn if he oughtn't to leave himself. I be durn if I wouldn't. (478 - 479)

One finds this statement singularly inappropriate after watching the agonized journey of the Bundren sons as they are forced to carry their useless father as well as their dead mother across the landscape of Mississippi. When Jewel departs hurriedly with his horse, Armstid predicts: "Well, that'll be the last they'll ever see of him now, sho enough" (481). But Armstid, like Cora Tull, fails to appreciate the depth of Jewel's feelings for his mother --- soon after, Jewel reappears to propel the funeral procession again along the road to Jefferson.

So Cora, Vernon Tull, Moseley, MacGowan, and Armstid act as the members of a chorus before which the Bundrens perform. They each help to highlight the comic quality of an action which threatens to overwhelm us with its tragic implications when we see the journey through the eyes of each particular Bundren. We will speak of this aspect further in a later chapter when we analyze Darl's role in the novel. It is enough to say here that these tragic implications are concerned with the essential isolation of all humanity; ironically, this sense of isolation is strengthened by the comic errors and misapprehensions of the choric bystanders. As Cleanth Brooks states, "The essential isolation of the characters is unobtrusively enforced by the fact that each part of

the novel is presented through the consciousness of a particular character. We are always within one mind, never in some domain of objectivity and commonly held values."<sup>14</sup>

Before leaving this examination of the novel's choric bystanders, we must deal with one more who differs greatly from the others previously discussed. This is Doc Peabody, whose two monologues in a sense frame the action of the novel, one occurring prior to the journey, the other coming after the journey is finished. Peabody, like the others, adds to the comic tone of the novel, but his humour is laced with a stronger anger which turns the comedy to bitter irony. When he is summoned to Addie's bedside, he thinks:

When Anse finally sent for me of his accord, I said "He has wore her out at last." And I said a damn good thing and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God. (366)

Later in the novel, after Anse has buried Addie with borrowed shovels, he says:

"That's right . . . Of course he'd have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground. Too bad you all didn't put him in it too..."(516)

Peabody expresses perfectly the sense of anger we feel at

Anse's wily shiftlessness and his ability to take advantage of those around him.

At the University of Virginia, Faulkner made a comment upon Peabody's role in the novel which reveals another dimension of his use of the chorus:

Mainly it was to give for the moment what may be called a nudge of credibility to a condition which was getting close to the realm of unbelief. That is, he brought in from comparatively the metropolitan outland for a moment which says, Well, if he comes out there and sees these people, well then maybe they do exist. Up to that time they were functioning in this bizarre fashion almost inside a vacuum, and pretty soon you wouldn't have believed it until some stranger came in as a witness. Another trick.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Peabody acts as a representative of the reader within the action and acts as a stepping stone between the reality of our life and the fantastic journey of the Bundrens.

Furthermore, as we have seen in previous novels, the choric device is justified by the fact that community opinion is an important factor in shaping the action of the protagonists. In addition to the twin perils of fire and water, the Bundrens must also hurdle the barrier of public opinion in their effort to take Addie to Jefferson. Samson, among others, voices the common sense opinion the Bundrens defy:

Because I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can. ( 110)

As the Bundrens enter Jefferson, we get a demonstration of the importance of public opinion to Jewel. When a passerby reacts in horror to the smell emanating from the Bundren wagon, Jewel whirls to attack him. Darl prevents a fight but only after an elaborate satisfying of respective senses of outraged honour. In this incident, we get an indication of why Jewel is so constantly angry: in his singleminded attempt to transport Addie's coffin to Jefferson, he is confronting community opinion, an opinion his sensitivity feels very strongly.

Darl's growing insanity too is defined in terms of "what people think." When Darl begins to laugh in the presence of his mother's coffin, Anse thinks: "How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him" (99). Samson refers to him in a similar way: "He don't say nothing; just look at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk" (119). These references to public opinion about Darl's strangeness find their culmination in Cash's view of insanity:

Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and



when he aint. Sometimes I think it  
 aint none of us pure crazy and aint  
 none of us pure sane until the balance  
 of us talks him that-a-way. It's like  
 it aint so much what a fellow does  
 but it's the way the majority of folks  
 is looking at him when he does it.  
 (510)

Here then is the ultimate justification of the choric structure of the novel: the collective bystanders are essential to the action of the novel, for they influence the behaviour of those they watch, and the central irony of the novel is the contrast between the anguish of the central characters and the comic view of those who watch them, dismissing them as farcical or insane.

In "A Rose for Emily," a short story published in a collection called These Thirteen in 1931, Faulkner takes the next logical step in his fusion of the choric bystander with the action; he makes the chorus the narrator. Throughout the story, the first person narrator(s) is (are) plural. Only those events which the town as a whole knows or which individual members of the town have discovered and transmitted to the others in the form of gossip are related. "We had long thought of them as a tableau," the narrator says, or "when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not exactly pleased, but vindicated."<sup>16</sup> Even in the end, when Miss Emily's bedroom is entered, it is as if the entire town, the plural

narrators, are there: "For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin . . . . Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head" (130). In the case of Miss Emily's purchase of arsenic, on the other hand, the reader presumes that the druggist himself provides the town with the details of the scene since he is apparently the only other person present. Emily's story is made up of shards of incomplete information, of glimpses caught from afar. The speculations of the town as a whole hypothesize and interpolate the missing links.

The device seems strange at first, but again we find the choric narrators an integral part of the story's significance. Miss Emily, deprived by her father of all male companionship and trapped in a society where an old maid is a figure of fun to be pitied, bears her face "like a strained flag" (126) against the opinions of her society. There is a continual sense, as there was in As I Lay Dying, of a watching community whose opinions may be resented but never ignored. After the beginning of Emily's presumed affair, the narrator says:

She carried her head high enough -- even when we believed that she had fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. (125)

The appearance of indifference to, or defiance of, community opinion is, however, superficial. As the younger generation gradually assumes control of the town, the elaborate subterfuges executed by men like Colonel Sartoris to protect Miss Emily's pride give way to tense confrontations which are evidence of a growing disrespect. Miss Emily breaks all contact with the town, refusing even to allow a postbox on her property (128).

Miss Emily's actions are, in fact, dictated to a considerable extent by her awareness of the watching town. Her secretiveness and her isolation seem attempts to frustrate its curiosity. When Homer Barron, her lover, threatens to abandon her, she poisons him, thereby keeping him by her and simultaneously avoiding, in her mind, the public appearance of a jilted woman. The sense of the watching town dominates the story as a result of the use of the choric narrator, and Emily's actions are partially explained by her desperate need for security in the face of the town's prying curiosity.

This awareness of an established social milieu which watches and evaluates the actions of each individual is pervasive not only in the works I have discussed but in most of Faulkner's fiction as we shall see, by the by, in later chapters. Indeed, the tension between

the protagonist and his society is one of the characteristic elements of Faulkner's writing, and when it does not appear, as in The Wild Palms, where there is no established society to counterpoint the actions of the two lovers, the result is often a slackness not present in his greater works. Further, it is from this sense of a consistent social bystander, I will contend in subsequent chapters, that Faulkner develops the individual bystander who finds his culmination in Gavin Stevens and the later novels.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (1963; rpt. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> William Faulkner, Soldier's Pay (1926; rpt. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1954), p. 111. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (1959; rpt. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Brooks, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> William Faulkner, Sartoris (1932; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p. 71. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>7</sup> William Faulkner, Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 741. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>8</sup> Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> Vickery, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara M. Cross, "Apocalypse and Comedy in As I Lay Dying," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 3 (Summer 1961), 258.

<sup>12</sup> William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (1930; rpt. New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 379 - 380. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Millgate, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> Brooks, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds.,  
Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the  
University of Virginia, 1957 - 1958 (1959; rpt. New York:  
Vintage Books, 1965), pp. 113 - 114.

<sup>16</sup> Faulkner, Collected Stories, p. 123.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE INDIVIDUAL BYSTANDER AND  
THE SUBJECTIVITY OF PERCEPTION

In Chapter One, I have demonstrated how Faulkner frequently juxtaposes the actions of his protagonists with a commenting choric voice and have suggested that the dominant characteristics of that voice are caution and conservatism. Obviously the choric comments are seldom authorial but are rather designed to illustrate the force and impact of the community upon the individual. When we move from consideration of the collective bystander to an examination of the individual bystander, however, the question of whether particular characters represent the author's point of view becomes more difficult.

Many critics have selected characters in the various novels who, they feel, represent Faulkner's opinion. Hyatt Waggoner, for instance, finds this kind of character frequently even in the novels of Faulkner's major period (1929-36) and sees in his later period "a tendency to make his themes explicit through the use of spokesman characters."<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gold divides Faulkner's work at Go Down, Moses and suggests that in the earlier part of his career he presented metaphor and action while in the latter half he substituted statement and discourse.<sup>2</sup> In a later chapter I will attempt to show that the general critical

attitude to many of the later works, particularly the "Gavin Stevens fiction", is mistaken. This tendency to find spokesman characters appears even in discussion of the major works, and therefore I shall make it part of my task in this chapter to suggest that the mistaken criticism of the later works is incipient in the criticism of the fiction of Faulkner's "major period."

My argument is, basically, that, in the novels of his major period, Faulkner repeatedly portrayed the subjectivity of human perception, a theme which precludes the device of an authorial spokesman who will give the questing reader "the Word." In these novels, none of the characters is totally correct, none is an omniscient pseudo-narrator. Faulkner himself declared: "I'm not expressing my own ideas in the stories I tell, I'm telling about people, and these people express ideas which sometimes are mine, sometimes are not mine."<sup>3</sup> Of course, writers, Faulkner among them, are often not accurate critics of their own work. It is, therefore, necessary to demonstrate this point by an examination of several of the works themselves. In many of his novels, Faulkner presents individuals whose primary role is that of passive bystander rather than active participant; as the novelist develops, he becomes more and more interested in the type of the



bystander and the influence that type can have by the act of watching upon the events he witnesses. The theme is not a new one in literature: Melville in Moby Dick is similarly interested as much in the way men see reality as in reality itself; Henry James focuses upon the act of perception itself in novels like The Golden Bowl. But Faulkner, as I have suggested in the first chapter, comes to the theme of perception from his own Southern background as the inhabitant of a small town.

The Sound and the Fury. (1929) is the first important example of this theme in Faulkner's canon. One way to approach the problem of point of view in the novel is through a comparison with "That Evening Sun", a short story with the same cast of characters--the four Compson children. In the story, the four children are the innocent and unwitting witnesses of the agony of Nancy, a black washerwoman who fears that Jesus, the husband she has cuckolded, will return to kill her. The ironic tension between Nancy's desperate fear and the children's ignorance of danger permeates the story.

The opening section of The Sound and the Fury provides us with an incident predicated on a similar irony; this section is of added interest because Faulkner has revealed that it was the germ of the entire novel. The

incident is Damuddy's death; as the funeral progresses inside the house, the children, outside in the dark, speculate about what is happening. One can see the obvious similarities: four ignorant witnesses observing a horror (death) which they cannot understand. But more important is the tableau of the three Compson brothers standing watching their sister's attempts to see from the branch of a tree what is happening inside the house. Faulkner has said:

It began with the picture of the little girl's muddy drawers, climbing that tree to look in the parlor window with her brothers that didn't have the courage to climb the tree waiting to see what she saw. And I tried first to tell it with one brother, and that wasn't enough. That was Section One. I tried with another brother, and that wasn't enough. That was Section Two. I tried the third brother, because Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes, I thought. And that failed and I tried myself---the fourth section---<sup>4</sup> to tell what happened, and I still failed.

This famous quotation, with its humorous description of Faulkner's method of composition, reveals the central concept of the novel to be the viewing by a number of bystanders, passive because they "didn't have the courage to climb," of the active participant, Caddy, their sister, whose muddy drawers represent for each one of them her

corruption by sex. Each brother reveals in his section an obsession with the actions of his sister, an obsession which controls and limits his perceptions. As Lawrence E. Bowling says, "in the first three sections of The Sound and the Fury the author is not primarily concerned with presenting the facts of a story, but with presenting the reactions of certain characters to these facts and thereby revealing individual states of mind."<sup>5</sup> As a result, it is impossible to see any brother as a reliable arbiter of reality; therefore it is dangerous to regard either Jason, Quentin, or Benjy as Faulkner's spokesman.

Nevertheless, many critics have maintained that, although Jason's and Quentin's visions of reality are unreliable, Benjy can be turned to for an invariably true representation of Compson history. Hyatt Waggoner, for instance, suggests that Benjy's recollections "are innocent memories in several senses---events innocently remembered, without special bias and without apparent interpretation."<sup>6</sup> Irving Howe agrees that Benjy's position is non-interpretive: "Being an idiot he is exempt from the main course of action and untainted by self-interest. Because he cannot colour or shape his memories, his mind serves the novel as an entirely faithful glass."<sup>7</sup>

It is true that Benjy's section presents reality

as he sees it, but one can say as much about Quention's or Jason's sections. Perhaps one reason for the frequent representation of Benjy as an undistorting mirror is the ease with which his distortions are perceived. For instance, at the purely physical level, Benjy's description of sleep as bright shapes like fire can be understood from additional details he reports. At another level, however, Benjy's reaction to Caddy's initial experimentation with sex argues a condemnation as rigid and demanding as Quentin's. When Caddy wears perfume, he reacts with a bellow of rage, his reply to everything that displeases him. Indeed, Benjy's entire section is ordered by his inarticulate moral judgments, not always sympathetic, which he uses in an attempt to control his world. For instance, Benjy meets Caddy as she returns from one of her assignations:

Caddy came to the door and stood there, looking at Father and Mother. Her eyes flew at me, and away. I began to cry. It went loud and I got up. Caddy came in and stood with her back to the wall, looking at me. I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. She put her hands out but I pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran.<sup>8</sup>

This is a terrifying picture. Whether or not Caddy's promiscuity is rightly judged is not a real problem here; the point is that Benjy does make judgments of the

actions he views. One should emphasize the fact that Benjy as much as his two brothers presents an interpretive vision of reality.

It has often been recognized that Quentin closely identifies sexuality and death, but it is interesting to note that Benjy's mind makes a similar identification. Benjy's memories of the events surrounding Damuddy's funeral (45-47) lead him directly into recollections of Caddy's marriage; both events are, for him, disturbing occurrences: "Then I saw Caddy, with flowers in her hair, and a long veil like shining wind. Caddy Caddy" (47). Benjy, of course, cannot consciously parallel the marriage and the funeral for he is incapable of symbolic thought, but the juxtaposition of these two disturbing events in his mind reinforces Quentin's similar reactions at a more complex level.

The point is that Benjy's memory is highly selective; it returns obsessively, again and again, to the people and events which preoccupy him. His section is a combination of perceptions which are forced upon him and recollections he cannot escape. Faulkner's comment about Benjy, that he "loved three things: the pasture which was sold to pay for Candace's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight" (423), defines

the limits of his obsessions. Benjy's memories are selective; in the highly restricted scope of his wanderings about the Compson farm, he undoubtedly repeats actions and events constantly, but his mind recalls only those similar occurrences related to his obsessions. For instance, in the opening pages of Benjy's section, we see Benjy catch his pants on a nail as he crawls through the fence:

"Wait a minute." Luster said. "You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail."

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. (3)

Luster's comment makes it clear that this snagging is a frequent occurrence, and yet Benjy's mind returns not to a similar event two weeks before, but to an occurrence thirty years past, an occurrence related to Caddy.

Benjy's tendency to cross time, whether it be three or thirty years, provides Faulkner with a convenient device for rendering one of his principal themes in The Sound and the Fury. By juxtaposition of Benjy's present in 1928 with the turn of the century childhood of the Compson children, Faulkner can demonstrate the progressive degradation of the family. As Irving Howe suggests, "By making the past seem simultaneous with the present, Faulkner gains remarkable moments of pathos, moments

sounding the irrevocable sadness that comes from a recognition of decline and failure."<sup>9</sup> For instance, the juxtaposition of Caddy's assignation with Charlie and her daughter Quentin's thirty years later helps to underline how much consideration and tenderness have been lost in the interim. Caddy reacts with comforting assurances, Quentin with selfish tantrums, to Benjy's interruptions.

In this manner, Benjy's section reiterates the statements of Faulkner's *Appendix*, which itself is a chronology demonstrating the Compson decline. Faulkner describes Jason as "the childless bachelor in whom ended that long line of men who had had something in them of decency and pride even after they had begun to fail at the integrity and the pride had become mostly vanity and self pity" (415), and he refers to Jason Lycurgus II as "the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide" (408). This rendering of loss and decline is one of the structural principles of the Benjy section which, with its juxtaposition of past and present, provides a picture of contentment face to face with loss.

This juxtaposition extends even to Faulkner's use of words; at the linguistic level, a pun fulfills the same purpose as structural juxtaposition. Benjy's recollections frequently use puns as the bridge between

two experiences. The caddies of the golf course remind Benjy of his Caddy, frequently turning his mind away from present experience. Similarly, the two Quentin's, one Caddy's brother, the other her daughter, provide parallels for Benjy's mind, and the balls the golfers lose in the creek are, for Luster at any rate, similar to the balls Benjy lost at Jackson.

Benjy's section repeatedly portrays happiness achieved, then sets it side by side with a vision of desolation and loss. Indeed, one of the most moving scenes of harmony occurs near the end of Benjy's section, providing a measure of the possibilities denied by the Compsons' fall:

Caddy and Father and Jason were in Mother's chair. Jason's eyes were puffed shut and his mouth moved, like tasting. Caddy's head was on Father's shoulder. Her hair was like fire, and little points of fire were in her eyes, and I went and Father lifted me into the chair too, and Caddy held me. She smelled like trees. (88)

Even here, Jason introduces a slightly disquieting note, but generally all is contentment. Benjy's vision of happiness is doomed, of course, and his frequent bellows of outrage and anguish express his disapproval of change.

The problem, however, is that change is inevitable. Caddy, for instance, must mature into a woman,



and to survive she must try to escape the sick family that drags her down. In this light, Benjy's demands upon her are as impossible and destructive as Quentin's.

Benjy's ideal life is an unchanging one. The final page of the novel shows him enforcing his vision of order upon reality as his bellows drive Luster and Jason to guide the carriage in the usual paths:

The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place. (401)

It is more generally agreed that Quentin's section presents a vision of reality as limited and stultifying as Benjy's has been seen to be. Faulkner describes him as one

who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves and deliberately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible body of his beloved, until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint and so flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning. (411)

Jean-Paul Sartre, indeed, has suggested that Quentin's entire section is a recollection by a man at the instant of death by suicide. Since it is in the first person and the past tense, the story of the day of Quentin's death comes, in a sense, from beyond the grave.<sup>10</sup> Whether

or not this is literally true, it suggests the feeling of death and implacable fate cast over all of Quentin's perceptions. Shreve's ironic question about Quentin's well-dressed appearance, "Is it a wedding or a wake?" (100) captures the central obsession of Quentin's section. Quentin's concern with his sister's maturation drives him to the point of death; her wedding is, in a sense, his funeral.

Quentin's revulsion with sex and sensuality dominates his consciousness. When he thinks of copulation it is in animalistic terms:

it seemed to me that I could hear whispers  
secret surges smell the beating of hot blood  
under wild unsecret flesh watching against  
red eyelids the swine untethered in pairs  
rushing coupled into the sea. . . . (219)

Disgusted by the physical and the material, Quentin attempts to escape into abstraction and spirituality. As a result, he thinks almost exclusively in symbolic terms. Nothing is what it seems to be for Quentin; rather it represents an idea, a concept with which he is pre-occupied. Melvin Backman says: "Quentin's abstractions seem to me to be chiefly rationalizations of inadequacy, as well as a means of putting distance between himself and deeply troubling experiences."<sup>11</sup> In other words, Quentin's symbolizing mode of thought is both a means of escaping and

perceiving reality. Whereas Benjy is limited completely to a perceptual reality, Quentin seeks to dwell in a conceptual world.

For Quentin a wristwatch is a symbol of inexorable time bringing decay to all he values; more important, his sister's maidenhead is the symbol of Compson honour and virtue. In this vision lies Quentin's doom, for his abstracting and symbolizing conceptions attempt to fix and rigidify the flux of life. Since he stakes all significance upon an unchanging absolute, he is overwhelmed by inevitable change. Just as Benjy reacts in horror to any change in the accustomed journey through Jefferson in the Compson carriage, so Quentin objects at a different level to any change in his sister's purity.

Quentin shares Benjy's concern with Caddy but he dwells continually, as well, upon another member of the Compson family, his father. References to Mr. Compson are as frequent as references to Caddy. It is obvious that Quentin's father has exerted a strong influence upon him, for this section is full of the words "Father said," and, whether Mr. Compson realizes it or not, the effect of his cynical expressions of despair and ennui is an undermining of his son's values: "Man the sum of his climatic experiences Father said. Man the sum of what have you. A

problem in impure properties carried tediously to an unvarying nil: stalemate of dust and desire." (153) Mr. Compson maintains that "nothing is even worth the changing of it" (96), a statement that profoundly affects his sensitive son. According to Michael H. Cowan, Quentin attempts "to see himself as a Romantic hero, defier of fate, sacrificial redeemer of damned experience",<sup>12</sup> but his father's pessimistic theories undermine his attempts to regard himself in this light. Mr. Compson seems capable, with the aid of his well-used sideboard, of living a life with no significance, but his son desperately needs the meaning the father so easily denies. His notions of honour decimated by his father's ironic commentary and Caddy's disregard, Quentin sees no other solution than suicide.

Both Quentin and Benjy seem incapable of dealing with change. Their brother Jason, the Compson who has become a Snopes, would appear, at first sight, flexible enough to adapt to the modern world his two brothers deny. But Jason too finds it difficult to thrive. The smell of gasoline makes him sick (296) even though he owns an automobile; the stock market's vagaries confuse him; the simple telegraph seems determined to cause him trouble. In general, Jason is incapable of coping with modern civilization.

Whereas his brothers attempt to deny time (and change), Benjy perceiving all time as present, and Quentin desperately attempting to escape all clocks, Jason lives within a chronological framework. He is less than successful, however, in his acceptance of time. Throughout his section Jason constantly hurries to catch up; he is always late, always off-balance because of the onward rush of change. In one sense, Jason shares his brother's rigidity.

Jason's section of The Sound and the Fury, however, differs markedly from the first two sections of the book. Despite Jason's malicious mind and highly coloured interpretations of reality, the reader experiences almost a feeling of relief when he moves into the third section. To leave the introverted and confused obsessions of the Quentin section and turn to Jason's colloquial and ironic tone, is like stepping from a stuffy room into fresh air. Jason's opening "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (223) launches a brilliant diatribe. Jason is totally evil, and yet the vigor of his sarcasm and hate provides a welcome change from the previous section.

One reason for this reaction is that Jason's perceptions are closer to our own than any we have met thus far in the novel. The Sound and the Fury progresses gradually from the obsessed, non-social visions of Benjy and Quentin through the more recognizable vision of Jason

to the final section which most closely approximates our own. Jason is as completely obsessed, in his own way, as his two brothers, but his obsessions are those of his society. His anti-Semitism and his greed for money, for instance, are the characteristics of some people we know.

It is true, as Hyatt Waggoner says, that "Jason's corruption interposes a whole series of screens between the reader and reality."<sup>13</sup> But his perverted vision is, nevertheless, interesting. His sarcastic gibes at his mother express the irritation of anyone who has witnessed Caroline Compson's neurotic whining through the first two sections:

"I know I'm just a trouble and a burden to you," she says, crying on the pillow.  
"I ought to know it," I says. "You've been telling me that for thirty years." (224)

There is an element of truth, moreover, in Jason's bitter self-justifications; he says of his father: "I never heard of him offering to sell anything to send me to Harvard." (245) Jason is the one left with the burden of supporting his mother and Benjy.

Having said this, however, we must emphasize that Jason is, in essence, an inhuman sadist who shows no warmth for any human being. He is equally objectionable as an adult and a child. Another source of the delight in Section III is the manner in which Jason's selfish and

brutal actions bring down misfortune on his own head. His years of cheating his **niece**, Quentin, of her mother's support money are made meaningless by the girl's clumsily executed but successful pilfering of his strong box. He repeatedly compounds his own troubles. In his search for the runaway Quentin, he offends with his insensitive questioning one of the circus men and very nearly gets himself killed as a result. Uncle Job's comment to Jason defines Jason's progress in the novel:

"You's too smart fer me. Aint a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself," he says. . . .  
 "Who's that?" Jason says.  
 "Dat's Mr. Jason Compson," he says. (311-312)

Part of Jason's fury arises from his sense of being watched, of appearing ridiculous. The third bystander of the novel, become actor himself, is conscious of a gallery which watches his every move. Fighting with Quentin, he is restrained by a sudden awareness of being watched: "By the time I got the car stopped and grabbed her hands there was about a dozen people looking. It made me so mad for a minute it kind of blinded me" (233). Because there have been so many irregularities in the Compson family already, Jason feels sure the town expects him to be next:

And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what's the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I'm not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family's crazy. -- (290)

He hates not Quentin's promiscuity but her indiscretion:

Like I say it's not that I object to so much; maybe she cant help that, it's because she hasn't even got enough consideration for her own family to have any discretion. I'm afraid all the time I'll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square, like a couple of dogs. (299)

Jason's sense of being watched is facetiously rendered in the text by the neon sign electric pupil which stares at him as he returns defeated to Jefferson (388). That he appears ridiculous only adds to the anger Jason nurses throughout his section, a fury which encompasses all he views, be it Negroes, automobiles, or the weather.

The three Compson brothers embody a trinity of consciousness; each provides a vision of reality moulded by his own obsessions and pre-occupations. None of them plays the role of authorial spokesman. Rather, each of them presents one way of viewing a reality of which the most significant element is Caddy (or in Jason's case, her surrogate, Quentin). Many critics have attempted to define or label the three points of view of The Sound and



the Fury. Olga Vickery calls them sensation, abstraction, and logic. Carvel Collins describes them as Id, Ego, Super-Ego. It is obvious that the three sections deal with, respectively, the youth, the adolescent, and the adult. Perhaps it would be possible to characterize the style of each as impressionism, Romanticism, and naturalism. One could produce trinities indefinitely. More important, however, is the realization that each brother represents a limited and inadequate vision of reality. Michael Millgate suggests that the novel is

in part concerned with the elusiveness, the multivalence, of truth, or at least with man's persistent and perhaps necessary tendency to make of truth a personal thing: each man, apprehending some fragment of the truth, seizes upon that fragment as though it were the whole truth and elaborates it into a total vision of the world, rigidly exclusive and hence utterly fallacious.<sup>14</sup>

Olga Vickery concurs, saying that the theme of the novel is "the relation between the act and man's apprehension of the act, between the event and the interpretation."<sup>15</sup>

What then of the fourth section of the novel where Faulkner drops the use of stream of consciousness and dramatic monologue? Has Faulkner decided, after mystifying the reader for over two hundred pages, to step forward with the reality of the Compson saga? A close examination of this section reveals that nothing could be

further from the truth. The reader of The Sound and the Fury is once more presented with the vision of a bystander, but this time a bystander closer to his own disposition than any of the three brothers. Margaret Blanchard, in her article, "The Rhetoric of Communion: Voice in The Sound and the Fury", shows how the narrator of the fourth section is anything but omniscient; indeed, his vision of reality is restricted to an external view of events aided by occasional cautious speculations about motivation. The one exception to this generalization is a section of some twelve pages in which we are permitted to watch the workings of Jason's mind. The greatest portion of the fourth section, however, is as objective and externalized as the eye of a movie camera. As Blanchard says,

we emerge with a description of the speaker's perspective as limited, having no foreknowledge, no control over events, privileged access into one mind only, and much recourse to conjecture, rewarded at times with progressive insight and empathetic sharing of a character's viewpoint, with a spectator's close but restricted view of events, and his detachment.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to illustrate the objectivity of an entire section with a few quotations, but the examination of several passages will, at any rate, be representative of this section's stylistic peculiarities. For the first time, we read meticulous accounts of characters'

appearances; Dilsey, Benjy, Jason, and Mrs. Compson are all described in precise detail. For example, Benjy is portrayed as

a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it. His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too, he moved with a shambling gait like a trained bear. His hair was pale and fine. It had been brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerrotypes. His eyes were clear, of the pale sweet blue of cornflowers, his thick mouth hung open, drooling a little. (342)

The external description is supplemented by cautious supposition and speculation, as if the narrator were making an intelligent guess. In the passage just quoted, for instance, expressions like "who appeared to have been" and "would not or did not" suggest a mind trying to make sense of the limited data available. This description of Jason standing outside Quentin's room is tempered by the same cautious speculation:

He grasped the knob and tried it, then he stood with the knob in his hand and his head bent a little, as if he were listening to something much further away than the dimensioned room beyond the door, and which he already heard. His attitude was that of one who goes through the motions of listening in order to deceive himself as to what he already hears. (349-350, my italics)

At times, one can almost watch the bystander-narrator's mind working with available details to reach a conclusion:

Luster was coming down the drive behind them, carrying the umbrella. A woman was with him. "Here dey come," Dilsey said. They passed out the gate. "Now, den," she said. Ben ceased. Luster and his mother overtook them. — Frony wore a dress of bright blue silk and a flowered hat.  
(361, my itali's)

The bystander-narrator sees an unknown woman; he then realizes she is Luster's mother whose name, he remembers, is Frony. The process of speculation is here visible before us.

The objectivity of the fourth section allows Dilsey to function as a moral arbiter without forcing her into the position of presenting another point of view which would, inevitably, have been as limited as those of the three brothers. We must not see events through Dilsey's eyes or her force in the novel will be weakened. Hyatt Waggoner says:

The structure of the novel . . . invites us to participate in the process by which the judgments implicit in the last section are arrived at. . . . The "objectivity" of the last section is, then, only formal. . . . its implicit perspective is based on judgments which we ourselves have been brought to the point of making.<sup>17</sup>

For this reason, the nature of Dilsey's vision is left deliberately vague. In the context of the Negro sermon with the worshippers murmuring: "I sees, O Jesus! Oh I sees!" (370), Dilsey affirms that she too has had a

vision of a different sort:

"I've seed de first en de last," Dilsey said. "Never you mind me."  
 "First en last whut?" Frony said.  
 "Never you mind," Dilsey said. "I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin." (371)

But what she has seen, the first and last what, Dilsey cannot say. It is, indeed, fortunate she cannot. Her presence rather than her interpretation makes her a moral force in the novel. When the town librarian, in fact, takes the picture of Caddy to Dilsey in Memphis, Dilsey tells her: "Look at my eyes . . . How can I see that picture? . . . My eyes aint any good anymore . . . I cant see it" (418). The librarian, however, is sure that Dilsey no longer wants to see because there is nothing worth seeing of the Compsons anymore (420). Dilsey, it seems, rejects at last the potential of seeing.

It is fortunate, furthermore, that Dilsey's point of view is not presented in the fourth section for neither is her vision infallible nor her power for good effective. Walter J. Slatoff says that "Dilsey spends much of her time nagging, scolding, and threatening both the Compson children and her own, and she is, in the last analysis, ineffectual."<sup>18</sup> To blame Dilsey for the failures of the Compson children is, to say the least, unfair, but she seems to have done little better in in-

fluencing Luster, her grandson, who she says, has "got jes es much Compson devilment in him es any of em" (344). Resenting, with some justification, the burden of acting as nursemaid for Benjy, Luster amuses himself with tormenting his hapless charge. When Dilsey tries to comfort Quentin, saying: "dont you be skeered, honey, I'se right here" (352), the reader is aware, ironically, of how little she can really do to effect the course of events.

Not only is Dilsey frequently ineffectual; she is also sometimes, fallible. When she tells Jason, "You's a cold man, Jason, if man you is" (258), the reader readily agrees. But her statements are not always correct. She frequently accuses Luster of crimes he is not guilty of, blaming him initially for breaking the window in Jason's room. When Benjy bellows his anguish, disturbed by Jason's fury, Dilsey chastises Luster:

"Whut you done to him?" Dilsey said. "Why cant you let him lone dis mawnin, of all times?"

"I aint doin nothin to him," Luster said.  
 "Mr. Jason skeered him, dat's whut hit is."  
 (356)

Luster is no angel, but he is hardly to blame for all of Benjy's frequent protestations. Her comments about the younger generation are typical of the intolerance of age; she claims that "Whut dey needs is a man kin put de fear

of God into dese here triflin young niggers" (362) and, on the way to church, she exhibits a fine sense of status, "steadily the older people speaking to Dilsey, though, unless they were quite old, Dilsey permitted Frony to respond" (364). Dilsey is a fallible but likeable human being, not as Waggoner maintains "a chorus and judge."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, Dilsey hardly says enough to play the role of judge of the novel's characters; she lives by actions rather than speech. The strength of her love and consideration acts as a counter against which to measure the lack of love of other characters. Dilsey's presence, not her interpretations, make her the novel's moral force. Quentin defines her role best when he says of Negroes: "They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope" (211).

Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and the unnamed narrator of Section IV present limited visions of reality, and Faulkner is careful to indicate their limits. Dilsey, on the other hand, reveals an inarticulate and largely unexpressed awareness of those around her; her presence and actions, not her interpretations, make her a touchstone for the reader.

In As I Lay Dying, we meet another character whose role is largely that of bystander, and again we have the problem of authorial intrusion. Hyatt Waggoner, paralleling his interpretation of Benjy, sees Darl as the bearer of the truth in the novel: "What Darl sees is true," and "In somewhat the same sense as Benjy's, his mind is a transparent glass through which we approach the reality he passively watches."<sup>20</sup> But it is a mistake to regard Darl as a detached observer recording impartially all that he sees; Darl is an obsessed human being on the edge of insanity who creates as much as watches the "reality" he reports. William J. Handy, in his article "As I Lay Dying: Faulkner's Inner Reporter", suggests that the "fact of Darl's insanity raises the question of just how valid his insights are intended by Faulkner to be."<sup>21</sup> He observes that Darl is obsessively pre-occupied with his brother Jewel, who appears very frequently in his interior monologues. Darl's jealousy of his mother's preference for Jewel drives him to taunt Jewel repeatedly during the journey to Jefferson: "Jewel . . . whose son are you?" (202), and he thinks: "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel's mother is a horse" (89). When he **was asked about Darl**, Faulkner said:



Darl was mad from the first. We got progressively madder because he didn't have the capacity---not so much of sanity but of inertness to resist all the catastrophes that happened to the family. Jewel resisted because he was sane and he was the toughest. The others resisted through probably simple inertia, but Darl couldn't resist it and so he went completely off his rocker. But he was mad all the time.<sup>22</sup>

One feels that many of the things Darl reports are metaphorically rather than literally true; indeed, many of the scenes he witnesses could not have happened in his seeing. Here is an observer who is more than a passive watcher; he partially creates the action in which he refuses to participate. In a sense, the opening page of the novel provides an epiphany of Darl's role:

Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cottonhouse can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own. (3)

When Darl and Jewel reach the cotton-house, Darl circles the cabin to reach the other side while Jewel steps "in a single stride" through one window, crosses the floor "in four strides", steps through the other window, emerging again on the path ahead of Darl.

In this opening scene we find all the germs of Darl's development in the novel. The first word he utters is "Jewel"; Jewel symbolically disregards obstacles which

halt Darl and, though he begins behind him, ends in front of him just as he has in Addie's affections. Darl, as he does throughout the novel, describes details like the four strides which he cannot possibly know. Therefore, Darl begins the novel as observer-creator, but by the time he reaches Jefferson, he has lost the sense of his own identity so much that he has in fact become a bystander to his own actions. In his final section he refers to himself in the third person:

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said. (243)

In the figure of Darl Bundren, Faulkner has presented us with a type we will see appearing frequently in his later novels, the sensitive observer who is unequipped to bear the strain of what he observes, a type that finds its culmination in Gavin Stevens, Faulkner's most extensive treatment of the sensitive and perceptive intellectual. Cleanth Brooks has shown how Faulkner portrays Darl's limitations and continues: "Indeed, Faulkner, probably more than any other author of our time is willing to see the limitations of the artistic temperament and to refuse to believe that it has a monopoly upon truth."<sup>23</sup>

As I Lay Dying may be seen, in fact, as an

analysis of the essential isolation and subjectivity of all human perception which only drives the individual on to futile efforts to break that isolation. The main concern of Addie's famous monologue in the novel is to highlight this problem. Addie, driven virtually to madness by her aloneness, beats her pupils viciously in an attempt to enter their lives:

When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (162)

But all such attempts are doomed to failure, partly because of each human's determination to maintain his individuality inviolate.

Darl learns this lesson too late, for his super-perceptiveness intrudes into the secret springs of motive, making others fear his knowledge. Dewey Dell wishes to murder him because she is sure he knows about her pregnancy. Jewel resents Darl's constant probing of his secret emotions. Finally, these two unite to have committed the man who knows too much. Vernon Tull describes the way they feel:

He is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say

it aint never been what he done so much or  
 said or anything so much as how he looks at  
 you. . . . Like somehow you was looking at  
 yourself and your doings outen his eyes.  
 (119)

It is his phenomenal ability as bystander which is Darl's downfall; he has the ability to make himself little more than perception, to abstract his vision from his personality to the extent that he is defined as insane.

If there is disagreement about the function of the bystander in As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury, there is general agreement about his function in Absalom, Absalom!. This novel is probably the best example of Faulkner's use of the bystander in conjunction with the theme of the subjectivity of perception. Ostensibly about the life and career of Thomas Sutpen, it is in fact a lengthy examination of opinions and theories about him, providing, however, no direct picture of the "protagonist" himself. Of the four narrators in Absalom, Absalom!, three were not present at the events they narrate; indeed, Shreve McCannon and Quentin Compson were not born when Thomas Sutpen died and Quentin's father was too young to have been involved in the episodes he describes. Even Rosa Coldfield, whose involvement with Sutpen is undeniable, views the action from the periphery with almost no access to privileged information. Partly because of their

distance from the action, the narrators present accounts of Sutpen's history which are incomplete and suspect. Faulkner made his intentions about the novel clear when he commented at the University of Virginia:

I think no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact. So these are true as far as Miss Rosa and as Quentin saw it. Quentin's father saw what he believed was truth, that was all he saw. But the old man himself was a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see all at once.<sup>24</sup>

As Hyatt Waggoner says, "Absalom has many voices but no official, sanctioned Voice. The voices in it speak from many points of view, none of them removed from the criticism of irony."<sup>25</sup>

The distance between the narrators and their subject is, however, temporal or spatial, not imaginative. Indeed, as physical closeness diminishes between the narrator and his subject in the novel, imaginative propinquity increases. Quentin and Shreve, the furthest from the actual events of Sutpen's life, create the most vivid imaginative reconstruction. Quentin thinks to himself as he reconstructs Sutpen's re-union with his daughter in 1865, "If I had been there I could not have seen it

this plain."<sup>26</sup> As each narrator examines the story of the Sutpen family, he (or she) creates an imaginative reconstruction that reveals as much about his (or her) obsessions and emotions as it does about the truth of Sutpen's history.

The narrators achieve this creative involvement in a tale they half repeat, half re-form, largely by means of an intense vicarious identification with one of the characters of the Sutpen legend. Miss Rosa identifies with Judith Sutpen, Mr. Compson with Charles Bon, and Quentin and Shreve with Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon in their relationship to one another. It is significant that none seeks vicarious union with Sutpen himself, that old man (as Faulkner calls him) "a little too big for people no greater in stature" than the narrators. Like Eliot's hollow men, the narrators are inhabitants of a modern waste land where they can only remember the "lost violent souls" like Thomas Sutpen.

The past which dominates them all comes to serve as a surrogate for actual living. Miss Rosa, in the midst of a "still hot weary dead September afternoon" (7) sits in her "coffin-smelling gloom" (8) telling her tale to Quentin, himself "a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (12). In "inverse ratio to [her] vanishing

voice," the ghost of Sutpen assumes "a quality almost of solidity, permanence" (13); he appears to be more alive than Miss Rosa. Mr. Compson, as Olga Vickery says, has "rejected the gambit of life for the sake of sitting on the sidelines and playing the role of ironic commentator."<sup>27</sup> Quentin and Shreve inhabit a world imaged for us by the "strange iron New England snow" (173), a passionless world where they contemplate the passions of an earlier time. Each narrator seeks in the story of Thomas Sutpen a satisfaction which he has not found in life itself. It is therefore necessary, before examining the figure of Thomas Sutpen, to define the nature of the perceiving intelligence through which we receive all we know of him.

Life has prepared Miss Rosa Coldfield well for the role of bystander to Thomas Sutpen's actions. She has had no life of her own to live and has, therefore, lived only as the spectator of other people's lives. Rosa describes herself as a child, eavesdropping on conversations, "standing close beside that door because I was afraid to be there but more afraid to leave it, standing motionless beside that door as though trying to make myself blend with the dark and become invisible" (27). Mr. Compson describes the source of Miss Rosa's obsessions and antagonisms concerning Sutpen:

In a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness Miss Rosa's childhood was passed, that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth which consisted of a Cassandralike listening beyond closed doors, of lurking in dim halls filled with that presbyterian effluvium of lugubrious and vindictive anticipation, while she waited for the infancy and childhood with which nature had confounded and betrayed her to overtake the disapprobation regarding any and every thing which could penetrate the walls of that house through the agency of any man, particularly her father, which the aunt seems to have invested her with at birth along with the swaddling clothes. (60-61)

From her father's "Puritan righteousness" and her aunt's "outraged female vindictiveness", Miss Rosa has learned an intense hatred of Thomas Sutpen, indeed of the male principle. Mr. Compson claims that "Miss Rosa merely mirrored her parents' attitude toward the son-in-law" (59), and that the aunt "had taught Miss Rosa to look upon her sister as a woman who had vanished, not only out of the family and the house but out of life too, into an edifice like Bluebeard's" (60). Moreover, as Olga Vickery says, "That isolation which leaves Miss Rosa forever watching other people's lives unfold while hers remains unchanged gives unlimited scope to her fantasies compounded of religion and romance."<sup>28</sup>

The result of this childhood is to turn Miss Rosa into "the chief disciple and advocate of that cult of demon-harrying of which [Sutpen] was the chief object"



(278). Miss Rosa's narrative casts Sutpen as "fiend blackguard and devil" (15), and his appearance in Jefferson has the quality of demonic intent:

Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt  
(man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful  
and decorous as a school-prize water color,  
faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes  
and beard, with grouped behind him his band  
of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to  
walk upright like men. (8)

Miss Rosa's style is isolated more clearly in Quentin's recollections of her story in which her emotively coloured terminology counterpoints Quentin's more neutral language:

It seems that this demon---his name was  
Sutpen---(Colonel Sutpen)---Colonel Sutpen.  
Who came out of nowhere and without warning  
upon the land with a band of strange niggers  
and built a plantation---(Tore violently a  
plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)---  
tore violently. And married her sister Ellen  
and begot a son and a daughter which---(With-  
out gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield  
says)---without gentleness. Which should have  
been the jewels of his pride and the shield  
and comfort of his old age, only---(Only they  
destroyed him or something or he destroyed  
them or something. And died)---and died.  
Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says---  
(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (And by  
Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin  
Compson. (9)

Obviously, the story Quentin attempts to tell and the story for which Miss Rosa demands acceptance are two different tales. In this passage, one sees in miniature the technique of Absalom, Absalom! as a whole: alternative interpretations, continual re-evaluation, and persistent

searching for the "something" that will make sense of Sutpen's life.

When seen in the larger terms of the novel's examination of Sutpen's story, Miss Rosa's interpretation is revealed as particularly inadequate. Her description of Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson, quoted above, contrasts with Mr. Compson's in which Sutpen appears as "a man of about twenty-five as the town learned later, because at the time his age could not have been guessed because he looked like a man who had been sick" (32). In Compson's version, Sutpen seems more human, less demonic. Similarly, Miss Rosa's description of the French architect "manacled among them . . . with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran" (8) is contradicted by Compson's assertion that the Frenchman "had come all the way from Martinique on Sutpen's bare promise and lived for two years on venison cooked over a campfire, in an unfloored tent made of the wagon hood, before he so much as saw any color or shape of pay" (35). In both these cases, the reader has no way of assessing the validity of the conflicting reports. Indeed, Miss Rosa's description of the architect as manacled harmonizes with Compson's description of his attempted escape and recapture, but the proposal of an alternative version of her story undermines the reader's confidence in the validity of either.

In some important instances, however, Miss Rosa very obviously does not understand what has happened. For instance, she asserts that she saw "Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse" (18). The reader, on the other hand, knows of three different possible motives (adultery, incest, and miscegenation) for Sutpen's denial of Bon's betrothal to Judith. Similarly, Miss Rosa maintains that Sutpen "was accustomed to having money and intended to have it again and would have no scruples about how he got it" (20), but the novel reveals Sutpen's background of poverty and his desperate struggle to rise in society. Other allegations that Miss Rosa makes seem equally mistaken; she explains the stampeding of the Sutpen carriage horses:

it had been Judith, a girl of six, who had instigated and authorized that negro to make the team run away. Not Henry, mind; not the boy, which would have been outrageous enough; but Judith, the girl. (25)

How Miss Rosa can assert this "fact" so confidently she does not make clear. She admits that, in a similar case, when she describes Judith as eavesdropping on her father's fight with a Negro slave: "I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time---once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her---looking down through the square entrance to the loft" (30).

In "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!", Lynn Gartrell Levins defines Miss Rosa's imaginative reconstruction: "Because Rosa Coldfield immerses the created events in the unreality of a dream-vision, which is without logic and reason, Sutpen's actions are presented to the readers without explanation, and hence without the plausibility afforded to a cause-effect sequence."<sup>29</sup> Miss Rosa herself explains the lapses in her perceptions of reality as a result of her sheltered, isolated childhood:

instead of accomplishing the processional and measured milestones of the childhood's time I lurked unapprehended as though, shod with the very damp and velvet silence of the womb, I displaced no air, gave off no betraying sound, from one closed forbidden door to the next and so acquired all I knew of that light and space in which people moved and breathed as I (that same child) might have gained conception of the sun from seeing it through a piece of smoky glass. (145)

Trapped in a sterile, unfulfilled existence, Miss Rosa is capable of living only through her imagination, and particularly through her vicarious identification with Judith Sutpen. Mr. Compson describes Miss Rosa as a frustrated spinster:

who in actual fact was the girl's aunt and who by actual years should have been her sister ignoring the mother to follow the departing and inaccessible laughter with myopic and inarticulate yearning and not one whit of

jealousy, projecting upon Judith all the abortive dreams and delusions of her own doomed and frustrated youth. (71)

Judith's projected marriage to Charles Bon, whom Miss Rosa has never seen, provides Miss Rosa with a reality in which to enshrine her maiden dreams of romance, and she looks forward to the wedding which will "immolate the frustration's vicarious recompense into the living fairy tale" (76). Miss Rosa works diligently sewing for Judith "those intimate young girl garments which were to be for her own vicarious bridal" (77). Miss Rosa confirms these speculations which Compson makes about her motives later in the novel when she describes her emotions towards Judith and Bon:

Oh no, I was not spying while I dreamed in the lurking harborage of my own shrub or vine as I believed she dreamed upon the nooky seat which held invisible imprint of his absent thighs just as the obliterating sand, the million finger-nerves of frond and leaf, the very sun and moony constellations which had looked down at him, the circumambient air, held somewhere yet his foot, his passing shape, his face, his speaking voice, his name: Charles Bon, Charles Good, Charles Husband-soon-to-be. (148)

Given this vicarious identification, it is no surprise that Miss Rosa reacts with furious outrage when Sutpen puts a stop to the marriage into which she has invested all her emotional life. The death of Bon and the widowhood of Judith are one more reason to hate Thomas Sutpen.

Yet to the amazement of everyone, including herself, when Sutpen proposes marriage to her, she accepts. In a lengthy occupatio, Miss Rosa attempts to justify her acceptance of Sutpen's proposal, all the while denying that she is doing so:

No. I hold no brief for myself. I don't plead youth . . . I don't plead propinquity . . . I don't plead material necessity . . . though I defy anyone to blame me, an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources. . . . And most of all, I do not plead myself: a young woman emerging from a holocaust which had taken parents security and all from her. (19)

Miss Rosa's lengthy attempt to explain her incredible acceptance of Sutpen, the man she has hated, as a husband, helps to portray her as an isolated, premature spinster who seizes at the one opportunity she is offered to leave the world of vicarious romance for the world of reality. When Thomas Sutpen shatters all her dreams with his insensitive proposal that they breed before marriage so that he can be assured of a son, Miss Rosa retreats once and for all into her world of isolation and "demon-harrying", determined to castigate Thomas Sutpen even after he has died. Her abortive betrothal turns Miss Rosa into the embittered and obsessed narrator of Absalom, Absalom!.

Compared with Miss Rosa's obsessive reiterations, Mr. Compson's narrative seems, at first, **straightforward**

and rational. However, Ilse Dusoair Lind, in "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!", describes beautifully his underlying unreliability:

Mr. Compson at first arouses the confidence of the reader as an unbiased narrator. His ironic eye easily pierces the romanticisms, enthusiasms, and self-deceptions of others. A skeptic in religion, a rationalist in his general approach to life, a shrewd analyst of the social scene, his elaboration gives the legend an apparent foundation in fact. But his observations have dubious validity; they are the projections of a profound spiritual resignation. His world-weariness, his love of paradox, his fascination with the exotic, all suggest that he has absorbed the malaise of fin de siècle decadence into his private philosophy.<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Compson's description of Bon's octoroon mistress and her son provides a good example of the cast of his imagination:

It must have resembled a garden scene by the Irish poet, Wilde . . . the magnolia-faced woman a little plumper now, a woman created of by and for darkness whom the artist Beardsley might have dressed, in a soft flowing gown . . . leading by the hand the little boy whom Beardsley might not only have dressed but drawn. (193)

Coupled with this interest in the vision of decadence, Compson possesses a sense of the Sutpen story as drama with himself as audience. More specifically, he casts his narrative in the form of a Greek tragedy with Sutpen as the doomed hero. He says of Sutpen:

he was unaware that his flowering was a forced blooming too and that while he was

still playing the scene to the audience, behind him Fate, destiny, retribution, irony---the stage manager, call him what you will---was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next one. (72-3)

Compson similarly describes Ellen, Sutpen's wife, as "speaking her bright set meaningless phrases out of the part which she had written for herself" (69). By portraying the Sutpen family as actors, Compson to some extent distances them, making them less real; it is all an act, a play for his amusement. As Olga Vickery says, Compson "has rejected the gambit of life for the sake of sitting on the sidelines and playing the role of ironic commentator."<sup>31</sup> As we shall see, however, this distancing provides Compson with the opportunity to create an imaginative propinquity with at least one of the saga's characters, Charles Bon.

The story of Sutpen and his family, taken as it is from the past, provides a more simplified setting than the world of moral and intellectual complexity of which he, Compson, is so representative a product. Compson describes the Sutpen family as:

people too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled, author and victim



too of a thousand homicides and a thousand copulations and divorcements. (89)

In his vision of the Sutpens, Compson provides the alternative to his own life of ambiguity and hedging, a stasis created by doubt and productive of an ideal bystander. For the bystander in Faulkner is frequently a man incapable of action because of his sense of ambivalence and complexity, and simultaneously suited by the same characteristics to watch the actions of simpler, more dynamic personalities.

One means of justifying stasis and inaction is the assertion of fatality in the affairs of man, and Compson employs this means to the full. He constantly reiterates the doomed nature of the Sutpen story. He says of Henry Sutpen, "he must have known, as he knew that what his father had told him was true, that he was doomed and destined to kill" (91). When Thomas Sutpen travels to New Orleans in an attempt to prevent Bon from marrying Judith, Compson says:

You would almost believe that Sutpen's trip to New Orleans was just sheer chance, just a little more of the illogical machinations of a fatality which had chosen that family in preference to any other in the country or the land exactly as a small boy chooses one ant-hill to pour boiling water into in preference to any other, not even himself knowing why. (102)

Of course, the reader learns later from Quentin that Sut-

pen's journey is perhaps not the result of fate. In the same way that Miss Rosa Coldfield ascribes things she cannot understand to a satanic malignancy personified in Thomas Sutpen, so Mr. Compson attributes unexplained aspects of his narrative to an arbitrary and indifferent fatality. Compson goes so far as to suggest that the crisis in Bon's relations with the Sutpens is delayed by a larger destiny:

by the War by a stupid and bloody aberration in the high (and impossible) destiny of the United States, maybe instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstance, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human beings for tools, material.  
(118-19)

Like Miss Rosa also, Compson finds within the Sutpen story an individual with whom he can identify (or rather, whom he can cast in his own image). This person is Charles Bon. Compson describes him in terms which apply as well to himself:

He is the curious one to me. He came into that isolated puritan country household almost like Sutpen himself came into Jefferson . . . a man a little older than his actual years and enclosed and surrounded by a sort of Scythian glitter, who seems to have seduced the country brother and sister without any effort or particular desire to do so, who caused all the pother and uproar, yet from the moment when he realized that Sutpen was going to prevent the marriage if he could, he (Bon) seems to have withdrawn into

a mere spectator, passive, a little sardonic and completely enigmatic . . . with an air of sardonic and indolent detachment like that of a youthful Roman consul making the Grand Tour of his day among the barbarian hordes which his grandfather conquered . . . and which he contemplated with the detached attentiveness of a scientist watching the muscles in an anesthetized frog---watching, contemplating them from behind that barrier of sophistication in comparison with which Henry and Sutpen were troglodytes. (93)

This sardonic spectator sounds very much like Compson himself. Compson calls Bon "that indolent fatalist" (105) and says he possesses "that pessimistic and sardonic cerebral pity of the intelligent for any human injustice or folly or suffering" (115). Compson's constant concern with the past allows the reader to describe him as he does Bon, as a man "whose fate it apparently was to exist in some limbo halfway between where his corporeality was and his mentality and moral equipment desired to be" (124).

Compson is quite willing to admit the speculative and hypothetical nature of his narrative, that he may be super-imposing his own preconceptions upon the story of the Sutpen clan. His narrative is studded with qualifications which make its tentative quality evident. For instance:

Miss Rosa probably went out there, probably once and then no more. And she must have told Mr. Coldfield that there was nothing wrong and evidently she believed that herself since, she continued to sew on the

garments for Judith's wedding.  
(80, my italics)

He continually reveals that his narrative is created as much as repeated with the use of expressions like "I can imagine him" (90) or "perhaps (I like to think this)" (95). He asserts that Eon used Henry as a go-between rather than courting Judith directly, and he uses as his evidence the fact that:

You can not even imagine him and Judith alone together. Try to do it and the nearest you can come is a projection of them while the two actual people were doubtless separate and elsewhere. (97)

In other words, the imagination becomes the ultimate arbiter of the truth of any occurrence; Compson is primarily interested in fictional reality.

Ultimately, Compson is forced to admit the inadequacy of his account of Sutpen's story; there is too much which he does not know or understand:

"It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it; they don't explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames . . . we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable. . . . They are there, yet something is missing." (100-1)

Compson's dilemma is that shared by Quentin and Shreve and, indeed, by any historian, but his own personal ignorance is of Charles Bon's true relationship to Thomas Sutpen. Only late in the novel does Compson learn from **his** own son that Charles Bon was Thomas Sutpen's son by an earlier marriage. Even this knowledge, as helpful as it is, does not provide all the answers; indeed, all the answers are never available. Until the last page, the narrators speculate about details of the Sutpen story. Compson particularly confesses his (and the general) ignorance of many of the facts:

Then Sutpen went to New Orleans. Whether he chose that time to go in order to get Bon and his mother together and thrash the business out for good and all or not, nobody knows whether he ever saw the mother or not while he was there, if she received him . . . or if Bon was there and it was Bon himself who refused the offer, though nobody ever did know if Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father or not. (268-9)

It is important to keep in mind Compson's assertions that nobody knows these details, for the narratives of Shreve and Quentin, partly because of the definiteness with which the narrators speak, partly because their versions of the Sutpen story come last, are more frequently accepted as the "truth" about the Sutpens rather than yet another alternative speculation.

Quentin Compson, the third narrator of Absalom, Absalom!, faces the same problems of understanding and explanation faced by the other narrators. In so far as he incorporates the narratives of Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson into his own, he achieves more insight into some of the problems left unsolved by his predecessors. His meeting with Henry Sutpen in 1909 also adds to his fund of facts, but ultimately he must fall back on an imaginative reconstruction as unreliable as those of his father and Miss Rosa. Michael Millgate suggests that "Quentin's final failure to resolve the quasi-authorial problems which confront him is closely related to his passivity, which itself has important implications for his initial and much more successful role of listener."<sup>32</sup> Quentin is subject to the schizophrenia of the bystander, divided between the half of him that merely watches and the half that is involved imaginatively with the action he views. Faulkner speaks of "two separate Quentins":

the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to be still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that. (9)

Like Miss Rosa, Quentin seems hardly as solid as the ghosts

he broods upon; "he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn backlocking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease" (12). It hardly seems necessary for Quentin to listen to the tales of his father and Miss Rosa for he already possesses their knowledge in his blood:

But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering. (212-13)

In this sense, the study of the Sutpen story is an examination of the formation of the consciousness of its narrators, particularly Quentin, and therefore the technique of first person narration is appropriate to the novel as a whole.

Like the other narrators, Quentin seeks out a personality in the Sutpen story with whom he can vicariously identify, and he finds his soulmate in Henry Sutpen, whose relationship with his sister is reminiscent of Quentin's relationship with his sister as portrayed in The Sound and the Fury. One cannot place too much emphasis upon this similarity, because Faulkner never alludes to it in Absalom, Absalom!. Leaving aside the theme of incest,

however, there still remains the romanticism of Henry's position to appeal to Quentin (and, to some extent, Shreve). William R. Poirier suggests that Quentin's "attempt to discover a meaningful tradition depends for its success upon his discovery of a participant in the conflict with Sutpen with whom he can share an active sense of association."<sup>33</sup> Mr. Compson fixes on the motivations of Bon; Rosa Coldfield cannot forget Sutpen's outrageous proposal to her; Quentin Compson cannot escape his vision of Henry's confrontation of his sister with the news he has killed her bridegroom:

there was also something which he too could not pass---that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women, the negress and the white girl in her underthings . . . pausing, looking at the door, the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace spread carefully on the bed and then caught swiftly up by the white girl and held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, with his shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair, his gaunt worn unshaven face, his patched and faded grey tunic, the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if they stood breast to breast striking one another in turn neither making any attempt to guard against the blows.

Now you cant marry him.

Why cant I marry him?

Because he's dead.

Dead?

Yes. I killed him.



He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. (172)

Like so many other incidents in the novel, this confrontation is a product of the imagination of the narrators (in this case, Quentin). The details of the scene, "the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin" which Judith holds before her, Henry's "shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair", the entire conversation, are impossible to prove, but they fit Quentin's conception of what the scene must have been like. Shreve quotes Miss Rosa's statement in justification of such poetic licence:

"There are some things that just have to be whether they are or not, have to be a damn sight more than some other things that maybe are and it dont matter a damn whether they are or not" (322). Quentin and Shreve create, for instance, a scene of Bon and Judith walking in a garden among the "jasmine, spiraea, honeysuckle" and the author comments:

It would not matter here in Cambridge that the time had been winter in that garden too, and hence no bloom nor leaf even if there had been someone to walk there and be seen there since, judged by subsequent events, it had been night in the garden also. But that did not matter because it had been so long ago.

(295)

Indeed, Quentin and Shreve create characters never before mentioned simply because they feel the need for their existence. Eulalia Bon's mother is not mentioned in

Mr. Compson's version of Sutpen's Haitian experience, but the two young men create and describe her:

the slight dowdy woman with untidy, gray-streaked raven hair coarse as a horse's tail, with parchment-colored skin and implacable pouched black eyes which alone showed no age because they showed no forgetting, whom Shreve and Quentin had likewise invented and which was likewise probably true enough. (335)

Quentin and Shreve have become, so to speak, surrogate authors selecting, creating, and rejecting details which fit their vision of the way things must have been.

Frequently, their selection and interpretation conflicts with that of the other narrators. Sometimes, one feels that, because of their access to new information, they have provided superior accounts of the action, as is the case in their interpretation of Sutpen's motivations for forbidding Judith's marriage to Charles Bon. But occasionally the reader is provided with alternative versions which he has no way of evaluating. For instance, Shreve declares to Quentin:

your old man was wrong here, too! He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn't. Because who told him? Who told Sutpen, or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit? . . . it was not Bon, it was Henry; Bon that found Henry at last and stooped to pick him up. (344)

The arguments Shreve uses to invalidate Mr. Compson's version of the battlefield incident can just as well be

used to undermine his own assertions. Compson **prefers** to think Henry did the saving because he views Bon as a sardonic and passive spectator. Shreve, on the other hand, identifies with Bon as a young man in search of his rights and prefers to assign him the active role against Henry's Quentin-like passivity.

In speaking of Quentin's narrative, it has been necessary to include Shreve McCannon in the discussion for he and Quentin speak often in the same terms to the extent that they are virtually interchangeable. Faulkner describes their conversation:

It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal. (303)

All that Shreve knows about the Sutpen history, he has learned from Quentin so his narrative frequently becomes a form of playback. More important, though, is their mutual fixation on the love story of Judith, Charles, and Henry which really forms only a part of the Sutpen legend. Faulkner explains that the two young men achieve:

some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other---faultings both in the creating

of the shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived ---in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false. (316)

The love the two young men focus upon in their narrative fusion parallels an emotion springing from their own experience. Faulkner says of them:

There was something curious in the way they looked at one another, curious and quiet and profoundly intent, not at all as two young men might look at each other but almost as a youth and a very young girl might out of virginity itself ---a sort of hushed and naked searching, each look burdened with youth's immemorial obsession not with time's dragging weight which the old live with but with its fluidity. (299)

Quentin and Shreve, the Southerner and the Canadian, "born half a continent apart yet joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough" (258), the Mississippi River, unite emotionally and imaginatively to create their version of the Southern romance.

Shreve is not always indistinguishable from Quentin in tone and attitude; their union occurs at those points in the narrative at which they are joined by a sentimental apprehension of the romance of Henry, Charles, and Judith. Frequently, however, Shreve's stance is

typified by distance and irony, particularly when the discussion centers upon Sutpen or Miss Rosa (whom he insists upon calling Aunt Rosa, thereby equating Quentin and Henry, saying: "You mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you?" [174]) Typical of Shreve's attitude at these times is his comment: "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it" (217). After the obsessed musings of the other narrators, Shreve's irony is refreshing and direct; he provides a welcome counterpoint to the dark tones of the novel.

At times, his ironic comments remind Quentin of his father's sardonic statements. Quentin thinks: "He sounds just like father. . . . Just exactly like father if father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back" (181). So at times Shreve sounds like Mr. Compson, at other times like Quentin (as was shown above). Indeed, he occasionally even resembles Miss Rosa in that he uses the same imagery, although ironically; he calls Sutpen "this demon, this Beelzebub . . . this Faustus who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons . . .

who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment and a beaver hat" (178). The reason for this identification of the separate narrators with one another parallels the reason for the vicarious identification of the members of the Sutpen family with those same narrators. Quentin says:

Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happens is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.  
(261-62)

It is appropriate that the narrators of a story of which a major theme is the influence of the story on those narrators should similarly influence and merge with one another.

Therefore, the novel's style fails to distinguish tones and accents as clearly as, for instance, The Sound and the Fury. Irving Howe points out that, while "several characters are employed as narrators, they are not sharply distinguished, their voices blending in a

drone of eloquence. . . . Faulkner is trying not to identify the narrators as individuals but to arrange them as parts in a chorus."<sup>34</sup> Although the differences in style and tone are more obvious than Mr. Howe admits, it is true that the novel's style is more monotone than ~~that of other~~ of Faulkner's novels. The unity of the style reflects the human interconnections the book considers.

There is another important reason for Shreve's tendency to irony similar to Mr. Compson's. Like Mr. Compson, he uses the sardonic tone to distance events which might otherwise disturb him too much. Faulkner explains Shreve's tone saying: "This was not flippancy either. It too was just that protective coloring of levity behind which the youthful shame of being moved hid itself" (280). Shreve confesses as much to Quentin, when, after making several sardonic remarks about the South, he drops his pose of detached amusement to say:

"Wait. Listen. I'm not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I dont know how to say it better. Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened so long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with

wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride  
 and glory at and in happenings that  
 occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a  
 kind of entailed birthright father and son  
 and father and son of never forgiving  
 General Sherman, so that forevermore as  
 long as your children's children produce  
 children you wont be anything but a  
 descendant of a long line of colonels  
 killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas?"  
 (361)

Shreve's Canadian background removes him completely from the effects of the South's history (much more than if he were an American from the North, the old enemy) while, at the same time, his relationship with Quentin involves him in the universal implications of the events he helps to narrate. He is unable to remember that Pickett's charge occurred not at Manassas, a Southern victory, but at Gettysburg, a decisive Southern defeat. Cleanth Brooks describes his inclusion in Absalom, Absalom! as "a stroke of genius", for by including him "Faulkner has in effect acknowledged the attitude of the modern 'liberal,' twentieth-century reader, who is basically rational, skeptical, without any special concern for history, and pretty well emancipated from the ties of family, race, or section."<sup>35</sup>

Like the other narrators, however, Shreve finds a personality within the Sutpen story with whom he can vicariously identify. He and Quentin, linked by a love



which has an important effect on their joint narrative, identify with Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen, whose passionate bond parallels their own. Indeed, the relationship between Charles and Henry is itself founded upon a sense of vicarious experience, "Henry watching Bon and Bon permitting himself to be watched," (119) similar to that shared by the narrators. As Quentin and Shreve contemplate the story of Charles and Henry, they suddenly become the characters of their own narrative:

So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--- Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry. (334)

The two parallels are obvious: Charles and Shreve, both outsiders, both coolly sardonic in appearance, both intellectuals, join with Henry and Quentin, respectively, the two young Southerners obsessed with their heritage.

Beyond these immediate parallels lies a more profound identification, for as the narrators delve more deeply into their narrative, they become "not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither" (351). All four young men typify the eternal quality of youth so that, as Faulkner says, it doesn't matter "what faces and what

names they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed---the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above slothy unregret and love above fat and easy shame" (295). Finally, the identification is an imaginative one, the one evoked by all good fiction, so that there are more than four riding "through the dark over the frozen December ruts." They are joined by a fifth, the involved reader, attempting to create from the disparate narratives of Absalom, Absalom! an imaginative unity.

It is necessary, before leaving Absalom, Absalom!, to examine its central figure, the personality that all the narrators discuss even when they focus on other members of the Sutpen family. It is, nevertheless, difficult to discuss Thomas Sutpen's career with any degree of certainty for virtually everything we know about him filters through the subjective consciousness of the novel's four narrators. This is somehow appropriate, for Thomas Sutpen's career may be defined in terms of the impressions and attitudes of those who surround him. The watching bystander influences the participant's actions.

The original crisis of Sutpen's life occurs when, as a boy of thirteen, he is turned away from the front door of a Virginia mansion by a Negro servant who

regards him as white trash. Suddenly, Thomas is forced into:

seeing his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time---as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them. (235)

This vision of himself through society's eyes and his realization that "there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own" (221) propel him on a quest for the social respectability and wealth that will classify him with the "haves" rather than the "have-nots." Appropriately, the attitudes of the watchers impel the actions of the watched.

Sutpen's Hundred and the paraphernalia, including a wife and children, which surround it are the visible manifestations of Sutpen's urge to create an image for a watching society. Miss Rosa claims he marries her sister as necessary adjunct to respectability (16) and Mr. Compson concurs, saying:

decorum even if not elegance of appearance would be the only weapon (or rather, ladder) with which he could conduct the last assault upon what Miss Coldfield and perhaps others believed to be respectability ---that respectability which, according to

General Compson, consisted in Sutpen's secret mind of a great deal more than the mere acquisition of a chatelaine for his house. (37)

Sutpen seems concerned that his gestures, the external shape of the impression he desires to create, be the appropriate ones. His salutation is a "florid, swaggering gesture to the hat" which ironically draws the comment:

yes, he was underbred. It showed like this always, your grandfather said, in all his formal contacts with people. He was like John L. Sullivan having taught himself painfully and tediously to do the schottische, having drilled himself and drilled himself in secret until he now believed it no longer necessary to count the music's beat, say. (46)

General Compson wonders from what book Sutpen learned "the bombastic phrases with which . . . he even asked you for a match for his cigar" (240). From the same source we learn that Sutpen desired a big wedding because "He wanted, not the anonymous wife and the anonymous children, but the two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent" (51).

Yet Sutpen frequently flaunts his disregard of public opinion. Compson says:

He was the biggest single landowner and cottonplanter in the county now, attained by the same tactics with which he had built his house---the same singleminded

unflagging effort and utter disregard of how his actions which the town could see might look and how the ones which the town could not see must appear to it. (72)

After the Civil War, he refuses to join with his neighbours in the Ku Klux Klan, replying to their declaration that his refusal meant war; "'I am used to it'" (162).

The paradox of concern and disregard is only apparent, however. Eccentric, immoral, ruthless, the town may believe him to be, but insignificant or lowly he knows they will never consider him. His actions establish his grandeur and strength, if nothing else; those are the important qualities for the thirteen year old boy who became Thomas Sutpen.

Furthermore, Sutpen's disregard of public opinion contrasts with his concern for the attitude of posterity:

All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do . . . because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after when he would be one of the dead. (220)

His concern with his heritage and with posterity is more

important than his desire to impress his neighbours. It is, therefore, particularly fitting that his story should be told by the very people he wished to impress. The four narrators of Absalom, Absalom!, living in the twentieth century, are the audience uppermost in Sutpen's mind just as he, a dead Civil War Colonel, bulks largest in theirs.<sup>36</sup> As each narrator faces the baffling intricacies of the Sutpen legend, he (or she) searches for an individual with whom he (or she) can share an emotional experience. In the absence of personal fulfillment, this imaginative and vicarious experience serves as a surrogate at the same time that it represents a triumph of the imagination in penetrating the years separating the narrators and their subjects. In a fusion of past and present, Henry and Quentin, Rosa and Judith, Compson and Bon, Shreve and Bon, are each unified by an achieved awareness of the universality of human pain and joy.

After the complexities of Absalom, Absalom! (1936), Pylon (1935) seems relatively straightforward; it appears to be the tale, highly coloured and dramatic, of the new life associated with aviation and, more generally, of the mechanical revolution transforming society. While at the University of Virginia, Faulkner described the aviators he was trying to show in the novel:

To me they were a fantastic and bizarre phenomenon on the face of a contemporary scene, of our culture at a particular time. . . . They were ephemera and phenomena on the face of a contemporary scene. That is, there was really no place for them in the culture, in the economy, yet they were there, at that time, and everyone knew that they wouldn't last very long, which they didn't. That time of those frantic little aeroplanes which dashed around the country and people wanted just enough money to live, to get to the next place to race again. Something frenetic and in a way almost immoral about it. That they were outside the range of God, not only of respectability, of love, but of God too. That they had escaped the compulsion of accepting a past and a future, that they were---they had no past.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, Faulkner revealed that he had written the book as a diversion after he had become temporarily bogged down in the complexities of Absalom, Absalom! Perhaps the aviators' appearance of having "escaped the compulsion of accepting a past" appealed to him at this moment as a relief from the past-obsessed narrators of the larger novel.

Edmond L. Volpe feels that this statement about the aviators of Pylon "reveals the ambivalent attitude toward the fliers that mars the novel. Sympathy for them in their isolation from society merges with antipathy for them as rootless beings beyond the range of God and love."<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, I would suggest that Pylon

is an examination of this ambivalence, rather than a novel inadvertently marred by it.

A closer look at the novel reveals the central importance of the bystander who reports the action, a man whose name we never learn, who is known simply as the Reporter. Olga Vickery suggests that "a name and a personal identity presuppose a certain consistency of attitude, whereas the Reporter exists solely as a reverberator who can and does articulate a series of disconnected and, at times, contradictory interpretations of the New World."<sup>39</sup> But the Reporter is more than this; he is, as his name suggests, another example of the bystander we have discussed in previous novels, the man who watches rather than acts, who seems incapable of emotion let alone action until this particular group of aviators burst into his *Prufrock*-like existence. The novel is, moreover, a record of his development into a life of emotion because of the impact of Laverne and the wild men who surround her. Michael Millgate has suggested that the situation is much like that in Light in August with Laverne's rescue of the Reporter from semi-life comparable to Lena Grove's wakening of Byron Bunch from his isolation.<sup>40</sup> Jiggs refers to the Reporter as Lazarus, a name that suggest his rebirth from the dead.



Much has been said about the obvious parallels between Eliot's earlier poetry and Pylon.<sup>41</sup> The Reporter's existence at the first of the novel is much like that of Eliot's famous "patient etherized upon a table." A more important comparison for understanding the novel, however, is with Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Faulkner's Reporter seems very much like Eliot's dessicated ghosts, unable to act or feel. Moreover, he sees the aviators as "lost, violent souls" who, whatever their limitations, live a life which seems preferable to his own half life in the limbo of modern society. In the same way that the narrators of Absalom, Absalom! watch the violence and passion of Thomas Sutpen from the sterility of their own lives, so the Reporter in Pylon focusses upon the passions of Laverne and her entourage because they provide a welcome alternative to his own Life-in-Death.

Throughout the novel, Faulkner constantly emphasizes the Reporter's insubstantiality and ghostliness. He is

a creature which, erect, would be better than six feet tall and would weigh about ninetyfive pounds in a suit of no color, as though made of air and doped like an aeroplane wing with the incrustated excretion of all articulate life's contact with the passing earth, which ballooned light and impedimentless about a skeleton frame as though suit and wearer both hung from a flapping clothesline.<sup>42</sup>

He hangs before his editor's desk "as though he had been blown for a second against the desk by a wind and would in another second be blown onward once more" (178). The Reporter is the archetype of the bystander divorced from the reality he perpetually watches:

he seemed doomed to look down at everyone with whom he seemed perennially and perpetually compelled either to plead or just to endure: perhaps enduring and passing the time until that day when time and age would have thinned still more what blood he had and so permit him to see himself actually as the friendly and lonely ghost peering timidly down from the hayloft at the other children playing below. (167)

When the novel opens, we find the Reporter's editor accusing him of writing lifeless copy with no interest in it:

"you never seem to bring back anything but information. Oh you have that, all right, because we seem to get everything that the other papers do and we haven't been sued yet and so doubtless it's all that anyone should expect for five cents and doubtless more than they deserve. But it's not the living breath of news. It's just information. It's dead before you even get back here with it." (42)

But the Reporter immediately leaps to this challenge, for he has been awakened from his coma by the advent of Laverne and her "twin husbands." Fascinated by their unorthodox life style and the sense of immediate felt life they embody, the Reporter fastens onto this group of

aviators and follows them like one obsessed. "Why don't you leave these people alone?" Hagood the editor asks him:

"I cant," he said.  
 "You cant?" Hagood said. "Did you ever try to?"  
 "Yes," the Reporter said in his dead flat voice looking at the lamp again . . . "I tried." (179)

So, in spite of himself, the bystander is forced to become involved in life and the lives of other people, and, as the novel develops, his sympathy for the aviators deepens. His attitude changes from one of lascivious curiosity to a fascination with the vitality of these people.

To underscore the Reporter's development Faulkner presents a scene after Roger Schumann's crash into the lake which contrasts the Reporter's feelings with the attitudes of reporters from the other newspapers of New Valois. The Reporter, returning from the disaster scene, has had a strong drink:

"So I feel better," he said. Then he began to say it fast: "Oh God, I feel better! I feel better! I feel! I feel!" until he quit that too and said quietly . . . "Something is going to happen to me. I have got myself stretched out too far and too thin and something is going to bust." (300)

He enters the realm of human emotion: "I feel better" has suddenly become "I feel!", the declaration of a new condition for the Reporter. As he returns to his apartment,

we find that he begins to identify in the fullest sense with the dead Roger Schumann:

But it [the apartment] was empty, or comparatively so, because he kept on making that vertical reverse without any rudder or flippers and looking down on the close-peopled land and the empty lake and deciding, and the dredgeboat hanging over him for twenty hours and then having to lie there too and look up at the wreath dissolving, faintly rocking..... (301)

Finally, the bystander, through emotional identification, has merged with the participant, just as Quentin and Shreve merged with Charles and Henry in Absalom, Absalom!.

This emotional identification is more remarkable because of its contrast with the indifference of the other reporters at the scene of the accident; the comments of the crowd which witnesses the accident are composed of "ten thousand different smug and gratulant behind-sighted forms of I might be a bum and a bastard but I am not out there in that lake" (252). One reporter says of Schumann: "If he had been a man that thought, he would not have been up there in the first place" (289). Another speculates that Laverne must be thinking: "Thank God I carry a spare" (289).

The difference between the public newspaper report that concludes the novel and the version which the Reporter destroys underlies the paradox in his emotions.

No longer indifferent spectator, he is still not an involved participant. His sympathy involves him in the actions of the aviators but his inertia isolates him from experience. Walter J. Slatoff asserts that the Reporter is unable to make sense of his experience. Slatoff describes one version of the report as full of phony sentiment, the other as conveying "only the reporter's anger and bitterness."<sup>43</sup> Michael Millgate says that the Reporter "becomes obsessed with the fact that he cannot be 'the Reporter' without also being an interpreter, and with the knowledge that the act of interpretation necessarily involves distortion."<sup>44</sup> More important, the act of interpretation, in Pylon as in Absalom, Absalom!, demands involvement.

The report for the newspaper is bitterly sarcastic. Its irony serves to distance it from human suffering as does its meticulous concern with concrete detail:

"At midnight last night the search for the body of Roger Schumann, racing pilot who plunged into the lake Saturday P.M. was finally abandoned by a three-place biplane of about eighty horsepower which managed to fly out over the water and return without falling to pieces and dropping a wreath of flowers into the water approximately three quarters of a mile away from where Schumann's body is generally supposed to be since they were precision pilots and so did not miss the entire lake."

Scrawled beneath the report, a note to the Reporter's editor, Hagood, states: "I guess this is what you want you bastard....." (315) The anger of the report is at least an improvement upon the indifference Hagood earlier criticized.

The private version which the Reporter throws into the wastebasket reveals a concern and sympathy absent from the final copy. The copy boy who reads it believes it "to be not only news but the beginning of literature" (314). This abortive report represents the Reporter's attempt to express part of what he felt about the aviators, but the failure of the attempt is manifest in the Reporter's rejection of it himself:

"On Thursday Roger Schumann flew a race against four competitors, and won. On Saturday he flew against but one competitor. But that competitor was Death, and Roger Schumann lost. And so today a lone aeroplane flew out over the lake on the wings of dawn and circled the spot where Roger Schumann got the Last Checkered Flag, and vanished back into the dawn from whence it came.

Thus two friends told him farewell. Two friends, yet two competitors too, whom he had met in fair contest and conquered in the lonely sky from which he fell, dropping a simple wreath to mark his Last Pylon."

(314)

The two juxtaposed versions demonstrate the ambivalence the novel describes. The aviators are strangely immoral, apparently callous people, and yet they embody a vitality

and passion missing from the limbo of the Reporter's world. Are they to be scorned as the public newspaper version shows or are they to be respected as the private, more sympathetic version suggests? The Reporter is incapable of saying.

In all of the novels discussed in this chapter, Faulkner has portrayed the relationship between the spectator and the participant. The passive bystander finds himself trapped in a meaningless world from which he observes the actions of a more vital personality. For the bystander, perception has become the only activity. Quentin Compson, Darl Bundren, Miss Rosa Coldfield, and the Reporter all seem to have no alternative to watching. But their observing can be a powerful force and frequently Faulkner shows the participants in the action reacting to and being controlled by the observer who can do no more than watch. Conscious of the watching eyes, characters like Caddy Compson, Jewel Bundren, and Thomas Sutpen react in complex ways either to satisfy or defy what they feel to be the demands of the observing vision. In this sense, the bystander by merely watching becomes an important force.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hyatt Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to Discourse (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence E. Bowling, "The Technique of The Sound and the Fury," Kenyon Review, 10 (Autumn 1948), 552-566. Reprinted in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951), p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Waggoner, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (1929; rpt. New York: Random House, 1956), p. 84. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>9</sup> Howe, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Time in Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury" in his Literary and Philosophical Essays, trans. Annette Michelson (London: Rider, 1955), pp. 79-87. Reprinted in Two Decades, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> Melvin Backman, Faulkner: The Major Years (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Michael H. Cowan, "Introduction" to Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury, ed. Michael H. Cowan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Waggoner, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Millgate, p. 87.



- 15 Vickery, p. 29.
- 16 Margaret Blanchard, "The Rhetoric of Communion: Voice in The Sound and the Fury," American Literature, 41 (January 1970), 560.
- 17 Waggoner, p. 58.
- 18 Walter J. Slatoff, Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 153.
- 19 Waggoner, p. 56.
- 20 Waggoner, p. 63 and pp. 76-77.
- 21 William J. Handy, "As I Lay Dying: Faulkner's Inner Reporter," Kenyon Review, 21 (Summer 1959), p. 442.
- 22 Faulkner in the University, p. 110.
- 23 Brooks, p. 146.
- 24 Faulkner in the University, pp. 273-274.
- 25 Waggoner, p. 148.
- 26 William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (1936; rpt. New York: Random House, 1964), p. 190. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 27 Vickery, p. 101.
- 28 Vickery, p. 87.
- 29 Lynn Gartrell Levins, "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!" PMLA, 85 (January 1970), 37.
- 30 Ilse Dusoier Lindel, "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA, 70 (December 1955), 887-912. Reprinted in Frederick Hoffman and Olga Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism (1960; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), p. 283.
- 31 Vickery, p. 101.
- 32 Millgate, p. 155.

33 William Poirier, "'Strange Gods' in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of Absalom, Absalom!" in Two Decades, pp. 230-231.

34 Howe, p. 255.

35 Brooks, p. 313.

36 One could compare the actions of Judith Sutpen and Miss Rosa Coldfield, both of whom seem concerned with reaching posterity, the one by giving Charles Bon's letter to her aunt to save, the other by passing on to Quentin Compson the story of her life.

37 Faulkner in the University, p. 36.

38 Volpe, p. 176.

39 Vickery, p. 151.

40 Millgate, p. 142.

41 See Waggoner, pp. 122-132, for instance.

42 William Faulkner, Pylon (New York: Random House, 1935), pp. 20-21. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

43 Slatoff, p. 214.

44 Millgate, p. 147.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE BYSTANDER AND IRONY

In the previous chapters, I have shown Faulkner's natural concern with the choric voice in his fiction and the manner in which he developed the bystander or witness into an integral and structural part of various novels. I have also indicated that this device expresses one of his recurring themes, the subjectivity of vision. Thus his use of the bystander is at times ironic; for instance, the chorus of bystanders in As I Lay Dying is a fine example of dramatic irony. Again, in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner frequently uses the figure of Shreve McCannon to deflate ironically Quentin's high-powered rhetoric. Irony is pervasive in most of Faulkner's works, but in a number of novels it is particularly involved with the use of the bystander. In subsequent chapters I will show that this irony also extends to the Gavin Stevens novels.

Starting with Soldiers' Pay, his first novel, Faulkner uses his bystander figure as a means to undercut ironically the novel's dominant mood. Just as in As I Lay Dying he created the comic vision of the chorus to counterpoint the tragic vision of the Bundrens, so in Soldiers' Pay he juxtaposes the ironic vision of

Januarius Jones with the predominantly romantic vision of the novel. As Michael Millgate says, "The presence of Januarius Jones casts an ironic light over much of the book, as if the action were being regarded with a kind of double vision, alternating the tragic mask with the comic."<sup>1</sup>

The character Januarius Jones seems at first irrelevant to the novel; he is a stranger arbitrarily introduced into an action in which he has no place. He is in no sense a sympathetic or attractive figure; he is lecherous, self-serving, unpitying. Faulkner, however, indicates immediately his character's position in the novel: "Januarius Jones' face was a round mirror before which fauns and nymphs might have wantoned when the world was young" (58). He is the mirror which reflects upon the action. His very name suggests the two-headed Roman god, looking before and after, always watching. This is his primary role in the novel: to act as an audience to the play performed before him.

Indeed, Jones is exceedingly perceptive -- he immediately picks out the hints and clues necessary to understanding the scene; on his first meeting with Cecily Saunders, Donald Mahon's fiancée, he characterizes her as "shallow" and he perceives the fact that Emmy, who

also loves Donald, is involved in the emotional play: "Oho, Emmy has fish of her own to fry, thought Jones" (79). Jones' continual watching disturbs the other characters, particularly Cecily Saunders. As Cecily leaves the house with George Farr, she looks back and sees "a face in the window, a round face" (86). When she meets George secretly in a cafe against her father's wishes, she is again startled by Jones' watching presence: "She looked hurriedly about the store, and her heart turned to water. Here, sitting at a table in the alcove made by the ascending stairs, was that fat man, with a half-empty glass before him" (216).

Jones is often ludicrous, particularly when he "stoops" to continue his role as watcher:

Jones, ignored, followed down the hall and stood without the closed door to the study, listening, hearing her throaty, rapid speech beyond the bland panel. Then, stooping, he peered through the keyhole. But he could see nothing and feeling his creased waistline constricting his breathing, feeling his braces cutting into his stooped fleshy shoulders, he rose under Gilligan's detached contemplative stare. Jones' own yellow eyes became quietly empty and he walked around Gilligan's immovable belligerence and on toward the front door, whistling casually. (138)

Such scenes militate against our taking Jones himself seriously, but they do not invalidate his view of the

novel's action. His ironic vision of Cecily, for instance, is one we can agree with:

In the dark hallway he halted, listening. Light from the front door fell directly on his face: he could see only the edged indication of sparse furniture. He paused, listening. No, she isn't here, he decided. Not enough talk going on for her to be here. That femme hates silence like a cat does water. Cecily and silence: oil and water. And she'll be on top of it, too. Little bitch. . . . And Georgie, too. She's such a fast worker I guess it takes a whole string to keep her busy. (135)

Cecily's hostility to Jones is strongly motivated by his ability to see behind the romantic facade she creates. Her actions, like Bayard's in Sartoris, are theatrical, but as an actress, she requires a sympathetic and not too perceptive audience. In the scene in which Cecily learns from the rector that Donald is alive, both Jones and Mrs. Powers serve as her audience. As she weeps in Mr. Mahon's arms: "The audience watched this, Mrs. Powers with speculative detached interest and Jones with morose speculation" (81). As Mrs. Powers and Cecily parry with one another, "Jones, statically remote, watched the comedy" (82). Mrs. Powers marvels at Cecily's dramatic ability:

that girl leaning against the oaken branch of the rector's arm, believing that she is in love with the boy, or his illusion -- pretending she is, anyway. . . . It's quite

romantic, being reft of your love and then having him returned unexpectedly to your arms. And an aviator, too. What luck that girl has playing her parts. Even God helps her. . . . (83)

A similar scene, even more to the point, occurs later in the novel when Cecily performs for her audience at a dance; she acts out her role while the same audience of Mrs. Powers and Jones keeps up a running commentary of sarcastic asides which undercut the Southern belle chattiness:

"Awfully nice dance. And Mr. Gilligan!" (What's she wanta come worrying him now for? She bothers damn little while he's sitting at home there.) "Of course, one simply does not see Donald without Mr. Gilligan. It must be nice to have Mr. Gilligan fond of you like that. Don't you think so, Mrs. Powers?" Her braced straightening arms supported a pliant low backward curve from her hips. "And Rufus. (Yes, she is pretty. And silly. But -- but pretty.) You deserted me for another woman! Don't say you didn't. I tried to make him dance with me, Mrs. Powers, but he wouldn't do it. Perhaps you had better luck?" A dropped knee molded the glass-like fragility of her silver dress. "Ah, you needn't say anything; we know how attractive Mrs. Powers is, don't we, Mr. Jones?" (See your behind, the shape of it. And your whole leg, when you stand like that. Knows it, too.) (205-206)

Cecily's role as charming young Southern belle requires an impressionable audience, but instead Faulkner provides her romanticizing and superficial posturing with a

sardonic audience in the person of Januarius Jones (and, occasionally, Mrs. Powers).

Cecily's young brother, Robert Saunders, fulfills a similar function when he views the meeting of Mrs. Powers and Joe Gilligan. His naturally anti-romantic bias makes him a Januarius Jones in little. While Cecily cries and shudders at the thought of Donald's disfiguring scar, Robert is consumed with curiosity to see it. He oversees the scene of sentiment which takes place with Margaret Powers and Joe Gilligan, and his boyish anti-romanticism counterpoints the romantic despair the two adults feel:

Gilligan felt impersonal, weary. He took her hand and rubbed his cheek against it. Her hand turned in his and patted his cheek, withdrawing. (Holding hands! gloated young Robert Saunders). . . . .  
He faced her and in her firm sexless embrace he stood staring at the blur of her face almost on a level with his own, in longing and despair. (Uhuh, kissing! crowed young Robert Saunders, releasing his cramped limbs, trailing them like an Indian.) (164-165)

Robert Saunders, Januarius Jones, and the town as a whole (as was shown in Chapter One) observe the return of the soldiers to Charlestown, observe them with an unsympathetic curiosity which isolates them but which also serves to undercut the theatrical romanticism of much of the action.

Aunt Jenny Du Pre serves a similar function in



Sartoris where her caustic remarks satirize Bayard's romantic despair. Like Januarius Jones, she provides an ironic vision which balances and comments upon the dominant romantic tone of the novel. Jenny is very different from Jones, however, for she partakes to a considerable extent in the Sartoris romance she criticizes. Indeed, she is the one who has inculcated the Southern myth in the Sartoris sons, and her sympathy for its world view colours all her remarks; her taste in reading indicates her romantic tendencies: "She enjoyed humanity in its more colorful mutations, preferring lively romance to the most impeccable of dun fact, so she took in the more lurid afternoon paper . . ." (40). It is Miss Jenny who relates the story of the much earlier Bayard Sartoris who rode with Stuart:

She had told the story many times since (at eighty she still told it, on occasions usually inopportune) and as she grew older the tale itself grew richer and richer, taking on a mellow splendor like wine; until what had been a hare-brained prank of two heedless and reckless boys wild with their own youth had become a gallant and finely tragical focal point to which the history of the race had been raised from out the old miasmic swamps of spiritual sloth by two angels valiantly fallen and strayed, altering the course of human events and purging the souls of men. (9)

In spite of such mythologizing, however, Jenny can act as an ironic observer of the boys whose behaviour

has been largely formed by such romantic tales. For one thing, she is capable, unlike old Bayard, of accepting the new; she immediately takes to the motor car which he so long rejects ("Is that as fast as it'll go?" she asks Bayard after a hectic ride [78]), she champions the young doctor against old Doc Peabody, saying: "Old people just fret me to death" (101). But her men cannot forget the old, outmoded chivalric feats of the Southern past. She interprets John's death in the war not as a glorious and tragic fatality, but as a silly act:

"The war just gave John a good excuse to get himself killed. If it hadn't been that, it would have been some other way that would have been a bother to everybody around . . . I've lived with these bullheaded Sartorises for eighty years, and I'll never give a single ghost of 'em the satisfaction of shedding a tear over him." (31)

The hard-bitten quality of Miss Jenny's protestation strikes us as overdone -- certainly she does care -- but her angry sarcasm constantly undercuts the romantic dignity of the Sartorises. When Narcissa phones Jenny, worried about an injury Bayard has sustained, she receives the following reply:

No, she had heard nothing of him since Loosh Peabody 'phoned her at four o'clock that Bayard was on his way home with a broken head. The broken head she readily believed, but the other part of the message she had put no credence in whatever, having

lived with those damn Sartorises eighty years and knowing that home would be the last place in the world a Sartoris with a broken head would ever consider going. No, she was not even interested in his present whereabouts, and she hoped he hadn't injured the horse. Horses were valuable animals. (152)

After Narcissa marries Bayard, Miss Jenny advises her not to accompany him on his reckless trips in the motor car:

"No. It won't make him drive slowly. Nothing will."  
 "Of course not. Nobody believes it will, not even his grandfather. He goes along for the same reason that boy himself does. Sartoris. It's in the blood. Savages, everyone of 'em. No earthly use to anybody." (298)

At the conclusion of the novel, after Bayard has finally killed himself, Jenny predicts that his son will follow in his footsteps: "Do you think . . . that because his name is Benbow, he'll be any less a Sartoris and a scoundrel and a fool?" (380) In his later novels, Faulkner consistently presents women as commonsensical and concerned with the business of living; Miss Jenny is the first of such characters. As a sympathetic but clear-headed bystander, she counterpoints with ironic commentary the extremes of the romantic action for which she herself is partially responsible.

Light in August, as Cleanth Brooks has ably demonstrated, presents the individual in confrontation with

his community. He suggests that the isolated condition of a "lost sheep" like Joe Christmas "can be given special point and meaning because there is still visible in the background a recognizable flock with its shepherds, its watchdogs sometimes fierce and cruel, and its bell wethers."<sup>2</sup> It is not, therefore, surprising to find several bystanders who play important parts in the novel. Byron Bunch, Gail Hightower, and Gavin Stevens are all primarily witnesses to rather than participants in the primary action of the novel, which is the career of Joe Christmas.

Each of these characters will be dealt with in subsequent chapters; here I wish to examine only the novel's ironic bystander, the travelling furniture dealer, who narrates the final chapter of the novel. He has no purpose in the novel other than to witness and relate the story of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch after they have left Jefferson. John Lewis Longley, Jr. suggests that the furniture dealer is introduced as narrator because he sees only the now, not the past of Byron's struggle.<sup>3</sup> The dealer knows none of the characters, personally or by reputation, and therefore his narration of the story of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch is concerned with the immediate relationship between the two rather than the history

of their experiences in Jefferson. He appears a mere ten pages from the end of the novel, introduced suddenly to fulfill his limited role. After the tragic action of Joe Christmas' life is concluded, Faulkner provides us with a gently comic romance which counterpoints the obsessions and the shock of the main plot. To narrate this romance, so radically different in tone, he creates the ideal narrator, a man lying in bed with his wife:

. . . he (Byron) was desperated up to something. But even then I didn't know what it was.  
 What was it? the wife says.  
 I just showed you once. You aint ready to be showed again, are you?  
 I reckon I dont mind if you dont.<sup>4</sup>

The easy sexuality of the pair, the relaxed joking, is the perfect medium through which to view Byron's desperate wooing of Lena Grove. Seen through the eyes of one who is sexually satisfied, Byron's frustration seems less crucial than it might if we were to see it from the view of a bystander who shared Byron's romantic dilemma. The salesman is sympathetic, but his distance from the action allows the introduction of a gentle irony at Byron's expense. Moreover, though we have no proof that Byron is ultimately successful in his suit, there is little doubt that he finally wins. The narrator Faulkner has chosen indicates what kind of a story he wishes to tell:

He laughs, lying in bed, laughing.  
 "Yes, sir. You cant beat a woman.  
 Because do you know what I think?  
 I think she was just travelling.  
 I dont think she had any idea of  
 finding whoever it was she was  
 following. I dont think she had  
 ever aimed to, only she hadn't told  
 him yet. . . . I think she had  
 just made up her mind to travel a  
 little further and see as much as she  
 could, since I reckon she knew that  
 when she settled down this time, it  
 would likely be for the rest of her  
 life." (479-480)

The salesman views the travellers with amusement, with an ironic distance; he refers to Byron as "the kind of fellow you wouldn't see the first glance if he was alone by himself in the bottom of an empty concrete swimming pool" (469). But his sympathy is obvious. He sees Byron as slightly ridiculous, but he does his best to hide his amusement. He sees Byron as essentially decent, and he does not wish to add to his humiliation. As he remembers Lena's rejection of Byron's attempt to join her in the salesman's truck, the salesman says to his wife:

"Well, I was downright ashamed to look at him, to let him know what any human man had seen and heard that happened. I be dog if I didn't want to find the hole and crawl into it with him." (477)

As bystander, he is prevented by his sympathy for Byron from revealing the fact of his watching.

In each of the three novels examined to this

point in this chapter, a bystander views the action with a sense of irony made possible by his lack of involvement in the action. As the bystander's sympathy for the protagonist increases, however, his irony softens. In Soldiers' Pay, Januarius Jones views the other characters with a complete lack of sympathy, and his bitter dissection of personalities frequently provides the reader with keen insights. But his own character is so self-centered and unattractive that we ultimately reject his interpretations. In Sartoris, Miss Jenny provides a sardonic commentary which counterpoints the romantic extremes and posturings of the Sartoris family, but Faulkner makes clear her underlying sympathy. Indeed, she is partly responsible for the dramatic Sartoris world view which she criticizes because she has taught it to the Sartoris grandchildren. Her position as ironic bystander is ambivalent, and, in her protestations of disgust, she seems frequently to be protesting too much. The salesman in Light in August, similarly, provides an ironic vision of the romantic story of Byron and Lena, but he is very obviously alive to the feelings of the "lovers." His sympathy partakes, to some extent, however, of condescension, for a bystander who views an action ironically necessarily looks down upon the participants. As the bystander's sympathy increases

in other words, as he sees himself as occupying the same level as the participants he views, the irony decreases. As the bystander identifies himself with one or the other of the participants, he can no longer retain a superior point of view, and his ironic commentary becomes more gentle.

In two later novels, Go Down, Moses and The Hamlet, Faulkner's irony lies more in structure than in characterization. In each novel, the choice and positioning of the bystander is instrumental in making a statement about the action.

In Go Down, Moses the relative position of black and white men as bystanders reveals the situation of the Negro in the South. In the next chapter we will examine Isaac McCaslin's role as bystander in the novel's four "hunt" stories which focus upon the white man's relationship to nature and the land: "Was," "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn." In this chapter, the two stories essential to our consideration of the bystander and irony are "The Fire and the Hearth" and "Pantaloon in Black," which focus upon the white man's relationship to the black man.

"The Fire and the Hearth," a story fully one hundred pages long, is, along with "The Bear," a central statement in Go Down, Moses. Within its bounds, it por-



trays the development of the Negro in the social environment of the South, just as "The Bear" traces the development of the white man in terms of the nature he despoils. Lucas Beauchamp, the hero of the former story, undergoes a change which is closely connected with the controlling symbol of the fire and the hearth. The structure of Chapter One with its comic frame and nearly tragic central section (cf. Light in August) may be likened to a fire burning within a hearth. But even more important, the passive hearth observing the active fire parallels a number of observer-actor dualities in the story.

In the flashback section of Chapter One, Zack Edmonds acts as he pleases; after his wife dies in childbirth, he brings Molly up to the main house to care for his newborn son without asking Lucas, her husband, and Lucas can do nothing but watch. His despairing question is "How to God . . . can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife?"<sup>5</sup> He is finally driven by his sense of honour to act in a fashion he feels is certain to bring his death. Zack initiates action which Lucas must watch. The events of the story come to us through the observing consciousness of the despairing black man who feels himself incapable of affecting the course of the action. Finally, driven almost mad by his

conviction that Zack Edmonds has cuckolded him, Lucas confronts the white man with a razor and very nearly kills him. All this, however, happens in 1898.

In the present of the story, Lucas is the actor rather than the audience and Roth Edmonds, Zack's son, watches Lucas' outrageous deeds with impotent fury. The white man, not the black man, has become the bystander in the Southern present. Lucas rigs a still beneath Roth's very nose and escapes punishment; he sells Roth's mule to buy a mine-detector and still comes out on top. The white man's anger is ineffectual and, at times, silly. But Roth cannot penetrate the cover which Lucas has learned to devise since his encounter with Zack:

"Was that still yours, Lucas?" Edmonds said. They looked at one another. Yet still the face which Edmonds saw was absolutely blank, impenetrable. Even the eyes appeared to have nothing behind them. (71)

Lucas now is capable of retreating behind the mask of "Sambo," the black man of Southern white mythology, and, at the same time, pursuing his ends with little concern for the attitudes of his white landlord. Point of view, therefore, shifts in the contemporary story from Lucas to the white man and the impetus of action now originates with the black man. The white man finds himself ironically in the position of a helpless witness to Negro

actions in a South he ostensibly controls.

Chapter Two of "The Fire and the Hearth" is similarly structured. It begins and ends with a visit by Lucas to Roth's commissary. Between these two visits Lucas perpetrates another of his outrages, the stealing of Roth's mule to buy a mine detector to search for buried gold. Roth learns of Lucas' adventure from another Negro, Dan:

He was not only about to perceive the whole situation in its complete and instantaneous entirety, as when the photographer's bulb explodes, but he knew now that he had seen it all the while and had refused to believe it purely and simply because he knew that when he did accept it, his brain would burst. (85)

Roth is, in other words, forced into the role of unwilling bystander, compelled to watch the inexplicable actions of the Negroes who were his grandfather's slaves. The juxtaposition of the story of Zack and Lucas with the later story of Roth and Lucas provides a measure of the development in race relations in the South. Roth presumes that he exercises as much power and authority as his father before him did, but he is constantly shocked to find that it is the black man who initiates events while he can do nothing but watch. Faulkner creates this irony by structuring the two separate stories in such a way

that they comment upon one another.

Chapter Three explains why Roth puts up with Lucas' numerous audacities. Roth Edmonds bears the guilt of his Southern heritage, the guilt his cousin Ike attempts to deny when he renounces the farm which is rightly his. Roth gives Molly, his surrogate Negro mother, presents every month in an attempt to placate his sense of guilt for the fact of black suppression in the South. Unlike Ike McCaslin, who, as we shall see in the next chapter, attempts to escape this racial guilt by fleeing into the wilderness, Roth must live with his guilt:

He called it a libation to his luck, as the centurion spilled first a little of the wine he drank, though actually it was to his ancestors and to the conscience which he would have probably affirmed he did not possess, in the form, the person, of the negro woman who had been the only mother he ever knew. (99 - 100)

Roth rages about Lucas' treatment of him, the "accumulation of floutings and outrages covering not only his span but his father's lifetime too," (104) but he is helpless to act because of what he calls the "bitter fruit" of his heritage, his sense of guilt as a descendant of Old Carothers McCaslin. Lucas Beauchamp, moreover, embodies the racial and familial guilt of the McCaslins and the Edmondses

in his very presence, and, therefore, Roth finds it impossible simply to dismiss or ignore his outrages:

He's more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers. He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us. (118)

Trapped by his sense of responsibility for his ancestor's sins, yet incapable of granting the black man his due, Roth and white men like him face the ironic duality of actual, physical power wedded with volitionless inertia.

As we will find later, in "Delta Autumn," the Negro is the true inheritor of the South; he has moved stage center in the McCaslin family, at any rate, and his white relations are on the periphery, helpless bystanders watching for his next move.

If this seems an overly optimistic rendering of the Negro's position in Southern society, Faulkner balances it with a bleak portrait in the story which follows "The Fire and the Hearth." In "Pantaloon in Black," the white man is still in the position of bystander, but his control over the Negro he doesn't understand is much greater. The very title suggests the position of the Negro in the white man's eyes; Rider, the grief-stricken husband

whose wife has just died, is seen as a "pantaloon", a clown, by the white society which does not have the insight into his sufferings which we, the readers, are given. The irony of this story lies not in the changing positions of "The Fire and the Hearth" but in the misinterpretations that other characters place on the actions of the central character. After Rider's death, we are presented with the interpretation we recognize as shockingly inappropriate for the agonies we have seen Rider experience because of his wife's death:

"Them damn niggers," he said. "I swear to godfrey, it's a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because they aint human. They look like a man, and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes." (154)

Indeed, Rider's actions, when seen from the view of an uninformed bystander, bear more than one interpretation. He hurries to cover his wife's coffin with dirt; he appears at work the next morning rather than taking a day off; he gets drunk and goes to a crap game where he cuts the throat of the white man running the game. Having all the prejudices of his white society, the deputy interprets these acts in the worst possible way, but at

least he is disturbed. Edmond L. Volpe suggests that the deputy, disturbed by his new-found awareness of Rider's suffering, must "restore the protective image of the Negro as not quite human by recasting each display of anguish he has witnessed or heard about as proof of the Negro's lack of humanity."<sup>6</sup> Certainly the deputy is bothered by the events surrounding Rider's death. His wife, however, to whom he relates his version of Rider's story, is not even interested:

"[he keeps] laughing and laughing and saying, 'Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit.' And what do you think of that?"  
 "I think if you eat any supper in this house you'll do it in the next five minutes," his wife said from the dining room. "I'm going to clear this table then and I'm going to the picture show."  
 (159)

Faulkner here uses the bystander to portray the indifference of society to the suffering of the individual. The deputy's wife is untouched and therefore unconcerned by the sufferings of Rider. The bystander's inhumanity provides the reader with a moving portrayal of the treatment of the black man by a society which refuses to recognize him as a human. "Pantaloone in Black" is a savagely ironic statement about one man's isolation in suffering rendered through the use of the bystander.

In The Hamlet, V.K. Ratliff acts as the bystander

not to the unapprehended suffering of another individual, but to the mystifying plans and secret depredations of Flem Snopes, the unfeeling capitalist whose rise to power is the subject of the Snopes trilogy as a whole. Ratliff, as an interested but uncommitted onlooker, faces the dilemma of any well-meaning bystander. Should he maintain his aloofness and remain inviolate, or should he involve himself in a struggle against evil in which he may be himself corrupted? On one level, we may see The Hamlet as the gradual development of Ratliff's commitment to the cause of fighting Snopesism in Yoknapatawpha County, and his ultimate defeat at the hands of Flem Snopes provides one of the important ironies in the novel. While Ratliff remains uninvolved, his perceptive criticism of Flem and the townspeople who allow themselves to be cheated serves as a running commentary upon the action, but Ratliff's attempt to remain uninvolved means that no champion equal in power to Flem has entered the lists against him. Economic rapacity remains unchallenged. When Ratliff does involve himself in the battle against Snopesism, however, he is defeated and, indeed, corrupted by the force that he faces. Edmond L. Volpe suggests that

in the plan of the novel, Ratliff must succumb. If he is not bested by Flem, he too will remain beyond the pale of emotional fallibility in which everyone except Flem is gathered.<sup>7</sup>



In other words, Ratliff's defeat is proof of his humanity. James Gray Watson suggests that this defeat has been prepared for by Ratliff's earlier misjudgments of Flem's abilities.<sup>8</sup> The irony is that, in order to be perceptive, Ratliff must be uninvolved; in order to be effective, he must act. The bystander become participant can no longer function as an observer, but the value of his observations is realized in a sense of involvement.

We first hear of Ratliff in his role of interested observer:

He spoke in a pleasant, lazy, equable voice which you did not discern at once to be even more shrewd than humorous. This was Ratliff, the sewing-machine agent. . . . On successive days and two counties apart the splashed and battered buckboard and the strong mismatched team might be seen tethered in the nearest shade and Ratliff's bland affable ready face and his neat tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group at a crossroads store,, or -- and still squatting and still doing the talking apparently though actually doing a good deal more listening than anybody believed until afterward -- among the women surrounded by laden clotheslines and tubs. . . . He never forgot a name and he knew every-one, man mule and dog, within fifty miles.<sup>9</sup>

When this quotation is juxtaposed with a statement Ratliff makes about the Snopeses later on in the novel, it indicates the nature of the book's struggle: "I don't understand yet how a man that has to spend as much time as I

do being constantly reminded of them folks, still can't keep the names straight" (327). When Ratliff, the capable and imperturbable, finds himself confronted, willy-nilly, with the Snopes horde as they overrun the hamlet, he must abandon his characteristic stance of non-involvement. He enters the lists against the arch-Snopes of them all, Flem, and when he does, he is defeated. Early in the novel, Ratliff is seen:

easy and relaxed in his chair, with his lean brown pleasant shrewd face, in his faded clean blue shirt, with that same air of perpetual bachelorhood which Jody Varner had, although there was no other resemblance between ~~them~~ and not much here, since in Varner it was a quality of shabby and fustian gallantry where in Ratliff it was that hearty celibacy as of a lay brother in a twelfth-century monastery -- a gardener, a pruner of vines, say. (43)

Ratliff's bachelorhood, his celibacy, is expressive not of a lack of interest in life, but of a non-involvement which he maintains only with great difficulty. For when he sees a wrong, he believes it should be righted, and if no one else will right it, as is usually the case in Frenchman's Bend, it falls to him to act.

When Ratliff hears about Flem's usurious treatment of the blacks of Frenchman's Bend, he asks Tull and Bookwright:

"Aint none of you folks out there done nothing about it?" he said.

"What could we do?" Tull said. "It aint right. But it aint none of our business." "I believe I would think of something if I lived there," Ratliff said. "Yes," Bookwright said. . . . "And wind up with one of them bow ties in place of your buckboard and team. You'd have room to wear it." "Sho now," Ratliff said. "Maybe you're right." (72)

In a sense, this conversation predicts what will happen in the course of the novel.

Ratliff's confrontation of Flem is, however, long in coming. Partly through chance, partly through deliberate policy, he is not closely involved in the earlier episodes of the novel. John Lewis Longley, Jr., suggests that Ratliff's shrewdness and insight give him the best chance against Flem Snopes but also make him unlikely to plunge headlong into the struggle.<sup>10</sup> Michael Millgate points out a more important aspect of Ratliff's internal struggle when he says that he is caught between his desire to remain uninvolved and his drive, his moral commitment, to fight Flem and injustice.<sup>11</sup> Ratliff protests: "I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that can't wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I won't. I won't, I tell you!" (326) This is almost the only time in the novel we see Ratliff lose his composure, and the reason is clear. Ratliff protests too much, for, in spite of his desire to remain

uninvolved, he is constantly drawn into the fight against the Snopeses. Florence Leaver, in "The Structure of The Hamlet", states that "the Snopes absorption of the village could not have come to pass except for lack of intelligent resistance."<sup>12</sup> This absence is the absence of Ratliff, Leaver then goes on to suggest that the only person who is undefeated by Flem is Mrs. Littlejohn who, partly for that reason, stands above Ratliff in the moral hierarchy of the novel: "superiority to him in this conflict explains that only she is invulnerable to the Snopeses. Shrewdness is not enough, not even shrewdness with a heart. Ratliff needs her wisdom and some of her Olympian anger."<sup>13</sup> But such an interpretation misses one of the central points of the novel; Ratliff's problem is that of the well-meaning individual: whether to hold himself aloof from life or to enter the fray with the possibility of injury and even the compromising of his moral standards. The novel portrays the two avenues open to morality: a cloistered. virtue or a vigorous moral system. To say that Mrs. Littlejohn is invulnerable is ridiculous, for she is never attacked; only Ratliff combines moral concern with concerted action.

Indeed, we can see the novel structured in terms of Ratliff's appearances and disappearances. With the exception of the episode of the goats, which is a special

case as we shall see, Flem Snopes' depredations until the concluding episode of the book take place during Ratliff's absences. Olga Vickery sees the book as showing the clash of two traditions, the economic and the humanistic, represented by Flem and Ratliff respectively,<sup>14</sup> but this clash occurs only at the end of the book. The plot of the novel involves an alternation between the two, climaxed by their meeting at the conclusion. A brief outline of the main plot is necessary to illustrate this point. Ratliff hears indirectly about Flem's appointment at the beginning of the book:

"I hear you and Jody got a new clerk in the store."  
 Varner looked at him sharply, the reddish eyebrows beetling a little above the hard little eyes.  
 "So that's done spread," he said. "How far you been since yesterday?"  
 "Seven-eight miles," Ratliff said. (25)

Having learned of the advent of Flem, Ratliff is able to fill in the background from his vast storehouse of knowledge by narrating the stories of Ab Snopes and his son, Sartoris. Ratliff visits Ab's farm in an attempt to find out more about Flem's move but learns nothing and returns to watch what Snopes will do:

Ratliff and his companions sat and squatted about the gallery all that day and watched

not only the village proper but all the countryside within walking distance come up singly and in pairs and in groups, men women and children, to make trivial purchases and look at the new clerk and go away. (52)

We can see here Ratliff's origins in the gossiping town-folk of novels like Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris; he is the social awareness supreme. When he has learned enough, he leaves: "He was moved by his itinerary, his established and nurtured round of news mongering, the pleasure of re-tailing it, not the least nor stalest of which present stock he had spent the last two weeks actually watching" (55).

When Ratliff returns to Frenchman's Bend months later (56), he learns of Flem's advances in prosperity and the introduction of I.O. and Lump. Then Ratliff disappears again, this time into hospital with gall bladder trouble (62). After his return from hospital, Ratliff takes on Snopes for the first time with a complex plan which involves a sewing machine sold to Mink Snopes and a herd of goats. But Ratliff, in spite of his shrewdness, barely wins this opening duel because of his inability to anticipate Flem's use of his idiot relation, Ike Snopes.<sup>15</sup> But he thinks to himself, "I reckon I was sicker than I knowed. Because I missed it, missed it clean" (88). And as he leaves Frenchman's Bend once more, he

decides:

I just never went far enough, he thought. I quit too soon. I went as far as one Snopes' will set fire to another Snopes' barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too.  
(89)

The next long section of The Hamlet is the story of Eula and how Flem uses her predicament to his own advantage by marrying her. Again, Ratliff knows nothing about this until he sees the couple in Jefferson: "But when he at last turned his tough little team toward Frenchman's Bend again, Bookwright and Tull had long since returned home and told it" (150). With this new knowledge, Ratliff fully appreciates the extent and nature of Flem's rapacity, and he invents the tale of Flem's confrontation with the Devil to express the mixture of amusement and horror he feels.

In Section Three of The Hamlet ("The Long Summer"), Ratliff returns once again to Frenchman's Bend to discover the latest Snopes indignity, this one perpetrated by Lump Snopes, who has turned his idiot cousin's passion for a cow into a sideshow. The long idyll relating the idiot's love for the cow is framed by the scene of Ratliff's discovery of it:

He knew not only what he was going to see but that, like Bookwright, he did not want to see it, yet unlike Bookwright, he was going to look. He did look, leaning his face in between two other heads; and it was as though it were himself inside the stall with the cow, himself looking out of the blasted tongueless face at the row of faces watching him. (199)

This passage is important for it reveals the powerful empathy that Ratliff possesses, an ability to put himself in another's place, which drives him, against his will, in a crusade against the depradations of the Snopeses. The passage suggests also the difference between Ratliff and Bookwright, who acts in a sense as Ratliff's surrogate during his absences. Bookwright remains aloof, but Ratliff, as much as he would like to, cannot. When he discusses with Mrs. Littlejohn his actions, in taking away Ike's cow, Ratliff admits to being Pharisaical:

I know the reason I aint going to leave him have what he does have is simply because I am strong enough to keep him from it. I am stronger than him. Not righter. Not any better, maybe. But just stronger . . . . Maybe all I want is just to have been righteouser, so I can tell myself I done the right thing and my conscience is clear now and at least I can go to sleep tonight. (201)

His own statement disproves his suggestion that he is simply being righteous, but it also indicates the



power of conscience which drives him to act.

The next major section in the book is the story of Jack Houston and Mink Snopes, an action in which Ratliff plays no part at all. But as soon as the narrative returns to the community at large, Ratliff is there, looking after Mink's wife and children with "not pity: rather, concern" (264). Indeed, this is the pattern of the book until the last episode: a story involving one of the Snopes family is followed by Ratliff's gaining knowledge of it and reacting to it.

In "The Spotted Horses" section which follows, Ratliff's absence is more evident because people comment upon it. When the horses first arrive in town, Ratliff warns the townfolk to avoid them:

I reckon there aint nothing under the sun or in Frenchman's Bend neither that can keep you folks from giving Flem Snopes and that Texas man your money. But I'd sholy like to know just exactly who I was giving my money to . . . . You folks can buy them critters if you want to. But me, I'd just as soon buy a tiger or a rattlesnake. And if Flem Snopes offered me either one of them, I would be afraid to touch it for fear it would turn out to be a painted dog or a piece of garden hose when I went to take possession of it. I bid you one and all goodnight. (283)

And with this Ratliff departs, leaving the field to Flem Snopes. After the auction, the men see Ratliff's team tied nearby and one says: "I thought something was wrong

all day . . . . Ratliff wasnt there to give nobody advice" (304). And when the trial to decide injuries is held at Whiteleaf's store, Faulkner lets us know that "neither did the Varner surrey nor Ratliff's buckboard make one among the wagons, the buggies, and the saddled horses and mules which moved out of the village on that May Saturday morning" (327).

But while Ratliff is absent, two other characters serve, as Bookwright earlier did, as surrogate bystanders watching the Snopes' outrages: Mrs. Littlejohn and the Justice of the Peace. While the auction is conducted at Frenchman's Bend, Faulkner makes constant references to the watching, disdainful presence of Mrs. Littlejohn as she goes about her housework: "Mrs. Littlejohn came out of the kitchen and crossed the yard to the woodpile, watching the lot. She picked up two or three sticks of wood and paused, watching the lot again" (285). "Mrs. Littlejohn was in the yard again . . . . She carried an armful of clothing and a metal-ridged washboard and she was standing motionless at the kitchen steps, looking into the lot. Then she moved across the lot, still looking into the lot, and dumped the garments into the tub, still looking into the lot" (292). These are only two of several similar references which run like a motif

through the episode (others: p. 291, p. 295). When finally the auction and its epilogue are over, she makes her short judgment: "I'll declare . . . . You men" (310).

The Justice of the Peace who hears the trial arising from the auction is similarly a replacement in the action for an absent Ratliff. Faulkner makes this explicit when he states: "into the lens-distorted and irisless old-man's eyes of the Justice there grew an expression not only of amazement and bewilderment but, as in Ratliff's eyes while he stood on the store gallery four weeks ago, something very like terror" (329). When he learns the full extent of the hamlet's stupidity and Flem's rapacity, his reaction echoes Ratliff's: "I cant stand no more!" the old Justice cried. "I wont! This court's adjourned! Adjourned!" (338, cf. 326) Faulkner has deliberately avoided bringing Ratliff into these episodes in order to delay his inevitable confrontation with Snopes which comes in the next (and last) episode of the novel.

When Faulkner was asked at Nagano who his favorite characters were, he named Ratliff as one: "Ratliff is wonderful. He's done more things than any man I know. Why, I couldn't tell some of the things that man has done."<sup>16</sup> But even Ratliff is flawed, as Faulkner proves

in the last chapter of The Hamlet; even Ratliff falls victim not so much to Flem's rapacity as to his own. Convinced that there is hidden gold on the Old Frenchman's place, he, along with Odum Bookwright and Henry Armstid, buys the property from Flem Snopes only to find it has been salted with gold coins. Scrabbling and scratching in the dark, Ratliff finds himself struggling with Bookwright for the shovel they have brought along:

"Wait," he said. "Wait." Then Ratliff seemed to realize what he was doing. He released the shovel; he almost hurled it at Bookwright.

"Take it," he said. He drew a long shuddering breath. "God," he whispered. "Just look at what even the money a man aint got yet will do to him." (349)

It is interesting that Ratliff's downfall is brought about by the lure of buried gold, for this is also what fells Lucas Beauchamp, an aloof and dignified figure who, in "The Fire and the Hearth" is also reduced to scratching frantically in the ground. Flem's triumph is complete in The Hamlet when he has brought Ratliff low, and it is ironic that Ratliff's loss of the cafe to Flem is what finally rids Frenchman's Bend of his depredations. Flem is on to greater things in Jefferson. But Ratliff's defeat is only temporary, for he has the sense of humour and the resiliency necessary to allow him to recover

rapidly. James Gray Watson maintains that more important than the fact of Ratliff's fall through greed "is the fact that such ravages are not totally debilitating, that the moral world is rejuvenatory and self-regenerative. Ratliff's defeat is only financial . . ."<sup>17</sup> The obsessed and maddened Henry Armstid acts as an illuminating contrast to Ratliff as he continues to hurl himself futilely against the earth of the Old Frenchman's place. In this final episode, Ratliff has become for once the watched rather than the watcher. Eustace Grimm and Lump Snopes watch him as he digs for gold. When we see him again in The Town, however, Ratliff is once again the removed spectator who leaves attempts at involvement to Gavin Stevens.

Jean-Paul Sartre has described another aspect of Faulkner's art which helps us to understand the position of Ratliff in The Hamlet:

Faulkner's man is undiscoverable. He is to be understood neither in terms of his gestures, which are a facade, nor through his tales, which are imaginary, nor yet by his acts, for they are lightning flashes that defy description. And yet, beyond behaviour and beyond words, beyond empty consciousness, Man exists. We have an inkling of a genuine drama, a kind of intelligible nature that might explain everything. But just what is this nature?<sup>18</sup>

This statement applies to all of Faulkner's fiction, of course, but it is particularly relevant to the Snopes

trilogy. Faulkner's bystander figures are cast in the role of detectives plumbing the depths of motive, exploring the why of others' actions. Part of Ratliff's task is discover "what makes Flem tick," to understand the motivations of his actions. But Flem is essentially inscrutable --- we never have an insight into his mind; he has no dramatic monologues in Faulkner's portrayals of him. We, the readers, know only as much about Flem Snopes as Ratliff does. As Warren Beck has shown, Ratliff's concern is an "inquiring into the mysteries of personality and behaviour with insistent curiosity yet with recognition of the enigmatic."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Faulkner's description of Flem Snopes consists always of a very limited number of characteristics which are repeated like a leitmotif throughout the novel. Flem is a chewing jaw and a small bow tie, "a tiny, viciously depthless cryptically balanced splash like an enigmatic punctuation symbol against the expanse of white shirt" (58, my italics). Flem's characterization is purposely depthless **because** we can never plumb his depths; he remains enigmatic because he refuses ever to allow anyone to know his innermost thoughts.

This use of leitmotif is a characteristic (and a device) common with Faulkner's characters; Joe Christmas

of Light in August is similarly described in very limited terms: a sneer, a drooping cigarette, and a cocked hat. The technique is very closely connected to Faulkner's use of the bystander, a figure whose job it is to attempt a reading of these enigmatic runes, to penetrate the surface of personality. His failure is inevitable, for, whether it be the mysterious story of Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!, the exciting life of the aviators in Pylon, or the personality of Flem Snopes in the Trilogy, the nature of this reality remains unknowable.

More particularly, in each of the four novels discussed in this chapter, the presence of the bystander creates an ironic duality between the reality of the participants' emotions and the reality of the witnesses' reactions and interpretations. The comments of the bystanders provide a counterpoint to the dominant mood of the novel as a whole as in Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris, or the positions, physically and structurally, of the bystanders represent stances ironically related to those of the central characters. This is, to some degree, true of all the bystander figures in Faulkner's fiction. They have a role as limited characters rather than as commentative voices or authorial spokesmen. What Cleanth Brooks says about Ratliff in The Hamlet is true of the other

bystanders in Faulkner's fiction as well:

The author relishes Ratliff and admires him, but he is not content to see Frenchman's Bend through Ratliff's eyes; the author's vision of Frenchman's Bend includes the figure of Ratliff himself.<sup>20</sup>



### Footnotes

- 1 Millgate, p. 66.
- 2 Brooks, p. 54.
- 3 John Lewis Longley, Jr., The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 60.
- 4 William Faulkner, Light in August (1932; rpt. New York: Random House, 1968), p. 437. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 5 William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (1942; rpt. New York: Random House, 1955), p. 59. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 6 Volpe, p. 235.
- 7 Volpe, p. 315.
- 8 James Gray Watson, The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1968), p. 23.
- 9 William Faulkner, The Hamlet (1940; rpt. New York: Random House, 1962), p. 13. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 10 Longley, p. 63.
- 11 Millgate, p. 199.
- 12 Florence Leaver, "The Structure of The Hamlet," Twentieth Century Literature, 1 (July 1955), 77.
- 13 Leaver, p. 84.
- 14 Vickery, p. 174.
- 15 Cleanth Brooks has analyzed the complexities of this business deal, showing how Ratliff comes out ahead. See Brooks, pp. 402-406.
- 16 James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-62 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 224.

- 17 Watson, p. 73.
- 18 Sartre, Literary and Philosophical Essays, p. 76.
- 19 Warren Beck, Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy  
(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 24.
- 20 Brooks, p. 172.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE YOUTH AS BYSTANDER

Faulkner's concern with the figure of the bystander manifests itself often as a consideration of the child's reaction to his society. Repeatedly, he portrays innocence confronting experience, youth coming to terms with a world of imperfections and injustice. In a previous chapter, we saw an example of such a confrontation in the Compson children's reaction to Damuddy's death in The Sound and the Fury. The pattern is prevalent in Faulkner, for the figure of the youth experiencing reality provides him not with an unbiased bystander, but with a fresh vision which leads the reader, himself unfamiliar with the Southern milieu, into a new world.

Again, critics have made the error of treating Faulkner's bystanders, in this case his youths, as representatives of the author within the novel. This has led, as in the case of The Unvanquished (1938), to mistaken interpretations of the book. In his discussion of this inter-related series of short stories, for instance, Melvin Backman dismisses The Unvanquished as "sentimental, superficial, and stereotyped."<sup>1</sup> Backman then goes on to say that with "Odor of Verbena," the culminating story in which Faulkner presents a strong criticism of Southern morals and standards, the artist breaks through the

Southern again. Similarly, William Van O'Connor refers to the book's "slick magazine stereotypes"<sup>2</sup> and again goes on to exempt the final story. Cleanth Brooks, however, suggests that the judgments of the conclusion are implicit in the earlier stories.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I will attempt to show that the sequence of stories comprises a thorough examination of point of view linked with a presentation of the degradation of the three people who stand at the centre of the novel: John Sartoris, Rosa Millard, and Drusilla. Faulkner presents a romantic vision of war only to suggest its inadequacy; he erects the stereotypes to show what lies behind them; he portrays a sentimental Southern morality in action to indicate its fatal inadequacy.

On the first page of the book, Faulkner presents an image suggesting the dichotomy between the myth Bayard loves and the reality he does not yet recognize. Bayard and Ringo work furiously on a miniature of Vicksburg they have built, trying vainly to keep their imitation Mississippi full of water:

we ran, panting and interminable, with the leaking bucket between wellhouse and battle-field, the two of us needing first to join forces and spend ourselves against a common enemy, time, before we could engender between us and hold intact the pattern of recapitulant mimic furious victory like a cloth, a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom.<sup>4</sup>

But into their play kingdom steps reality in the form of Loosh, who sweeps their chip castle away with the words: "There's your Vicksburg" (5). With the fall of Vicksburg, Bayard's father returns to Mississippi surrounded by a sense of grandeur, in the boy's imagination. An older Bayard, telling the story, realizes: "He was not big; it was just the things he did, that we knew he was doing, had been doing in Virginia and Tennessee, that made him seem big to us" (10). His size is "the illusion of height and size which he wore for us at least" (11). Bayard smells an odor associated with his father,

that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now: know now to have been only the will to endure, a sardonic and even humorous declining of self-delusion which is not even kin to that optimism which believes that that which is about to happen to us can possibly be the worst which we can suffer.  
(11)

"Know better now": these three words are the key to understanding the opening stories of The Unvanquished. We are constantly made aware of the two perceptions focussed upon the action, that of the young innocent bystander with his romantic visions of war and his father, and the older, disillusioned narrator recalling what he thought. In "Raid", when Bayard and Ringo learn of the

locomotive chase, this dual sense of romantic invention and apprehended reality which informs the book is epitomized:

So we knew a war existed . . . . Yet we had no proof of it. In fact, we had even less than no proof: we had had thrust into our faces the very shabby and unavoidable obverse of proof, who had seen Father (and the other men too) return home, afoot like tramps or on crowbait horses, in faded and patched (and at times obviously stolen) clothing, preceded by no flags nor drums and followed not even by two men to keep step with one another, in coats bearing no glitter of golden braid and with scabbards in which no sword reposed, actually almost sneaking home to spend two or three or seven days performing actions not only without glory . . . and in which they had no skill but the very necessity for which, returning, they bore no proof -- actions in the very clumsy performance of which Father's whole presence seemed (to us, Ringo and me) to emanate a kind of humility and apology, as if he were saying, "Believe me, boys; take my word for it: there's more to it than this, no matter what it looks like. I can't prove it, so you'll just have to believe me." And then to have it happen, where we could have been there to see it, and were not: and this no poste and riposte of sweat-reeking cavalry which all war-telling is full of, no galloping thunder of guns to wheel up and unlimber and crash and crash into the lurid grime-glare of their own demon-served inferno which even children would recognize, no ragged lines of gaunt and shrill-yelling infantry beneath a tattered flag which is a very part of that child's make-believe. (107-108)

The story of the locomotive is completely unlike Bayard's romantic visions of traditional cavalry conflict, and the sight of his father and the others returning home "like tramps" is strangely troubling to him. Like Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (written only five years earlier in 1929), The Unvanquished is a criticism of traditional romantic conceptions of war. War destroys morally as well as physically; John Sartoris, Drusilla, and Rosa Millard each degenerate when confronted by its horror.

In "Ambuscade," Faulkner presents the boy's vision of his father as a Southern hero, tempered however by the older Bayard's ironic awareness. But John Sartoris has been turned into a creature of war and by the time we reach "An Odor of Verbena," we find Bayard describing him in the following terms:

he sat half-turned from the table, a little paunchy now though not much, a little grizzled too in the hair though his beard was as strong as ever, with that spurious forensic air of lawyers and the intolerant eyes which in the last two years had acquired that transparent film which the eyes of carnivorous animals have and from behind which they look at a world which no ruminant ever sees, perhaps dares to see, which I have seen before on the eyes of men who have killed so much that never again as long as they live will they ever be alone. (265-266)

Bayard now sees the intolerant eyes of a carnivore where

before he had seen only an heroic father. John Sartoris too realizes what he has become, claiming he "acted as the land and the time demanded" (266), and he decides as an act of moral expiation to face his enemy unarmed. But the pattern which he helped to establish cannot be ignored, and John Sartoris is killed by Redmond, his ex-partner. As we shall see later, it is Bayard's dilemma to attempt to escape this fixed pattern of revenge and retribution which his society imposes upon him.

Drusilla, his father's second wife, attempts to force him into that fatality more than anyone. She is the second person in the novel who is destroyed without being killed by the Civil War. Her femininity is drained from her by the exigencies of wartime and her vision of the heroic code, leaving her a cold and inhuman shell. Early in the book, she informs Bayard that she has quit sleeping and Bayard, when he looks at her, sees "her head with the short jagged hair like she had cut it herself without bothering about a mirror, and her neck that had got thin and hard like her hands since Granny and I were here before" (114). By the time of John Sartoris' death, she has become "the Greek amphora priestess of a succinct and formal violence" (252). She still seems to exist at the time of the Civil War, "in that last year of it while



she had ridden in man's clothes and with her hair cut short like any other member of Father's troop" (253). She asserts the primacy of the dream over human life, for, to Drusilla, a life is an unimportant thing when weighed against the glory of the romantic imagination:

A dream is not a very safe thing to be near, Bayard. I know. I had 'one once. It's like a loaded pistol with a hair trigger: if it stays alive long enough, somebody is going to be hurt. But if it's a good dream, it's worth it. There are not many dreams in the world, but there are a lot of human lives. And one human life or two dozen--- (257)

When she urges upon Bayard the pistols which she intends he **shall** use against his father's killer, her fusion of the symbols of life and sexuality with the instruments of death provides a shocking illustration of her perversion:

"Oh you will thank me, you will remember me who put into your hands what they say is an attribute only of God's, who took what belongs to heaven and gave it to you. Do you feel them? the long true barrels true as justice, the triggers (you have fired them) quick as retribution, the two of them slender and invincible and fatal as the physical shape of love?" (273)

Like Drusilla and John Sartoris, Rosa Millard, who is the moral center of Bayard's childhood, is also corrupted by the war. She finds the moral principles

she has guarded so fiercely compromised by the necessities of life before and during the occupation of the South. Bayard and Ringo hide beneath her skirts from a Yankee patrol they have fired upon and as they cower there, Bayard thinks

how Granny had never whipped us for anything in our lives except lying, and that even when it wasn't even a told lie, but just keeping quiet, how she would whip us first, and then make us kneel down and kneel down with us herself and ask the Lord to forgive us. (32)

But to save the two boys, she lies to the Yankees, and when Bayard points out to her that she has done so,

"I know it," she said. She moved. "Help me up." She got out of the chair, holding to us. We didn't know what she was trying to do. We just stood there while she held to us and to the chair and let herself down to her knees beside it. It was Ringo that knelt first. Then I knelt, too, while she asked the Lord to forgive her for telling the lie. (39)

In "Retreat," the next story in the book, another of Granny's strictures breaks down, her soap-inforced rule against swearing. Driven to desperation by the Yankee occupation and the Negro exodus, she joins her two boys in cursing them:

"The bastuds, Granny!" I said. "The bastuds!" Then we were all three saying it -- Granny and me and Ringo, saying it together: "The bastuds!" we cried. "The bastuds! the bastuds!" (86)

These are, however, rather minor and understandable deviations from her moral code. But in the next two stories we see a much more serious corruption of her principles occur, one that leads to her death. Taking advantage of a Yankee quartermaster's mistake, she and the boys bilk the Union Army out of several hundred mules, which she then resells to support herself and her neighbours. Initially, Granny attempts to justify her actions, saying: "I tried to tell them better. You and Ringo heard me. It's the hand of God" (128). But Ringo, who moves more and more into a position of command, uses the incorrect requisition paper to obtain supplies and mules and asks her ironically: "Hah! . . . Whose hand was that?" (130) Even when she makes her confession to God, however, she sounds more like an advocate in court than a penitent:

"I have sinned. I have stolen, and I have borne false witness against my neighbour, though that neighbour was an enemy of my country. And more than that, I have caused these children to sin. I hereby take their sins upon my conscience . . . . But I did not sin for gain or for greed . . . . I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after the first time, I sinned for more than justice: I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures . . . ." (167)

As Granny continues in her career of beating the Yankees, she is forced to consort with criminals like Ab Snopes and Grumby; her moral system degenerates and she is finally destroyed by her own actions. After Bayard and Ringo have avenged her death by the murder of Grumby, Ringo points the moral: "It wasn't him or Ab Snopes either that kilt her . . . . It was them mules. That first batch of mules we got for nothing" (211).

Caught up in a sequence of events they have helped to initiate but cannot control, all three people, Drusilla, Rosa Millard, and John Sartoris, are, in one sense or another, destroyed by them. This is the action Bayard watches helplessly and this is the fatality from which he seeks to escape in the final story of the volume, "The Odor of Verbena." His problem is complicated by the fact that, as soon as he becomes an actor in this drama, he too is provided with an audience which watches his every move. In "Skirmish at Sartoris," an earlier story in the book, we see this community opinion brought to bear upon Drusilla with ultimate success, as she is forced into a traditional role against her will by the women of Jefferson. Aunt Louisa, Drusilla's mother, marshalls public opinion to force a marriage between her daughter and John Sartoris:

Aunt Louisa didn't doubt, only she did hope and pray that Mrs. Compson had been spared the sight of her own daughter if Mrs. Compson had one flouting and outraging all Southern principles of purity and womanhood that our husbands had died for . . . . (222)

This parody of Southern sentiments is comic largely because it is seen through the wondering eyes of Bayard, who, as a boy, doesn't understand the traditional values his community embraces: "Because I was just fifteen; I still didn't know what it was all about" (225).

But in the later story, the influence the community exerts, as bystander, upon the action it witnesses is very nearly deadly. When Bayard arrives at his home after learning of his father's murder, he sees

Wyatt and the others of Father's old troop -- and I had forgot they would be there. I had forgot that they would be there; I remember how I thought, since I was tired and spent with strain, Now it will have to begin tonight. I won't even have until tomorrow in which to begin to resist. (267)

Bayard sees the watching men gathered "with that curious vulture-like formality which Southern men assume in such situations" (267). The image of the vulture is apt, for these men fully expect to witness a death and indeed even desire it. Bayard suddenly feels that he is acting out a dramatic scene with the men as a Greek chorus:

I seemed to be still in the saddle and to watch myself enter the scene which she Drusilla had postulated like another actor while in the background

for chorus Wyatt and the others stood with the unctuous formality which the Southern man shows in the presence of death . . . . (269)

The influence of these watchers is strong upon Bayard, for, as he tells Aunt Jenny in explaining his ride to the town to confront Redmond, "you see, I want to be thought well of" (280). As he enters the town, Bayard is conscious of the eyes upon him and he thinks: "If I could only be invisible until I reach the stairs to his office and begin to mount" (283). But he cannot escape the force of public opinion. Aunt Jenny advises him to ignore this opinion, but Bayard replies that there is more to it than that; as a creature of his society, he carries within himself the attitudes of the society which has fostered him:

"Don't let it be Drusilla, a poor hysterical young woman. And don't let it be him, Bayard, because he's dead now. And don't let it be George Wyatt and those others who will be waiting for you tomorrow morning. I know you are not afraid."

"But what good will that do?" I said.

"What good will that do? . . . I must live with myself, you see."

"Then it's not just Drusilla? Not just him? Not just George Wyatt and Jefferson?"

"No," I said. (276)

Bayard's task is to satisfy the demands of this public opinion, which are, in part, demands of his own conscience, while at the same time putting an end to the progression of violence, the latest victim of which has been his own father. His solution is to face Redmond, but unarmed, a

solution his father tried before him. But his father has been trapped too firmly in the pattern of violence he has initiated; however, it is not too late for Bayard, in spite of the fact that he has earlier (in contrast to this incident) taken a bloody revenge upon Grumby, his grandmother's murderer. Wyatt, Jefferson's representative, is initially outraged to find that Bayard does not intend to kill Redmond, but he, and the town with him, are finally satisfied with Bayard's substitution for violence, moral courage. As Bayard leaves Redmond's office, the men salute him with raised hats, the community's stamp of approval and respect. He escapes the expectations of the choric observers but only in a limited sense; the bystanders exert a powerful influence upon Bayard by the very act of watching.

The Unvanquished delineates, in a series of short stories, the emotional development of a youthful bystander, Bayard Sartoris, in reaction to the destruction of his father, his grandmother, and his cousin. Their fates are important largely because of the impact they have upon the perceiving consciousness of the innocent bystander whose innocence is destroyed by the actions of his relations. Faced with a newly acquired awareness of his society's limitations, Bayard is forced to act on

his own, largely because of the pressure of that society's presence as collective bystander. He can no longer function simply as a bystander himself.

In several of his short stories Faulkner uses a similar device -- the youth as bystander -- in rather different ways. In "My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and The Battle of Harrykin Creek," a story which is closely connected by subject to The Unvanquished, he again uses the innocent vision of Bayard Sartoris as a means of satirizing the old tradition of the South. The tone of this story is close to that of "Skirmish at Sartoris," but the hints of darker occurrences which frequent The Unvanquished are here absent. Bayard's unromantic report of the romantic clap-trap spoken by Cousin Philip and Cousin Melisandra emphasizes the ludicrous quality of their posturings. The manner of the lovers' meeting, with its embarrassment, is constantly recalled for Melisandra by her lover's name: Lieutenant Philip St-Just Backhouse. Cousin Philip wanders aimlessly about with what Bayard calls "that beautiful-girl look in his face."<sup>5</sup> When Bayard suggests that the logical solution to their dilemma is for Philip to change his name, Rosa Millard says:

"That's the first sensible thing I've heard said on this place since eleven o'clock this morning. . . . It's so sensible and simple that I reckon only a child could have thought of it." (682)



But Cousin Philip explains that the name is not his to change, but that of a proud family whose honour he must uphold. In this juxtaposition of attitudes, Bayard's tradition-free common sense and Philip's tradition-bound allegiances, we have the essence of the story. The satire of Cousin Melisandra's romantic posturings while her lover is away in the army bear a strong resemblance to Huck Finn's description of the Grangerford's pictures. Bayard thinks:

if I was General Forrest I would go back and get Cousin Philip and make him sit in the library until about suppertime while Cousin Melisandra played the dulcimer and sang. Then he could take Cousin Philip on back and then he could finish the war without worrying. (694-95)

The source of Cousin Melisandra's behaviour is obvious when Bayard refers to her reading habits:

When Cousin Melisandra first came she tried to read aloud to Ringo and me. It wasn't much. That is, what she insisted on reading to us wasn't so bad, even if it was mostly about ladies looking out windows and playing on something (maybe they were dulcimers too) while somebody else was off somewhere fighting. It was the way she read it. (695)

One recalls the unsympathetic vision of young Robert Saunders in Soldier's Pay, but here the effect is quite different. In the novel, we see the romantic, doomed

protagonists directly and sympathize with them, so that Robert's vision strikes us as just another example of Charlestown's lack of understanding. But in this short story, we have only Bayard's report and, consequently, we feel the truth of his perceptions.

In "Barn Burning," Faulkner again renders the youth as bystander to an action. In this story, however, the consciousness of the youthful witness plays a much larger role than in "My Grandmother Millard" or Soldier's Pay, in which the figure of the youth is largely a technical device, a created narrative voice used to contrast with the subject of the fiction. Sartoris Snopes of "Barn Burning" is closer to the Bayard of The Unvanquished in that he shows development; indeed, the changing awareness of the youth in these two stories becomes central rather than secondary to the artist's concern. We see the undermining of the boy's confidence in his father as Ab Snopes continues on his career of arson. The boy is caught between two forces, his need to respect his father and his social morality:

He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (our enemy he thought in despair; ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!)<sup>o</sup>

The tension is constantly in the boy's mind as he

helplessly witnesses the outrages his father perpetrates; the boy hopes futilely:

Maybe it will all add up and balance  
and vanish -- corn, rug, fire; the  
terror and the grief, the being pulled  
two ways like between two teams of  
horses -- gone, done with for ever  
and ever. (17)

Images **expressing** the boy's feeling of hovering between two worlds, two forces, proliferate in the story; he is aware of "the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events" (9). Indeed, the story ends with such an image, the picture of the spring dawn which represents the middle point in the boy's development:

He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing -- the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back. (25)

Because he wishes to capture this sense of development from one world into another, Faulkner presents his by-stander from the point of view of the omniscient narrator who can slip in and out of his characters' consciousness. In The Unvanquished, Faulkner solved a similar problem by

rendering the story in steps, one discrete story after another, thereby allowing both a viewer's awareness and a sense of change within that awareness.

In "Uncle Willy," Faulkner uses the youth as bystander in a very different manner; the innocence of the youthful narrator allows him to see truths beyond the comprehension of the adults of Jefferson. As a fervent advocate for the old druggist who is destroyed by the town, the boy takes on the meddling adults who drive Uncle Willy to destruction. He says:

Uncle Willy was the finest man I ever knew, because even women couldn't beat him, because in spite of them he wound up his life getting fun out of being alive and he died doing the thing that was the most fun of all because I was there to help him. And that's something that most men and even most women too don't get to do, not even the women that call meddling with other folks' lives fun.<sup>7</sup>

We have seen the town and the choric voice satirized before in novels like Soldier's Pay and As I Lay Dying, but this story is by far Faulkner's most bitter attack on the destructive power of community opinion. In an essay called "On Privacy," Faulkner has left us a clear expression of his attitude on this subject; he attacks the constant violation of the individual's privacy in America, saying "one man's liberty must stop at exactly

the point where the next one's begins."<sup>8</sup> This story is a good fictional representation of that attitude. Like Darl Bundren in As I Lay Dying, with whom he is explicitly compared, Uncle Willy Christian is sacrificed to the principles of Jefferson's pharasaical society:

Uncle Willy was sitting by Reverend  
Schultz looking littler than ever,  
and I thought about one day last  
summer when they took a country man  
named Bundren to the asylum at Jack-  
son but he wasn't too crazy not to know  
where he was going. (228)

Uncle Willy, whose last name is Christian, is like "one of those sheep they would sacrifice back in the Bible" (231). Determined to stop him from enjoying himself with drugs, women, liquor, or anything else he might like, the women of the town, led by the ironically named Mrs. Merridew, send him to the asylum and put him through untold agonies, all in the name of "real Christianity" (232). Now and then, of course, the pious facade slips, as when Mrs. Merridew curses the whore Uncle Willy married; the boy observes drily:

so maybe the church can go just so  
far and maybe the folks that are in  
it are the ones that know the best  
or are entitled to say when to dis-  
connect religion for a minute or two.  
(236)

The boy is seldom this calm in his indictment of the town; he claims that he runs away with Uncle Willy because "if

I wasn't there it would be just him against all the old terrified and timid clinging to dull and rule-ridden breathing which Jefferson was to him" (239). Uncle Willy finally dies in the crash of his aeroplane, but, for the boy, the true disciple, he will outlast the mob who crucified him:

It was like I knew even then that, no matter what might happen to him, he wouldn't ever die and I thought that if I could just learn to live like he lived, no matter what might happen to me I wouldn't ever die either. (242)

The boy learns Willy's lesson of happiness, but he is unable to communicate it to others, to explain what he has learned from Uncle Willy Christian: "And now they will never understand, not ~~even~~ Papa, and there is only me to try to tell them and how can I ever tell them, and make them understand? How can I?" (247)

In each of these three short stories, the vision of the youthful bystander clashes with the traditional morality and actions of his society. In "My Grandmother Millard", Bayard's uncomprehending but commonsense view of the extravagant romanticism of his cousins reveals the ludicrous nature of Southern courtly love. Similarly, Sarty Snopes' innate sense of what is right conflicts with his family's insistence upon the sanctity of blood ties. Again, the youthful bystander in "Uncle Willy"

because of his youthful sympathy with Willy Christian's ethic of delight, perceives the predominant morality of the town as harsh and hypocritical. In each case, Faulkner seems to imply that the innocence and inexperience of his youthful narrator provides a vision which is superior to that of his society. In Go Down, Moses, Faulkner treated this theme in a more complex manner.

The great bulk of criticism on Go Down, Moses has focussed upon "The Bear" with only occasional references to the other stories in the volume, but an examination of the book in terms of the bystander can show the close relationship of this long story to the unified sequence. The book can be divided into two groups of stories, the plantation stories, which concentrate on the white man's relationship with the Negro, and the hunting stories, which reveal his relationship to the land. That this division seems arbitrary to some extent suggests the unity of these two concerns, because the white man, in his destruction of the wilderness, his rape of nature, has compounded his sin by using as his tool the enslaved black man. Therefore Ike McCaslin's attempt to live in harmony with the wilderness also involves his attempt to renounce the heritage of evil descending from his grandfather's miscegenation.

Ike McCaslin is the bystander of the four hunting stories, "Was," "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn." The first story, indeed, occurs long before his birth and yet its importance for him involves him as a bystander to its action. In both "The Old People" and "The Bear", although Ike is one of the hunters, he seems incapable of acting, and his role becomes that of a witness, profoundly influenced by the implications of the events he watches. His decision, in Section Four of "The Bear," to renounce his heritage and its concomitant guilt makes him a perpetual bystander to the passions of life, and in "Delta Autumn," as an old man, he is the helpless witness of events he would prefer not to see. Although in the last two pieces mentioned Ike is no longer the youth he was in the earlier stories, it seems appropriate to deal with him even as an old man. As an adult he is the product of those experiences he witnessed as a youth, just as Bayard Sartoris of The Unvanquished is. Moreover, it will be argued below that Ike's inability to develop beyond the stage of youthful and passive bystander is his problem as a man.

Ike attempts, unsuccessfully, in these four stories to escape the burden of guilt which he, as a white man and, even more, as old Carothers McCaslin's descendant,



bears. In the other stories in the volume, Roth Edmonds is similarly unsuccessful in grappling with the white-black problem which Ike hopes to escape. In this sense, Roth and Ike form the duality of human consciousness and its approach to original or inherited sin: Ike's attempted escape and denial of his heritage contrasts with Roth's acceptance and involvement. In a previous chapter, I discussed the "plantation" stories; here I will show how Ike's role as bystander structures and unifies the "hunting" sequence.

It may seem strange to include "Was" in the sequence for two reasons: it deals with the slave-plantation experience similarly described in "The Fire and the Hearth," "Pantaloons in Black," and "Go Down, Moses," and it uses as its viewing consciousness not Ike himself, but Cass Edmonds, the first representative of the family which supplants Ike as owner of Carothers McCaslin's plantation. But there are two reasons for its inclusion in the hunting sequence: it is presented as an action to which Ike is a bystander historically, and it is related in terms of a series of hunting metaphors which parallel it to the other hunting stories.

Although Ike appears nowhere in the action of "Was," he is involved in it by an introductory section

which suggests his relationship to the story:

Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike,' past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one

this was not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin, McCaslin

Edmonds . . . . .

not something he had participated in or even remembered except through and from his cousin McCaslin . . . out of the old time, the old days (3-4)

Like Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom!, Ike is a witness of a distant past in which he could hardly have participated, a witness because the emotional and moral impact of those previous actions upon him in the present are so strong. In all of these stories, Ike is influenced by his cultural past; **nowhere** is this truer than in his inheritance from old Sam Fathers, the half-Negro, half-Indian guide, who in his very presence embodies the history of the South. In "The Old People," for instance:

The boy would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin talking about the old days and the People whom he had not had time ever to know and so could not remember. . . . .

And as he talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. (171)

Imaginatively, the boy becomes the witness of events transmitted to him only through Sam Fathers, his spiritual father, who becomes "the mouthpiece of the past" (171). Later, in "The Bear," Faulkner describes Ike as a person who "even at almost eighty would never be able to distinguish certainly between what he had seen and what had been told to him" (291). Ike's imaginative awareness makes him the bystander of his race's past and heritage.

"Was" takes its place in the hunting sequence for another important reason; the attempt to recapture Tomey's Turl, the Negro slave, who repeatedly slips away to visit his woman on a nearby plantation, is rendered consistently in terms of the hunting of an animal. This bizarre use of metaphor underlines the inhumanity of the slavery system that makes such a chase possible, and it reveals an aspect of the horror which Ike, as a reluctant and post facto witness, attempts to absolve.

The story begins and ends with the furor created when the McCaslin's tame fox gets loose among their dogs and turns the house into a chaos in the resulting chase. In both cases, the boy's comment is: "It was a good race" (5,30). When we turn to the main business of the story, the pursuit of Tomey's Turl (in his own way a

tame fox), the description continues to rely on the metaphor of hunting. Here is the chase seen through Cass Edmond's eyes:

He waited until Uncle Buck had vanished into the woods. Then he went on. But Tomey's Turl saw him. He closed in too fast; maybe he was afraid he wouldn't be there in time to see him when he treed. It was the best race he had ever seen. (8)

The events are obviously regarded lightheartedly by the boy; indeed, the tone of the story throughout is comic. For Tomey's Turl, however, the outcome is more serious; the comic tone of the story is partly a result of distance. The hunting imagery, when viewed in terms of the total scheme of Go Down, Moses takes on a darker significance. Stanley Tick points out the immorality revealed in "Was":

To the boy, the chase is only an adventure; no social or moral consideration can be expected to occur to him. Yet the adults see the pursuit no differently; their interference with another human being, who is a negro, has for them no more significance than their dog's pursuit of the fox which opens and ends this section.<sup>9</sup>

One need only remember Roth Edmond's attitude to "does" in "Delta Autumn" to see that Faulkner uses the hunting terms consciously. For instance:

he never did know just when and where they jumped Tomey's Turl, whether he

flushed out of one of the cabins or not. Uncle Buck was away out in front on Black John and they hadn't even cast the dogs yet when Uncle Buck roared, "Come away! I godfrey, he broke cover then!" (14)

Another reason for the lightness of tone is that the actions are seen through the innocent vision of the double-youth narrator (similar to the Gowan-Charles duality in The Town). The serious pursuits of these adults are either bewildering or funny to a child untouched by the sexual urges of Tomey's Turl or Sophonsiba Beauchamp and as yet unconcerned by the implications of slavery. Miss Sophonsiba's stalking of Uncle Buck is presented in terms as humorous as those used to describe Tomey's Turl pursuit. When it seems that Uncle Buck has finally been caught, Hubert Beauchamp's comment is: "She's got you 'Filus, and you know it. You run a hard race and you run a good one, but you skun the hen-house one time too many" (23). Similarly, Cass's understanding of Miss Sophonsiba's elaborate romantic vocabulary makes it appear ludicrous:

Then Miss Sophonsiba said something about a bumblebee, but he couldn't remember that. It was too fast and there was too much of it, the earrings and the beads clashing and jingling like little trace chains on a toy mule trotting and the perfume stronger too, like the earrings and the beads

sprayed it out each time they moved.  
 . . . something about Uncle Buck was  
 a bee sipping from flower to flower  
 and not staying long anywhere and all  
 that stored sweetness to be wasted on  
 Uncle Buddy's desert air. (11)

In the same way as he used Bayard in "My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and The Battle of Harrykin Creek" to satirize adult behaviour, so Faulkner uses Cass's vision of Sophonsiba Beauchamp to make her appear ludicrous.

This comic sense disappears in "The Old People" and "The Bear," two stories in which Isaac McCaslin is himself now the bystander to the actions. Although certainly the most important character in either story, Ike is strangely passive and removed. His principal function seems to be to act as the consciousness upon which the implications of the stories' actions impact. Sam Fathers and Boon Hogganbeck, the central actors, are significant only in so far as they influence the boy who watches them. It is true that in "The Old People" the boy does act to slay his first deer, but that very act seems to place him as the novitiate whose role it is to watch the master. Ike is joined to Sam Fathers in a union consecrated by the blood of Ike's first deer, "joining him and the man forever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy's seventy years and then eighty years, long after the

man himself had entered the earth as chiefs and kings entered it" (165). The boy's role is not even as active as that of questioner: "The boy would never question him; Sam did not react to question. The boy would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin" (171). When the old buck, "grandfather," symbol of the wilderness itself, stands before him, Ike only watches with "the gun still partly aimed and one of the hammers still cocked" (184).

Indeed, this act of confrontation occurs three times in Go Down, Moses and, in each case, Ike remains strangely inactive. Standing before the mighty buck in "The Old People," he holds a cocked rifle, but he doesn't even try to shoot. In "The Bear," the boy's confrontation with Old Ben is similarly passive; he neglects his opportunity to shoot the fabled bear. Sam Fathers tells him, after Old Ben has disappeared into the **forest**, "You've done seed him twice now, with a gun in your hands . . . this time you couldn't have missed him" (212). The boy's reply is: "Neither could you. . . . You had the gun. Why didn't you shoot him?" (212) Finally, the boy confronts the rattlesnake in the last section of "The Bear," once more face to face with an exceptional animal.

The elevation of the head did not change  
as it began to glide away from him,

moving erect yet off the perpendicular as if the head and that elevated third were complete and all . . . going and then gone; he put the other foot down at last and didn't know it, standing with one hand raised as Sam had stood that afternoon six years ago when Sam led him into the wilderness and showed him and he ceased to be a child, speaking the old tongue which Sam had spoken that day without premeditation either: "Chief," he said: "Grandfather."  
(329-330)

In this final meeting, we can see the reason for Ike's previous passivity; the three animals, deer, bear, and snake, represent and symbolize the wilderness, nature, as a whole. Ike's reaction to each one is the breathless amazement of the novitiate before a particularly sacred shrine. Ike embodies the hunter as witness rather than destroyer, as appreciative bystander to a mysterious and life-giving order which his unrestrained activity would corrupt.

Richard E. Fisher, in "The Wilderness, the Commissary, and the Bedroom: Faulkner's Ike McCaslin as Hero in a Vacuum" has suggested that Ike's role in Go Down, Moses is a denial of the vicious self-assertion which has characterized the white man and, particularly, Ike's ancestor, Carothers McCaslin: "In terms of the story, his proper education and mode of life amount to recognizing and repudiating self-assertion."<sup>10</sup> This self-



assertion has involved not only the destruction of the wilderness but also the enslaving of the Negro; the white man has imposed his will upon the land and upon another race.

Fisher suggests further that Ike's ultimate failure arises from his lapse back to self-assertion. Thus his refusal to accept the black woman who is his relative in "Delta Autumn" stems, Fisher says, from an inability to carry through the perception he achieved in "The Bear" with the help of Sam Fathers. On the contrary, I believe that Ike's subsequent failure, far from being a result of renewed self-assertion, is, in fact, an inevitable concomitant of his initial decision to renounce self-assertion. The bitter irony of Go Down, Moses lies in the fact that Ike's recognition of his corrupted heritage leads not to an attempt to improve the situation, but to an escape into the wilderness. His renunciation of **his inheritance**, which is a flight from responsibility, is innate in Ike's character. His passivity, in other words, his habitual stance as bystander rather than participant, determines that his response to the evils of **his heritage** will be passive rather than active. In this sense, Faulkner's use of Ike as his register in the four hunting stories involves another brilliant fusion of theme

and technique. Receptive to impressions and perceptions, Ike nevertheless exhibits the stasis typical of a novel's perceiving intelligence; it is his job to be acted upon rather than to act.

Throughout "The Bear" Ike's stance as bystander renders him passive before the action he watches. Indeed, when he first enters the woods with the men: "It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth" (195). Old Ben is "the bear which had run in his listening and loomed in his dreams since before he could remember" (200). Ike's entire life has consisted of the novitiate's tranquil though passionate observation of this deified presence. When Lion appears, the one dog sufficient to bring Old Ben to bay, the boy seems again to be the spectator of the pageant:

It was like the last act on a set stage.  
It was the beginning of the end of  
something, he didn't know what except  
that he could not grieve. He would be  
humble and proud that he had been found  
worthy to be a part of it too or even  
just to see it too. (226)

Ike's role is "just to see it," but this is the most important role of all, for, as involved bystander, his reaction to the events is Faulkner's central concern.

In Section Four of "The Bear," the nature of Ike's renunciation is made clear. Ike is determined to

sever his association with the plantation of his grandfather, "that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery" (298). Ike believes that all earth, cultivated or wild, was made for all men to hold "Mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood" (257). The ledger which records the injustice and rapacity necessary to create the McCaslin plantation is, moreover, representative of a larger crime; it is "that chronicle which was the whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South "(293). In these terms, Ike's decision to renounce his tainted inheritance must be seen as commendable.

Yet that decision is as much escape as renunciation. Ike sees himself as a latter-day Isaac, determined to avoid the sacrificial altar of his ancestors' guilt; he calls himself:

-- an Isaac born into a later life  
than Abraham's and repudiating  
immolation: fatherless and there-  
fore safe declining the altar be-  
cause maybe this time the exasper-  
ated Hand might not supply the kid  
--' and McCaslin 'Escape:' and he  
'All right. Escape.' (283)

Ike confesses to his cousin: "I have got to because I have got myself to live with for the rest of my life and

all I want is peace to do it in" (288). Ike regards the forest in which he spends so much time as a refuge; it is described as "the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide himself" (318). He says to McCaslin, with satisfaction, "Sam Fathers set me free" (300).

Ike's escape is not so simple, however; his heritage is as much within him as external and, therefore, wherever he goes, he bears the old guilt bequeathed to him by Carothers McCaslin. Speaking about the black race, Ike is about to say "they are better," but he pauses significantly half way through his sentence:

it was not a pause, barely a falter even, possibly appreciable only to himself, as if he couldn't speak even to McCaslin, even to explain his repudiation, that which to him too, even in the act of escaping (and maybe this was the reality and the truth of his need to escape) was heresy: so that even in escaping he was taking with him more of that evil and unregenerate old man who could summon, because she was his property, a human being because she was old enough and female, to his widower's house and get a child on her and then dismiss her because she was of an inferior race. (294)

Ike can no more escape the problem of the McCaslin heritage than McCaslin Edmonds and his grandson Roth can come to terms with it in the "plantation stories" of Go Down, Moses.

The hint of failure suggested in Section Four becomes for Ike an overwhelming reality in "Delta Autumn." The problem of the ravaging of the land is everywhere evident in the opening pages of this short story. Ike sees "the territory in which game still existed drawing yearly inward as his life was drawing inward" (335). He sees the delta land of Mississippi, "the land across which there came now no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives" (341). At the conclusion of the story, Ike has a vision of the ruined land, "deswamped and denuded and derivered", and he thinks: "No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! . . . The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge" (364).

This inevitable encroachment upon the wilderness is paralleled by another intrusion into Ike's forest retreat. Into the hunting camp comes his nephew's mixed blood mistress, abandoned by Roth Edmonds in a re-enactment of the original sin committed by old Carothers McCaslin upon Tomasina. Confronted by the old heritage he had sought to escape, Ike despairingly adopts his habitual response, flight. He counsels the young woman to leave the South:

"That's right. Go back North. Marry:  
a man in your own race. That's the only  
salvation for you---for a while yet,

maybe a long while yet. We will have to wait. Marry a black man. You are young, handsome, almost white; you could find a black man who would see in you what it was you saw in him, who would ask nothing of you and expect less and get even still less than that, if it's revenge you want. Then you will forget all this, forget it ever happened." (363)

In effect, Ike counsels the young woman to adopt the same course he himself has followed, escape. Her withering reply is a fitting comment upon his suggestion: "Old man . . . have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (363). Ike's ultimate failure has been inherent in his limited success in renouncing his evil inheritance; his flight from responsibility involves a refusal to face either the reality he views or the reality of his own soul. Isaac McCaslin exemplifies the bankruptcy of the policy of non-involvement. The bystander is inextricably bound up in the events he views.

All the works discussed thus far in this chapter, The Unvanquished, Go Down, Moses, and the three short stories, describe children attempting to come to terms with their traditions. Seen through the eyes of innocence, their Southern heritages often appear either ludicrous or malevolent. Bayard Sartoris, "Sarty" Snopes, and Isaac McCaslin are all incapable, to one degree or

another, of accepting the social structures they discover simultaneously with the reader.

In several of his other works, however, Faulkner played interesting variations on this, one of his favourite themes, the innocent child as bystander. In two ironic short stories, "That Evening Sun" and "That Will Be Fine," the corruption which the ignorant (but hardly innocent) children view is matched by the evil of the viewers themselves. In The Reivers, a more sentimental mood prevails and the innocence of the witnessing child alters, to some extent, the nature of the flawed reality he refuses to accept.

Marvin Fisher, in "The World of Faulkner's Children," says that "children constitute a convenient embodiment of innocence and primitive simplicity, values which are in very direct contrast to the distorted values of the more knowing person or to the self-destructive values of the displaced individual who can fit into neither a primitive nor a 'civilized' society."<sup>11</sup> This may be a legitimate description of The Unvanquished or "Uncle Willy," but it hardly applies to either "That Evening Sun" or "That Will Be Fine," stories in which the corruption of adult society is paralleled by a corruption already present in the youthful witnesses.

In "That Evening Sun," the Compson children watch unfeelingly the torment suffered by Nancy, their Negro servant, as she waits for Jesus, her husband, to return and execute his revenge upon her for her repeated infidelity. They do not understand the nature of her fear, but one feels that, even if they did, they would hardly be concerned about her. They are completely absorbed by their own selfish concerns and sibling rivalries.

It is true that the adult society of "That Evening Sun" is portrayed as equally unfeeling and selfish. Nancy confronts the hypocritical Mr. Stovall with a demand of payment for her services and receives in reply brutal physical abuse:

they were taking her to jail and they passed Mr. Stovall. He was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church, and Nancy began to say:  
 "When you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent -- ". Mr. Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying, "When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since--" until Mr. Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel.<sup>12</sup>

When Nancy tries to commit suicide by hanging herself in her jail cell, the jailer who cuts her down and whips her is of the opinion that "it was cocaine and not whiskey, because no nigger would try to commit suicide unless he



was full of cocaine" (291). He apparently fails to interpret the signs of pregnancy, "her belly already swelling out a little, like a balloon" (292) as justifiable cause for her desperation. Again Nancy's fears meet with little sympathy from Mrs. Compson, her employer, who complains to her husband, "You'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home? . . . Is her safety more precious to you than mine?" (293) The white society which uses Nancy either as a servant or as a prostitute exhibits little concern for her welfare.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Compson children should reflect the callousness of their elders when Nancy appeals to them for help. Nancy calls them "little devils" (291) when they throw stones at her house to awaken her. When Mrs. Compson expresses the fear that the children might fall into the hands of Nancy's husband, Mr. Compson asks her: "What would he do with them, if he were unfortunate enough to have them?" (294) It is obvious that the adults have no illusion about the 'innocence' of the Compson children.

Quentin alone of the three children exhibits any perception and sympathy, but he is more disembodied narrative voice than actual character in the story. He seldom takes part in the discussion or arguments of Jason

and Caddy; his role is, rather, that of observer. For example, as he watches Nancy telling them a story, he is aware of her preoccupation with something else:

She talked like her eyes looked, like her eyes watching us and her voice talking to us did not belong to her. Like she was living somewhere else, waiting somewhere else, waiting somewhere else. She was outside the cabin. Her voice was inside and the shape of her, the Nancy that could stoop under a barbed wire fence with a bundle of clothes on her head as though without weight, like a balloon, was there. (302)

The perception involves considerable sensitivity, and Quentin, though limited by his childish intelligence, frequently is aware of something wrong.

Caddy and Jason, however, are so self-engrossed and insensitive to other's feelings that they are incapable of sensing Nancy's terror. Jason particularly is an objectionable little monster who shows every sign of growing into the Jason of The Sound and the Fury. As Nancy frets about the return of Jesus, her husband, Jason continually interrupts:

"How do you know he's back?" Dilsey said.  
 "You ain't seen him."  
 "Jesus is a nigger," Jason said.  
 "I can feel him," Nancy said. "I can feel him laying yonder in the ditch."  
 "Tonight?" Dilsey said. "Is he here tonight?"  
 "Dilsey's a nigger too," Jason said.  
 "You try to eat something," Dilsey said.  
 "I dont want nothing," Nancy said.  
 "I aint a nigger," Jason said. (297)

Jason's insistence is more maddening for being irrelevant to the conversation of Dilsey and Nancy. Throughout the last half of the story Jason alternates between his customary threat of "I'll tell " and attempts to win concessions of chocolate cake, popcorn, or other special favours, while Caddy continually taunts him for his fear of the dark. Caddy similarly attempts to blackmail Nancy with threats of departure for home: "We ought to go," Caddy said. "Unless we have a lot of fun" (303). As the story ends, they are still bickering:

"I'm not a nigger," Jason said. . . .  
 "You're worse," Caddy said, "you are a tattletale. If something was to jump out, you'd be scairder than a nigger."  
 "I wouldn't," Jason said.  
 "You'd cry," Caddy said.  
 "Caddy," father said.  
 "I wouldn't!" Jason said.  
 "Scairy cat," Caddy said.  
 "Candace!" father said. (309)

Nancy has been left behind in the cabin, and the children continue with the spats they have carried on throughout the story. They have been interested in Nancy only as far as she could entertain them, and they return home completely indifferent to her fate.

In many ways the Compson children are typical in their selfishness and greed. But the boy who narrates "That Will Be Fine" is a truly frightening manifestation of childlike depravity. His only interest in life is the

accruing of as much money as it is possible for him to acquire. Rosie, the black servant, comments upon his inordinate greed: "You and money! If you ain't rich time you twenty-one, hit will be because the law done abolished money or done abolished you."<sup>13</sup> For him Christmas is simply a once a year opportunity for unlimited aggrandizement. For instance, his motive for buying his grandfather a present is completely selfish:

I thought how maybe I could go on downtown when I got through working for Uncle Rodney and buy a present for Grandpa with a dime out of the ten quarters and give it to him tomorrow and maybe, **because** nobody else had given him a present, Grandpa might give me a quarter too instead of a dime tomorrow, and that would be twenty-one quarters, except for the dime, and that would be fine sure enough. (278)

This type of financial speculation and his general acumen elicits his Uncle Rodney's grudging respect: "By God, some day you will be as good a business man as I am" (280).

Rodney's own master passion is a lust every bit as rampant as the boy's cupidity. The major irony of the story is that Rodney's schemes are viewed through the eyes of an ignorant though scarcely innocent boy, a boy whose own form of corruption is fully a match for his ne'er-do-well uncle's. The boy's narrative, as a result,

is a strange mixture of his own corrupt interests and a misunderstanding of his uncle's actions:

after a while Uncle Rodney would prize open Grandpa's desk and take a dose of **Grandpa's** tonic and maybe he would give me another quarter for helping him, like he did last Christmas, instead of just a nickel, like he would do last summer while he was visiting mamma and us and we were doing business with Mrs. Tucker. (266)

Because the boy's knowledge of his uncle's activities is even more extensive than his mother's and father's, their attempts to keep the scandal from him are finely ironic: "and then mamma said Louisa! Louisa! Remember Georgie! and that was me, and papa cussed too, hollering How in damnation do you expect to keep it from him? By hiding the newspapers?" (272) Although Georgie's understanding is limited by opportunity, one feels sure that he and his uncle are well matched soul-mates. The boy's ignorance of the story's culminating events, his taking of the pistol shots that kill Rodney for firecrackers, prevents him from realizing that his well-organized financial structure is falling about his ears, but it is clear at the end of the story, as the boy turns his attention to the capture of a possum, that Georgie's setback will be only temporary. For him the future "will be fine."

It would seem that, in "That Will Be Fine,"

Faulkner set out to create an ironic reversal of the traditional tale of corruption seen through the innocent and uncomprehending eyes of a child. Georgie is a product of the corruption he views, a child of his society; indeed, he seems almost an Uncle Rodney in embryo.

The Reivers, on the other hand, is a return to Faulkner's more customary use of the child narrator. Lucius Priest, now an old man with grandchildren, relates the story of his boyhood pursuit of adventure with Boon Hogganbeck and Ned McCaslin as they "borrow" his father's car to drive to Memphis. The novel's opening line is: "Grandfather said," and the rest of the book is dominated by this sense of retrospect; its events are seen as through the wrong end of a telescope, removed and somehow less frightening than they might otherwise be. A duality of vision controls the narrative as the perceptions and emotions of the young boy are filtered through the consciousness of the old man that boy became. Indeed, the novel's subtitle, "A Reminiscence," suggests the tone that will predominate. As Olga Vickery says, "the boy's innocence and the old man's wisdom serve to balance the wonder of discovery against the deeper note of mature reflection and comprehension."<sup>14</sup> Michael Millgate suggests that with this duality, "Faulkner manages to achieve both nostalgic

retrospect and narrative immediacy."<sup>15</sup>

This dual narrative voice, moreover, is used to express a nostalgic grief for the lost innocence, not only of Lucius the boy, but also of a civilization as a whole. The simplicity of life, the close (and often troubling) contact with nature, are now gone. For instance, Lucius as grandfather says of the modern era:

there are no seasons at all any more, with interiors artificially contrived at sixty degrees in summer and ninety degrees in winter, so that mossbacked recidivists like me must go outside in summer to escape the cold and in winter to escape the heat; including the automobiles also which once were more economic necessities but are now social ones, the moment already here when, if all the human race ever stops moving at the same instant, the surface of the earth will seize, solidify: There are too many of us.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that the very obstacles which Lucius and his companions faced in their journey to Memphis have now shrunk to insignificance; he is forced to tell his grandchildren: "Hurricane Creek is four miles from town; you have passed over it so fast all your life you probably dont even know its name. But people who crossed it then knew it" (68). For Lucius as grandfather, it seems that the modern era has removed all the mysteries he found so awe-inspiring.

Indeed, the novel as a whole can be regarded as

an old man's elegiac tribute to the sense of wonder and innocence of an earlier age. Nowhere is this wonder so evident as in the reaction of everyone in the novel to the **advent** of the motor-car. Lucius, Boon, Ned, even Mrs. Priest herself, all are excited by this new machine. Now, however, the automobile, because of its commonness, no longer elicits such awe. The boy's innocence is the innocence of an earlier day.

The most important statement Faulkner makes about this innocence in The Reivers is an affirmation of its power to alter and form the reality it views. Through the eyes of the grandfather, we view this innocence's loss; through the eyes of the boy we see its power to transform. Lucius brings into a Memphis whorehouse his attitudes about ladies and gentlemen, and the whores attempt to conform to his expectations.

That Lucius' views are representative of a society as a whole is made clear in the opening chapter of the novel, a chapter which seems to have no connection with the rest of the book. The story of Lucius' indiscretion with the delivery wagon and Boon's decision to revenge himself for comments Lucius has made about him reveals a society which lives by a number of unspoken but accepted standards. When Boon steals the gun of John



Powell, Mr. Priest's blacksmith, he forces into the open the fact that John has been carrying the gun despite the stable's rules, a fact known but ignored in a discreet manner by his employer. Boon makes the implicit agreement explicit, thus destroying it: "John and Father looked at each other for about ten seconds while the whole edifice of entendre-de-noblesse collapsed into dust. Though the noblesse, the oblige, still remained" (9). This society of gentlemen has formed Lucius' principles.

So when Lucius confronts Everbe, the first prostitute he has ever met, he of course treats her as a lady. Everbe's initial reaction is to protect Lucius' tender sensibilities from the true reality; she chastizes Miss Reba for cursing in front of the boy (136), and she puts on as respectable an appearance as possible. But when Otis, Everbe's nephew, "the demon child who debased her privacy" (157) as Lucius calls him, reveals to him the nature of Everbe's profession, Lucius must fight him in defense of a lady's good name. The result of his defense, however, is Everbe's decision to become the virtuous woman Lucius believes she is. She tells him:

"You fought because of me. I've had people -- drunks -- fighting over me, but you're the first one ever fought for me. I aint used to it, you see. That's why I dont know what to do about it. Except one thing. I can do that. I want to make you a promise. Back there in Arkansas it was my fault. But it wont be my fault any more." (160)

The preconceptions of the youthful bystander alter the nature of the reality he views.

At the same time, however, Lucius' perceiving intelligence is being changed by the experiences he is forced to undergo. Early in the book, Lucius redefines the innocence of children, in effect, denying it exists:

When grown people speak of the innocence of children, they don't really know what they mean. Pressed, they will go a step further and say, Well, ignorance then. The child is neither. There is no crime which a boy of eleven **has** not envisaged long ago. His only innocence is, he may not yet be old enough to desire the fruits of it, which is not innocence but appetite; his ignorance is, he does not know how to commit it, which is not ignorance but size. (46)

In the course of his travels, Lucius acquires just the information he lacks, whether he is ready for it or not. A good example of such experience is his first entry into the whorehouse:

at once I smelled something; the whole house smelled that way. I had never smelled it before. I didn't dislike it; I was just surprised. I mean, as soon as I smelled it, it was like a smell I had been waiting all my life to smell. (99)

At times, Lucius protests the rapidity with which experience is being forced upon him; he says: "I was having to learn too much too fast, unassisted; I had nowhere to put it, no receptacle, pigeonhole prepared yet to accept it without pain and lacerations" (155). Suddenly, he

realizes he is unable to return home: "Because I couldn't now. It was too late. Maybe yesterday, while I was still a child, but not now. I knew too much, had seen too much. I was a child no longer now; innocence and childhood were forever lost, forever gone from me" (175). Like the other youthful bystanders, part of Lucius' reaction to the experiences he witnesses is an alteration of his own personality, for the experiences of a child are themselves the process of maturation.

Lucius does return to Jefferson, however, and he is amazed to find it unchanged:

I thought It hasn't even changed.  
 Because it should have. It should  
 have been altered, even if only a  
 little. I dont mean it should have  
 changed of itself, but that I,  
 bringing back to it what the last  
 four days must have changed in me,  
 should have altered it. I mean, if  
 those four days -- the lying and  
 deceiving and tricking and decisions  
 and indecisions, and the things I  
 had done and seen and heard and learned  
 that Mother and Father wouldn't have  
 let me do and see and hear and learn  
 -- the things that I had had to learn  
 that I wasn't even ready for yet, had  
 nowhere to store them nor even any-  
 where to lay them down; if all that  
 had changed nothing, was the same  
 as if it had never been -- nothing  
 smaller or larger or older or wiser  
 or more pitying -- then something  
 had been wasted, thrown away, spent  
 for nothing. (299-300)

Lucius expects, in return for his spent innocence, a

changed external reality, believing that a subjective change alters the object viewed. But the important changes he soon realizes, are the changes in relationships and within the individual himself. When he and his father face one another in the cellar in the ritual of punishment, they both realize the difference.

So here we were at last, where it had taken me four days of dodging and scabbling and scurrying to get to; and it was wrong, and Father and I both knew it. I mean, if after all the lying and deceiving and disobeying and conniving I had done, all he could do about it was to whip me, then Father was not good enough for me. And if all that I had done was balanced by no more than that shaving strap, then both of us were debased. (301)

Lucius' new maturity, the result of his transgressions, demands that his punishment be fitting a man, more, a gentleman. His punishment, according to his grandfather, is an internal one; to bear the responsibility for his sins without the benefit of absolution. He must live with his guilt, a fate more terrible to Lucius than any shaving strap; he protests to his grandfather:

"Live with it? You mean, forever? For the rest of my life? Not ever to get rid of it? Never? I cant. Dont you see I cant?"  
 "Yes you can," he said. "You will. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences." (302)

Lucius learns the distinction between appearance and reality, "that your outside is just what you live in, sleep in, and has little connection with who you are and even less with what you do" (304). The importance of the actions revealed in The Reivers is their impact upon the viewing consciousness of the youthful bystander.

In The Unvanquished and Go Down, Moses, as well, Faulkner has filtered the actions of his stories through the inexperienced perceptions of the youthful bystander. The youth's perceptions help to define the events perceived, but the impact of those events upon the child's innocence modifies the youthful bystander himself. Bayard Sartoris, Ike McCaslin, and Lucius Priest develop as a result of the events they perceive. In the short stories discussed in this chapter, Faulkner attempted variations upon this traditional use of the youth as register. Most important, the use of the young bystander emphasizes the reciprocating effect of perception and experience upon one another. In subsequent chapters, we will see how Faulkner uses the adult spectator in a similar fashion.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Backman, p. 180.
- <sup>2</sup> William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 100.
- <sup>3</sup> Brooks, p. 84.
- <sup>4</sup> William Faulkner, The Unvanquished (1938; rpt. New York: Random House, 1965), p. 4. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>5</sup> Collected Stories, p. 680. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>6</sup> Collected Stories, p. 3. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>7</sup> Collected Stories, p. 225. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>8</sup> James B. Meriwether, ed., Essays, Speeches and Public Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 66.
- <sup>9</sup> Stanley Tick, "The Unity of Go Down, Moses," Twentieth Century Literature, 8 (July 1962), 72.
- <sup>10</sup> Richard E. Fisher, "The Wilderness, the Commissary, and the Bedroom: Faulkner's Ike McCaslin as Hero in a Vacuum," English Studies, 44 (February 1963), 26.
- <sup>11</sup> Marvin Fisher, "The World of Faulkner's Children," University of Kansas City Review, 27 (October 1960), 14.
- <sup>12</sup> Collected Stories, p. 291. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>13</sup> Collected Stories, p. 265. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>14</sup> Vickery, p. 228.
- <sup>15</sup> Millgate, p. 256.

<sup>16</sup> William Faulkner, The Reivers (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 193. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SANCTUARY: BLUEPRINT FOR GAVIN STEVENS

In the previous chapter I showed how Faulkner uses the perceiving intelligence of the youth as bystander to comment upon the experiences which occur around him. In most cases considered, the innocence and naivete of the youthful witness help to define the corruption or inadequacies of the society or tradition with which the youth must come to terms. Just as frequently, Faulkner uses the figure of the naive intellectual as bystander to achieve the same effects. Inexperienced in spite of his years, this type is particularly child-like in his reactions to the actions of more worldly protagonists. The best example of the innocent intellectual in Faulkner's fiction is, of course, Gavin Stevens; in subsequent chapters I will examine closely his development as a character and as a literary device.

Earlier in his literary career, however, Faulkner used a character who seems, in many ways, to be the prototype for Gavin Stevens. This is Horace Benbow, the lawyer in Sanctuary. Like Stevens, he is middle-aged, inexperienced in the evil of life, talkative, ineffectual, well-educated, and frightened of women. Cleanth Brooks says of him,

Horace is the man of academic mind, who finds out that the world is not a place of justice and moral tidiness. He



discovers, with increasing horror, that evil is rooted in the very nature of things. Horace represents a type that appears often in Faulkner's work, not only in the early novels, but again prominently in his last novels. He is an "intellectual." He has a great capacity for belief in ideas and a great confidence in the efficacy of reason.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Millgate refers to him as "the intellectual of generous impulses but inadequate courage or will to action, tending always to dissipate his energies in talk."<sup>2</sup> Like Quentin in The Sound and the Fury, like Darl Bundren in As I Lay Dying, Horace Benbow is the sensitive, perceptive observer whose moral and intellectual reserves prove inadequate in the face of life as he is finally forced to see it.

In Sanctuary, Horace reacts to the events which comprise the story of Temple Drake. Indeed, the novel seems more about Horace's reactions than about Temple's experience. The first three chapters discuss Horace's experience without mentioning Temple Drake, and fully one half of the novel renders the action from Horace's point of view. Indeed, Michael Millgate has shown that, in the original draft, Horace's material bulked even larger.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Faulkner wished the novel to tell the story of Temple Drake, but his interest in the bystander's relationship to that story was <sup>so</sup> extensive ~~such~~ that it

almost turned Sanctuary into a novel about Horace Benbow.

In the novel as published, Horace recoils from the evil manifested in Temple's story, an evil to which Temple herself accommodates herself with relative ease, but Horace's perceptions have to do with more than Temple Drake alone. Throughout the novel, it is his fate to confront one woman after another and to be repeatedly disillusioned by each in turn. Horace seems to have imbibed the theories of feminine purity and innocence which stem from the romance traditions of courtly love and, more particularly, the ideals of "white Southern womanhood." But each woman in the novel reveals herself to him as fallible and human, and the knowledge causes him grave psychic damage. His wife Belle, his stepdaughter Little Belle, Temple Drake, his sister Narcissa, Ruby Goodwin, all shatter his illusions. It seems to him as though "femininity were a current running through a wire along which a certain number of identical bulbs were hung."<sup>4</sup> It is clear that Faulkner intends Horace's disillusionment to represent a realization of evil in general, but the particular form in which evil appears most damaging to his character is female. When the novel opens, Horace has left his wife in an attempt to escape the female, but it is his fate to be continually embroiled with women.

When he assures Miss Jenny that "It wasn't Narcissa I was running to. I haven't quit one woman to run to the skirts of another," Jenny replies, "If you keep on telling yourself that you may believe it, someday" (103). Fleeing Belle and Little Belle, he becomes disastrously involved with Narcissa Sartoris, Temple Drake, and Ruby Goodwin.

Faulkner repeatedly characterizes Horace as incapable of dealing not only with women but also with life. Horace is well acquainted with literature but rather less with life. Instead of the gun which Popeye carries in his pocket, Horace carries a book, and he habitually defines his experience in literary terms; for instance, when Popeye crowds close to him, Horace thinks: "he smells like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth and down upon her bridal veil when they raised her head" (7). Faulkner describes Horace's voice as that of "a man given to much talk and not much else" (13). He admits he cannot drive an automobile, saying "Sometimes, when I think of all the time I have spent not learning to do things ---" (118). The "filled but unlighted cob pipe in his hand" (168) is a symbol of his habitual failure to act (just as it is with Gavin Stevens). Horace complains about the experience he is forced to

witness: "I am too old for this. I was born too old for it, and I am sick to death for quiet" (253). He asserts to Ruby Goodwin: "I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it won't run" (16). The courage Horace speaks of is not the courage to face danger or to fight for what he believes is right. It is rather the courage to endure an evil, squalid existence which does not conform to his vision of ideality.

It is this type of existence which, when the novel opens, he is fleeing. When Ruby asks him why he has left his wife, he replies:

"Because she ate shrimp . . . . I couldn't -- You see, it was Friday, and I thought how at noon I'd go to the station and get the box of shrimp off the train and walk home with it, counting a hundred steps and changing hands with it . . . . I have done it for ten years, since we were married. And I still don't like to smell shrimp. But I wouldn't mind the carrying it home so much. I could stand that. It's because the package drips. All the way home it drips and drips, until after a while I follow myself to the station and stand aside and watch Horace Benbow take that box off the train and start home with it, changing hands every hundred steps, and I following him, thinking here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk." (17)

Horace measures out his life in dripping shrimp boxes,

and it is partly this life of quiet desperation he flees from when he abandons Belle in Kinston and returns to his family home in Jefferson. He wants to find a hill "to lie on for a while" (15) where, like a hermit or anchorite, he can dissociate himself from the lush flatlands of the Delta which he characterizes as feminine.

For Horace flees more than boredom and ennui; he flees from his perception of the duplicity and evil lurking behind the innocent exterior of his stepdaughter Belle, whose moral education he attempts to wrest from his wife's more experienced tutelage. The incident which haunts him is a fight he has had with Little Belle about what men she dates. Belle attempts to placate him:

"Then she was saying 'No! No!' and me holding her and she clinging to me. 'I didn't mean that! Horace! Horace!' And I was smelling the slain flowers, the delicate dead flowers and tears, and then I saw her face in the mirror. There was a mirror behind her and another behind me, and she was watching herself in the one behind me forgetting about the other one in which I could see her face, see her watching the back of my head with pure dissimulation." (14 - 15)

Horace flees this vision, not wanting to believe in the corruption of youth and femininity, but he encounters even worse in his contemplation of the story of Temple Drake, and he is forced into the realization that women, and by extension Little Belle, are evil. Sitting in his

hotel room in Jefferson, Horace looks at a snapshot of his stepdaughter and sees "a face suddenly older in sin than he would ever be" (163). He now realizes the truth of human nature, and his reaction to it is horror.

When Horace returns to Kinston and his wife, he is a defeated and disillusioned man. Nothing has changed at home except Horace's perception. His wife's first words to him as he enters are: "Did you lock the back door?" (292) and her constant reiteration of this question punctuates his questions about Little Belle, revealing how completely he has re-entered the world of ritual he fled at the beginning. His phone call to Little Belle at a house party similarly reveals to him how little things have changed:

Over the thin wire came a scuffling sound; he could hear Little Belle breathe. Then a voice said, a masculine voice: "Hello, Horace; I want you to meet a ---" "Hush!" Little Belle's voice said, thin and faint; again Horace heard them scuffling; a breathless interval. "Stop it!" Little Belle's voice said. "It's Horace! I live with him!" Horace held the receiver to his ear. Little Belle's voice was breathless, controlled, cool, discreet, detached. "Hello, Horace. Is Mamma all right?" (293)

Following the story of Temple's relationship with Popeye and Red, this episode provides an ironic parallel which reveals Horace as the impotent and ineffectual "Daddy" who is not a father. For Horace it is evidence of Belle's

continuing duplicity and callousness, characteristics which appear more obvious to him because of the experiences he has just endured during the trial of Lee Goodwin.

In the same way, Horace's reactions to Temple Drake's story are largely determined by the parallels he draws between Little Belle and Temple. They are both young women in danger of being exposed to corruption, he feels. His initial comment when he learns about Gowan Stevens abandoning Temple at the Old Frenchman's Place while drunk on bootleg liquor is "I'm going to have a law passed making it obligatory upon everyone to shoot any man less than fifty years old that makes, buys, sells or thinks whiskey . . . scoundrel I can face, but to think of her being exposed to any fool . . ." (162). The feminine pronoun is ambiguous; Horace is discussing Temple's experience, but he seems to be talking about his worries over Belle. Miss Jenny's comment makes it clear that Horace is thinking of his stepdaughter: "I'll declare, a male parent is a funny thing, but just let a man have a hand in the affairs of a female that's no kin to him . . ." (161). This identification of the two young women in Horace's mind helps to explain why his reaction to Temple's experience is so violent and emotional.

The culmination of this theme of identification

comes after Horace has learned about Popeye's bizarre rape of Temple. As he stands in his hotel room looking at the photograph of Little Belle, he smells the scent of honeysuckle:

Almost palpable enough to be seen, the scent filled the room and the small face seemed to swoon in a voluptuous languor, blurring still more, fading, leaving upon his eye a soft and fading aftermath of invitation and voluptuous promise and secret affirmation like the scent itself.

Then he knew what that sensation in his stomach meant. He put the photograph down hurriedly and went to the bathroom. He opened the door running and fumbled at the light. But he had not time to find it and he gave over and plunged forward and struck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs. Lying with her head lifted slightly, her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body. She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel, the blackness streaming in rigid threads overhead, a roar of iron wheels in her ears. The car shot bodily from the tunnel in a long upward slant, the darkness overhead now shredded with parallel attenuations of living fire, toward a crescendo like a held breath, an interval in which she would swing faintly and lazily in nothingness filled with pale, myriad points of light. Far beneath she could hear the faint, furious uproar of the shucks. (215 - 216)

In this remarkable passage, both Little Belle and Temple Drake become identified in Horace's mind not only with one another but also with himself. He experiences



vicariously the rape on the bed of corn shucks where Temple cowered in fear, and the young, terrified girl becomes confused as well with the photograph of Little Belle propped on his dresser. Like Quentin and Shreve in Absalom, Absalom! or the Reporter in Pylon, this bystander also achieves an emotional and imaginative identification with the participants he observes. This particular fusion is made especially remarkable, however, in that the union comprises people of opposite sexes. As a result, the nightmare images combine feminine images with the girl strapped on her back on the flat car and masculine images with the flat car moving in "a long upward slant" and penetrating a dark tunnel. Horace's identification with both young women expresses beautifully his sympathy for Temple's predicament, but it also reveals the essentially passive, "feminine" nature of his personality. The sexual climax described in the "crescendo like a held breath" is for Horace associated with crucifixion and sickness as he retches into the toilet. Desiring, as bystander, to remain above life, "on a hill," Horace nevertheless is forced to confront its horror imaginatively through his identification with Temple and Belle.

Horace feels strongly that even to witness evil

involves the bystander in corruption, and his flight in the novel is from the necessity to watch and thereby participate in evil. He says to Miss Jenny, "Dammit, say what you want to, but there's a corruption about even looking upon evil, even by accident; you cannot haggle, traffic, with putrefaction" (125). For a man who makes his living as a lawyer, this is a strange theory; it points up the real problem for Horace. He cannot escape professionally nor essentially the contemplation of evil, and he is therefore doomed to disillusionment. Shattered by the events he witnesses, Horace thinks "Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realize, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die" (214).

Although Horace is shocked by the revelation of Temple's experiences at the Old Frenchman's Place, he is still unprepared for worse to come. In his relations with Ruby, the reformed whore who is Lee Goodwin's common law wife, Horace feels he has a decent woman he can help with his legal skills. When Ruby, however, expresses her willingness to pay his legal fees by offering him her body, Horace bursts out in anger at her and all women: "O tempora! O mores! O hell! Can you stupid mammals never believe that any man, every man -- You thought

that was what I was coming for?" (267) Continuing, he reveals his own ideal of motivation, "that perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right, necessary to the harmony of things that it be done" (268), and in awe he asks her "What kind of men have you known?" (268) Ruby, who has lived a life which has left her few ideals and illusions, is matter-of-factly pessimistic about human motives. Horace's ideals have no place in her world, and when Lee Goodwin echoes Horace's question to Ruby, turning it back on Horace himself: "What sort of men have you lived with all your life? In a nursery?" (271) the effect is ironic. The difference between Ruby's world and Horace's world is epitomized in their respective visions of God. When Horace tries to comfort her, saying "God is foolish at times, but at least He's a gentleman," she replies "I always thought of Him as a man" (273). Horace is the foolish gentleman, but Ruby has had to deal only with men.

Horace's ultimate disillusionment comes with the perversion of justice in Lee Goodwin's trial and Lee's subsequent lynching at the hands of an angry mob. Shattered by the realization that his ideals have no place in reality, Horace leaves Jefferson, "like an old

man, with a drawn face" (284). He allows himself to be driven by his sister Narcissa, whose betrayal of his confidence has resulted in Lee's death. Like a sleep-walker, he returns to town to witness the lynching of his doomed client and barely to escape injury himself. Finally, he returns, capitulant and humble, to his wife Belle and his stepdaughter, whose reaction to his return is indifference. As Olga Vickery says, "Horace's sanctuary, his imaginative world of moral and aesthetic perfection, has been violated and destroyed by his one excursion into the world of concrete experience."<sup>5</sup>

If Sanctuary were no more than the story of Horace's disillusionment with women and life, it would be an interesting examination of the unworldly intellectual's venture into the world of hard experience. Horace's role as bystander is, however, functional as well in that his concepts and presence represent the ideals and values to which a hypocritical society pays lip service. Sanctuary may be seen as a study of clashing concepts of respectability and virtue in much the same way that Sartoris and "There Was a Queen" (discussed in Chapter One) considered reputation and the verities. Nearly everyone in Sanctuary worries about reputation, about what people will think; only Horace, whose morals represent what everyone

says he believes, seems unconcerned with what people will think. Temple Drake, Gowan Stevens, Narcissa Sartoris, all of them ostensibly pillars of Southern rectitude, engage in various illicit and immoral affairs which they are concerned with hiding. In this sense, Horace's lack of duplicity is a standing reproach to the hypocrisy of the society which destroys his ideals.

Because of this contrast between Horace's ideals and the corruption that surrounds him, he appears more favorably to the reader than he might otherwise seem. He is ineffectual and unrealistic, but we prefer these qualities to the self-assured and duplicitous nature of Jefferson's elite.

The townfolk who have availed themselves of Lee Goodwin's bootleg liquor are the first to turn on him when his dealings are brought out into the open. As Horace says:

"Then they all jumped on him. The good customers, that had been buying whiskey from him and drinking all that he would give them free and maybe trying to make love to his wife behind his back. You should hear them down town. This morning the Baptist minister took him for a text. Not only as a murderer, but as an adulterer; a polluter of the free Democratic-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha county . . . Good God, can a man, a civilised man, seriously . . ." (123 - 124)

When Horace learns that a committee of the town women have forced the hotel owner to evict Ruby Goodwin from her room, he mutters, "Christians. Christians" (175). He is amazed at the savage and hypocritical vindictiveness of his fellow townspeople for whom an appearance of rectitude is most important.

Most outraged of all is Horace's sister, Narcissa, whose own personal life, as revealed in "There Was a Queen," bears little examination. She is concerned completely with what people will think; she accuses Horace of violating the proprieties of public opinion:

leaving here and opening the house, scrubbing it yourself and all the town looking on and living there like a tramp, refusing to stay here where everybody would expect you to stay and think it funny when you wouldn't; and now to deliberately mix yourself up with a woman you said yourself was a streetwalker, a murderer's woman. (113).

Finally, Narcissa makes an appeal to Horace to remove his apparently immoral conduct from Jefferson on the basis that he offends what he calls the town's "odorous and omnipotent sanctity":

"Don't you see, this is my home, where I must spend the rest of my life. Where I was born. I don't care how many women you have nor who they are. But I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about." (178)

What Horace does is not her concern; what he appears to

do bothers her more. Irving Howe suggests that

there is an important relation in Sanctuary between the foulness of characters like Popeye and the rottenness of characters like Narcissa; each, so to say, nourishes the other, and the two together, the agent of the underworld and the agent of the respectable world, drive Faulkner to that sense of nausea which dominates the novel.<sup>6</sup>

Cleanth Brooks concurs, saying: "Next to Popeye, Narcissa is the most frightening person in this novel, as she pitilessly moves on to her own ends with no regard for justice and no concern for the claims of truth."<sup>7</sup> This union of Popeye and Narcissa is clearest in the conduct of Lee Goodwin's trial; it is Narcissa who reveals to the District Attorney the presence of Temple Drake who is, it seems, persuaded by Popeye to perjure herself in order to doom Goodwin to death.

It is Temple who acts as the instrument of these two forces, and it is obvious that she fears the force represented by Narcissa as much as the one represented by Popeye. On the way to Memphis in Popeye's car, she eschews her opportunity to escape, preferring rather to hide from possible discovery by a former classmate: "He nearly saw me! . . . He was coming right toward me! A boy. At school. He was looking right toward - -" (136). Obviously Temple fears her loss of reputation as much as her loss of virginity. Horace is impressed by Temple's

sense of drama, of the contrast between what she says and how she says it, as she relates the story of her rape and abduction:

She went on like that, in one of those bright, chatty monologues which women can carry on when they realise that they have the center of the stage; suddenly Horace realised that she was recounting the experience with actual pride, a sort of naive and impersonal vanity, as though she were making it up, looking from him to Miss Reba with quick, darting glances like a dog driving two cattle along a lane. (208 - 209)

Temple's sense of an audience, of the watching bystander, is a powerful motivation for her; indeed, her actions in the novel may be seen as fluctuations between the two impulses of vanity and fear. She fears Popeye and his violence, but she fears as much the soiling of her reputation which will inevitably occur if she ever reveals her true feelings and her behaviour.

Gowan Stevens, the irresponsible Virginia "gentleman" who abandons Temple to her fate at the Old Frenchman's place, demonstrates as nice a consideration of reputation as the girl he leaves behind. Clearly he has acted in a cowardly manner, and, even more important in his mind, he has shown himself unable to drink like a gentleman. As he returns to Jefferson he contemplates what to do:



I'll decide what to say to her on the way to town; thinking of Temple returning among people who knew him, who might know him. I passed out twice, he said. I passed out twice. Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ he whispered, his body writhing inside his disreputable and bloody clothes in an agony of rage and shame . . . . Town, the world began to appear as a black cul-de-sac; a place in which he must walk forever more, his whole body cringing and flinching from whispering eyes when he had passed, and when in midmorning he reached the house he sought, the prospect of facing Temple again was more than he could bear.  
(83)

Again, it is fear of Narcissa (and what she represents) rather than fear of Popeye which motivates Gowan to abandon Temple. In a morose letter to Narcissa he mentions a mysterious "experience" which he hopes she will not learn and then declares: "I need not say that the hope that you never learn it is the sole reason why I will not see you again" (126). Horace's sarcastic comment on this melodramatic statement is: "Good Lord . . . . Someone mistook him for a Mississippi man on the dance floor" (126).

Horace is the only person in Jefferson who seems unconcerned about public opinion and reputation. His total lack of comprehension of the significance of the force of the town is clearly revealed in his arguments with Narcissa, chief representative of respectability in the novel. He sees nothing wrong with living as a bachelor in the family house instead of with his sister outside town.

He sees nothing wrong in taking in Ruby Goodwin and her baby when they are without a place to stay. Finally, when Miss Jenny explains to him that his closeness to Ruby might be interpreted by a court as collusion, he understands that he must take some heed of appearances: "That's so . . . Mrs. Blackstone. And sometimes I have wondered why I haven't got rich at the law. Maybe I will, when I get old enough to attend the same law school you did" (114). Even this concession, however, is more a legal precaution than any new awareness of the importance of respectability. When Horace drives Ruby back to the hotel, it is Ruby who argues that they must not be seen in the car together (119), but Horace persists in his indifference to what people might think. This indifference, often almost ignorance, contrasts favorably with the hypocrisies of the respectable citizens of Jefferson.

Faulkner successfully reveals the absurdity of public respectability by burlesquing it in the cheap and superficial decorum of Miss Reba's whorehouse. The shabby gentility of her establishment is a bizarre parody of the less obvious hypocrisies of Jefferson society. This parody is most brilliantly accomplished in the description of Red's funeral. The Negro waiters move with "swaggering and decorous repression" as the gamblers and pimps enter

dressed in "dark suits of decorous restraint" with the madams and whores, "matronly figures resembling housewives on a Sunday afternoon excursion" (236). The orchestra is restrained from playing jazz because "It'll look bad" (237). Mixed with the vulgarity of the crowd, the attempt at a strained decorum makes concepts of respectability appear ludicrous. When Virgil and Fonzo, two ignorant country boys, take up residence in Miss Reba's cathouse, their belief that the girls are all Miss Reba's daughters adds to the comedy implicit in Miss Reba's duplicitous respectability. The best expression of the dichotomy between seeming and reality that informs the novel comes from Clarence Snopes, who declares to Horace: "When I'm here, in Jefferson, I'm one fellow; what I am up in town with a bunch of good sports ain't nobody's business but mine and their'n" (254).

In a society that functions in terms of a hypocritical denial of its true actions, Horace Benbow stands out as the one innocent but consistent individual. Horace's ignorance of the duplicity which is the central principle for people like his sister Narcissa renders him incapable of functioning successfully in a corrupt world. The realization that shatters his world

of ideals comes when he is forced to see that the temple of feminine rectitude in which he has worshipped so passionately is a hollow sham.

In his ignorance, Horace is similar to the innocent children Faulkner frequently uses as registers in his short stories and novels. Though in his forties, he is no more prepared for the realization of evil than Sartoris Snopes or Bayard Sartoris. His belief in the ideals professed by his society isolates him from the mass of his townsfolk whose illusions have long before disappeared. In this sense, Horace is very similar to Gavin Stevens, the bystander I discuss in the following chapters. They are both child-like and idealistic; they are both garrulous and ineffectual. They both represent a type that recurs throughout Faulkner's writing.

Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Brooks, p. 116.
- <sup>2</sup> Millgate, p. 117.
- <sup>3</sup> Millgate, p. 115.
- <sup>4</sup> William Faulkner, Sanctuary (1931; rpt. New York: Random House, 1962), p. 116. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- <sup>5</sup> Vickery, p. 114.
- <sup>6</sup> Howe, pp. 57 - 58.
- <sup>7</sup> Brooks, p. 128.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GAVIN STEVENS: FIRST APPEARANCES

When Gavin Stevens first appears in Faulkner's fiction, he is a significant though decidedly minor figure whose introduction to the particular story or novel seems almost an afterthought. In these early appearances (in "Hair," Light in August, and Go Down, Moses), he is obviously not the Faulknerian spokesman. Faulkner, on the contrary, uses him even to suggest the inadequate vision of the group Stevens represents.

In the short story "Hair," published in 1931 as one of the stories in These Thirteen, Faulkner, introduces Gavin Stevens for the first time. The narrator, though unnamed, is obviously V.K. Ratliff, a sewing-machine salesman whose travels from town to town enable him to learn all the details of the barber Hawkshaw's story; he explains the basis of his friendship with Gavin Stevens:

I never told anybody except Gavin Stevens. He is the district attorney, a smart man; not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard, and when my health broke down (I used to be a bookkeeper in a Gordonville bank and my health broke down and I met Gavin Stevens on a Memphis train when I was coming home from the hospital) it was him that suggested I try the road and got me my position with this company.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons, Stevens serves as Ratliff's confidant

and, in the concluding section of the story, he provides him with the information about Hawkshaw's sudden marriage.

More than this, however, Stevens provides a rhetorical, romantic tone not present in Ratliff's ironic, realistic narration of Hawkshaw's story. One need only compare the style of a typical Ratliff passage with the style of Stevens' brief speech at the end to understand what Stevens contributes to the story. First, here is Ratliff commenting on Hawkshaw's relationship to the young girl he has watched grow into a slut: "And now the girl has gone bad on him, and he's too old to hunt up another one and raise her . . . And someday he'll have the place paid out and those Alabama Starnes can come and take it, and he'll be through" (144). The tone of this is colloquial, ironic, almost bitter. But, ultimately, there is a resignation and realistic awareness of life for, as Ratliff says about Hawkshaw, "he won't be the first man to tilt at windmills" (144). Later, Ratliff describes the appearance of the "Paid in full" Hawkshaw has written in an old family Bible: "It didn't look like it was written boastful; it just flourished somehow, the end of it, like it had run out of the pen somehow before he could stop it" (147). Stevens' answer to this comment is:

So he did what he promised her he would  
 . . . . So the old lady could rest quiet.  
 I guess that's what the pen was trying to  
 say when it ran away from him: that now  
 she could be quiet. And he's not much  
 over forty-five. Not so much anyway.  
 Not so much but what, when he wrote 'Paid  
 in full' under that column, time and  
 despair rushed as slow and dark under him  
 as under any garlanded boy or crownless  
 and crestless girl. (147)

Introduced into Ratliff's restrained, ironic, colloquial narrative we have for the first time a tone we will be familiar with in Faulkner's writing before long. The romantic, rhetorical repetitions and the mythic references which soar up from the ordinary opening lines of the speech, bring a new dimension to the contemplation of Hawkshaw's story. The effect is a generalizing one, suggesting that the middle-aged barber's experience is in some sense typical, an experience which we all have shared. It is not that Stevens draws a moral from the story; rather, his emotional reaction to its facts help us to see them from a perspective different from Ratliff's.

A good example of the way Stevens approaches Hawkshaw's experience comes in his final conversation with Ratliff. Ratliff says:

"Maybe he never knew about the girl, anyway.  
 Or likely he knew and didn't care."  
 "You think he didn't know about her?"  
 "I don't see how he could have helped it.  
 But I don't know. What do you think?"  
 "I don't know. I don't think I want to know.  
 I know something so much better than that."  
 (147 - 148)



The "something so much better" is Hawkshaw's marriage to the girl, but the important fact to notice here is Stevens' unwillingness to investigate an unpleasant speculation. His idealism leads him away from the squalid reality which Ratliff ironically accepts and into romantic speculations. We will see this characteristic developed consistently in Faulkner's later portrayals of Gavin Stevens.

Before leaving the story "Hair," we may notice an ironic parallel between the story of Hawkshaw and Stevens' own experiences in The Town and The Mansion. Hawkshaw's story is that of an older man in love with a young woman, helping her in spite of her materialistic kinfolk, "the Alabama Starnes." When the girl dies, he transfers his affection to a young girl with similarly colored hair, "not brown and not yellow" (139), and watches her grow up. This experience is like Stevens' with Linda Snopes in The Town and The Mansion and with her mother, Eula Varner Snopes. The doppelganger effect, Susan-Sofy and Eula-Linda, appears in both stories as does the affection of an older man for a younger woman.

In his next appearance in Faulkner's fiction, Gavin Stevens is even more obviously not the author's spokesman. In Light in August, published in 1932,

Stevens appears in only one chapter, Chapter Nineteen, in which he tells a friend of the death of Joe Christmas, the novel's protagonist, and speculates about Joe's motivation. In order to understand Stevens' function and position in Light in August, however, it is necessary to outline the story of Joe's life and actions.

The novel tells of an embittered outcast, apparently white, who nevertheless suspects and frequently avers that he is partially Negro. Tortured by his awareness of his dual nature, accepting as valid the bigoted assumptions of his Southern society, Joe Christmas is driven from one enormity to another. He believes himself Negro and rejects white men and women; he believes himself white and rejects the "womanshenegro" (147) which threatens to engulf him. Most of all he is tortured by the realization that he can never be certain of his race. The young Joe calls a Negro labourer "a nigger," and the man replies: "You are worse than that. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you won't never know. You'll live and you'll die and you won't never know" (363). The same implication can be drawn from a conversation Joe has with Joanna Burden as they lie together in bed:

"You don't have any idea who your parents were?"

"If she could have seen his face she would have found it sullen, brooding."

"Except that one of them was part nigger. Like I told you before."

". . . How do you know that?"

He didn't answer for some time. Then he said: "I don't know it." Again his voice ceased . . . Then he spoke again, moving; his voice now had an overtone, unmirthful yet quizzical, at once humorless and sardonic: "If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time." (240 - 241)

Joe had accepted uncritically the prejudices and attitudes of his society and, since one of those prejudices is the belief that Negro blood is inferior to white, Joe bears within him a bitter self-contempt. Cleanth Brooks argues convincingly the impossibility of proving that Joe possesses any Negro blood at all; all evidence of such inheritance descends from Joe's maniacal and bigoted grandfather:

we are never given any firm proof that Joe Christmas possesses Negro blood, for the sufficient reason that Joe would have become what he became whether he had an infusion of Negro blood or not. The pressures that mold him into an Ishmael have, as Faulkner knows, nothing to do with biology as such. The decisive factor is the attitude that the world takes toward Joe and the attitude that he takes to other men and toward himself.<sup>2</sup>

Joe acts as he does because society defines him in certain terms.

Faulkner confirmed this interpretation himself; when asked about Christmas' Negro blood, he replied:

I think that was his tragedy --- he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was. That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic, central idea of the story.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the question of Joe's blood is, in a sense, irrelevant to his actions, and Gavin Stevens' elaborate theories are similarly incapable of explaining Christmas' actions. When asked about these theories, Faulkner replied:

That is an assumption, a rationalization which Stevens made. That is, the people that destroyed him made rationalizations about what he was. They decided what he was. But Christmas himself didn't know and he evicted himself from mankind.<sup>4</sup>

In the novel, Faulkner groups Stevens' theories about Christmas' behaviour with the other explanations suggested by the town. By doing so, he suggests, I think, that we should read all of them in the same light:

There were many reasons, opinions, as to why he had fled to Hightower's house at the last. "Like to like," the easy, the immediate, ones said, remembering the old tales about the minister. Some believed it to have been sheer chance; others said that the man had shown wisdom, since he would not have been suspected of being in the minister's house at all if someone had not seen him run across the back yard and run into the kitchen. Gavin Stevens though had a different theory. (419)

These theories, respectively, are the moralistic, the

fatalistic, and the rationalistic. The first groups the town's outcasts, Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower, and Joe Christmas in a legion of the damned. The second shrugs off the incident as coincidence or "chance." The third explains the escape attempt as a rational attempt that very nearly worked. Gavin Stevens' explanation views it in racist terms.

Stevens explains Joe's apparently contradictory actions in terms of the struggle of the white and black blood within him. It is interesting to notice that in every case the black blood is associated in Stevens' explanation with evil:

"the black blood drove him first to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister

He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand." (424 - 425)

Read out of context, this Southern bigot's version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, of a rapidly fluctuating racial schizophrenia, seems ludicrous. For Stevens, the black blood snatches the pistol, attacks the minister, and prepares to fight the pursuers; all of this fits very conveniently into what Faulkner calls Stevens' "rationalization." But when we consider that Joe's Negro blood is little more than an unproven hypothesis, then Stevens' long-winded explanations become gratuitous.

If this is so, why then does Faulkner intrude Gavin Stevens and his theories into the novel? The answer to this question lies in an examination of Joe's development in the novel. Torn, not by black and white blood, but by his belief that he is black, Christmas castigates himself and rejects in turn both black and white society. But after his murder of Joanna Burden, as he flees the posse pursuing him, Christmas comes to a new awareness. He learns finally that whether or not he has black blood is irrelevant to his own feelings and experience. (Chapter 14). In the midst of flight, Christmas finds a peace he

has sought all his life:

It is just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the natural grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted,' he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. 'That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years.' (313, my italics)

In union with a natural order, Joe's self diffuses, and he becomes part of not black or white but of "the natural greyness." He thinks of the Negroes who fled in fear from him: "And they were afraid. Of their brother afraid" (317). He accepts them at last not as brothers in race but as brothers in mankind. Therefore, he returns to town, to the society whose prejudices he had formerly accepted, but he no longer holds that society's consciousness of dichotomies, racial or otherwise.

It is precisely this new attitude, however, which infuriates the whites of Mottstown and Jefferson:

He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (331)

Although Joe may have achieved a personal

reconciliation, his society has learned no such lesson and, as soon as he attempts to enter that society again, he finds the role of nigger imposed upon him from without even though he may have laid that ghost within. The Negro shoes which he must wear to escape the dogs of the sheriff's posse symbolize the imposition of this role upon him; in the wagon in which he hitches a ride into town, Joe sits

on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of Negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves. (321)

We must read Gavin Stevens' comments in this context; they are yet another example of the town's attempt to impose its grossly oversimplified vision of reality on experience. As Faulkner says in connection with Byron Bunch, "Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing" (43).

Similarly, Gail Hightower's life is very largely controlled by the way in which the town considers him. His very isolation is a burden he assumes to propitiate the force of social morality which has expelled him from



his church and attempted to expel him from the town. Nevertheless, he is suspected of miscegenation and homosexuality by the collective consciousness which relegates him to the status of "Done Damned" (55). Byron Bunch, Hightower's one friend, thinks: "How people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names" (65 -66).

Cleanth Brooks has suggested that this pervasive sense of community, springing from the environment of a small town, is one of the distinguishing factors that set Faulkner's novels apart from other modern fiction:

The community is at once the field for man's action and the norm by which his action is judged and regulated. It sometimes seems that the sense of an organic community has all but disappeared from modern fiction, and the disappearance accounts for the terrifying self-consciousness and subjectivity of a great deal of modern writing. That Faulkner had some sense of an organic community still behind him was among his most important resources as a writer.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the sense of a watching community dominates Light in August; Joe Christmas, as we have seen, accepts its prejudices all his life and, as a result, lives a life of self-loathing. Gail Hightower readily accepts the town's unofficial judgement for the sake of a peace

which is suspiciously death-like. Joanna Burden, the paramour of Joe Christmas and the third "damned" protagonist of the novel, similarly is forced into a life of futility and isolation by Jefferson's interpretation of her heritage. As she says, "They hated us here. We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpetbaggers" (235). When her murder is discovered, the people who flock to her house are those "who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (271 - 272). Even in death, Joanna does not escape the outrage of the town:

She had lived such a quiet life, attended so to her own affairs, that she bequeathed to the town in which she had been born and lived and died a foreigner, an outlander, a kind of heritage of astonishment and outrage, for which, even though she had supplied them with an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost, they would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet. Not that. Peace is not that often. So they moiled and clotted, believing that the flames, the blood, the body that had died three years ago and had just now begun to live again, cried out for vengeance, not believing that the rapt infury of the flames and the immobility of the body were both affirmations of an attained bourne beyond the hurt and harm of man. Not that. Because the other made nice believing. (272 - 273)

Even Byron Bunch, who at the beginning of the novel is determined to know nothing, finds himself drawn into the role of chorus and bystander. When Lena Grove asks him about Christmas and Brown, he almost apologizes for his knowledge of the two men:

"But that aint none of my business in the first place. And in the second place, most of what folks tells on other folks aint true to begin with. And so I reckon I aint no better than nobody else . . . . I would injure no man . . . . I reckon I ought not to talk so much. For a fact, it looks like a fellow is bound to get into mischief soon as he quits working."  
(49 - 50)

In spite of himself, Byron is pulled into the action by his love for Lena Grove; indeed, he becomes the primary narrator of the novel; "Byron Bunch knows this" (27) sums up a major aspect of his role in the novel. He relates information about one character to another, thus becoming one of the principal unifying devices in the plot. He tells Lena about Brown and Christmas; he tells Hightower about Christmas; he helps Ma Hines to tell Christmas about Hightower.

As bystander, Byron is very different from the communal choric voice as represented by Gavin Stevens. His vision of the protagonists is not marred by preconceptions and prejudices; he thinks that "when anything gets to be a habit, it also manages to get a right good distance

away from truth and fact" (69). He is aware of the difference between appearance and reality although, when Hightower asks him "are you going to undertake to say just how far evil extends into the appearance of evil? just where between doing and appearing evil stops?" (289), Byron's reply is negative. He himself is largely disregarded by the town; he is "a small man who had lived in the town seven years yet whom even fewer of the country people than knew either the murderer or the murdered, knew by name or habit" (394). The travelling furniture dealer describes him as "the kind of fellow you wouldn't see the first glance if he was alone by himself in the bottom of a empty concrete swimming pool" (469). But even with Byron we sense the duality of judgment and behaviour; he assumes that he is seen by the town as "Byron Bunch, that weeded another man's laidby crop, without any halves. The fellow that took care of another man's whore while the other fellow was busy making a thousand dollars" (394). In other words, Byron plays pre-cuckolded Joseph to Lena Grove's Mary; He can be seen as a figure of fun if not contempt.

Inside this inconsequential man, however, something is brewing:

he could look down at himself breathing,  
at his chest, and see no movement at all,

like when dynamite first begins, gathers itself for the now Now NOW, the shape of the outside of the stick does not change: a small man you would not look at twice, that you would never believe he had done what he had done and felt what he had felt . . . . (395)

If Byron ignores his society's preconceptions to do what he feels is right, then Lena Grove, whose blithe disregard of social convention and morality see her through all situations, is an appropriate mate for him.

Lena is Joe Christmas' precise opposite in virtually every way, and she is particularly indifferent in her reaction to the bystander. It is not that society is any less eager to view her in an unflattering manner; to all who see her, she is the betrayed and foolish woman, the fallen virgin, but her disregard of such attitudes means they have little influence on her. As Armstid thinks, "she'll walk the public country herself without shame because she knows that folks, menfolks, will take care of her" (12). Lena possesses "a soft quality, an inwardlighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment" (15); she listens "to something very far away or so near as to be inside her . . . the implacable and immemorial earth" (26), not the rationalizations and categorizations of society. Only twice in the novel does Lena act as though she is worried about what people

might think about her. When she visits town with her parents, she insists on walking from the edge of town rather than riding in with them in the wagon "because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too" (1 - 2). Faulkner's description of the second of these incidents reveals how we should regard them. At Armstid's place, Lena eats dinner:

. . . Armstid watched her eat, again with the tranquil and hearty decorum of last night's supper, though there was now corrupting it a quality of polite and almost finicking restraint.  
(19 - 20)

Later, Lena thinks about this episode: "Like a lady I et. Like a lady travelling" (23). When Lena stops to worry how others might think about her, her natural beauty is corrupted by this "restraint". Fortunately, however, her serene unconcern predominates and sees her through the gauntlet of watching eyes which constitutes society.

In order to present adequately the subsequent union of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch, Faulkner introduces another bystander-narrator in the last chapter of the novel. This is the travelling furniture dealer. Unlike Gavin Stevens, whose narration is merely an extension of the preconceived attitudes which have dominated the book

prior to his appearance, the furniture dealer possesses a felicitous ignorance of the tragic events of the novel. His view, untarnished by knowledge of the past, fittingly complements the beauty and comedy of Byron and Lena's story. The fact that the furniture dealer narrates his story while lying, sexually sated, beside his own wife casts over the lighthearted sexuality of his narrative a mood which assures the reader of Byron's ultimate success. Watching Byron's failure to seduce Lena, the narrator pretends he is asleep, fearing that he will make Byron aware that his humiliation has been witnessed. This is a very different kind of bystander; this is the beneficent well-wisher, not the hostile community.

The furniture dealer serves as a very different kind of bystander from Gavin Stevens. Gavin Stevens' role fortifies the principal theme of the novel which is the effect of the collective perception upon the individual's experience. Stevens mouths, however subtly and cleverly, the prejudices and preconceptions of his own society which have led to the disaster he witnesses.

In "Hair" and Light in August, Gavin Stevens is an incidental character, almost an afterthought, used for a very specific purpose. He has a similar function in Go Down, Moses, a series of interrelated short stories,

in which he appears only in the concluding title story, "Go Down, Moses". This story, published in 1941, is Stevens' last appearance as a decidedly minor figure; already, Faulkner had been composing the short stories ("Smoke", "Monk", "Hand Upon the Waters", "Tomorrow") which would be collected in 1949 under the title Knight's Gambit. As will be shown in Chapter VII, this volume and Intruder in the Dust (1948) represent a major development of the character, but in Go Down, Moses Stevens is still incidental to the book as a whole.

Since the stories which make up this series have been discussed in considerable detail in Chapters III and IV, all that is needed here is a brief outline of the major movement of Go Down, Moses in order to suggest how Gavin Stevens' character fits into the context. It has been my contention previously that Faulkner portrays a gradual shift in importance from white to black in his sequence of stories, with the white man becoming, more and more, the helpless, frustrated and outraged witness to the actions of the more vital black man. The structure of "The Fire and the Hearth" is illustrative: in Section Two, the flashback, Lucas Beauchamp as a young man watches with helpless anger as Zack Edmonds confiscates his wife after Mrs. Edmonds has



died in childbirth. Zack's son, Roth, however, finds himself relegated to the position of impotent witness in Sections One and Three as the elderly Lucas initiates actions to which Roth can only react. Counterpointed to the impotent fury of Edmonds in the "farming stories" is the passive escapism of Ike McCaslin in the "hunting stories." In both cases, the white men are motivated by the guilt of the white race for its crime against the Negro. Roth Edmonds meets the guilt head-on; Ike McCaslin flees to the forest in a futile attempt to escape it. Both fail to propitiate it. The white man finds himself replaced by the long-suffering Negro whose enormously vital capacity for living survives all the white race has done to suppress it. In "Delta Autumn", the mulatto mistress of Roth Edmonds represents for Ike the inheritance he has denied; he touches her hand --- "the gnarled, bloodless, bone-light bone-dry old man's fingers touching for a second the smooth young flesh where the old blood ran after its long lost journey back to home" (362).

In this context, we can see Gavin Stevens, the bystander in the concluding story, as another example of the helpless white witness whose position at the center has been usurped by the black race. Stevens has "a thin, intelligent, unstable face" (370); he is a man "whose

serious vocation was a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek" (371). This translation, which is to become more important in Stevens' subsequent appearances in Faulkner's fiction, represents his desire to retreat from the confrontation which life seems continually determined to force upon him, into a serene, sterile, and perfectly useless world of intellectual dabbling. The Greek translation becomes Stevens' ivory tower.

The imagery of the story reinforces the sense of Stevens' helplessness; a hot, bright wind blows through his office window, "contriving a semblance of coolness from what was merely motion" (370). Only Molly Beauchamp, the old Negro woman who forces Stevens and the town into action, seems impervious to the breeze in his office. Stevens crosses the empty square of Jefferson "in the hot suspension of noon's beginning" (373). Indeed, he is constantly surrounded by a sense of futile motion or of absolute suspension which are fitting objective correlatives to his position in the story.

The only white person who seems in control, in fact, is Miss Worsham, the old spinster who helps Molly in her mourning. Her conversation with Stevens reveals further his position in the action; he meekly

follows her suggestions and she leads him through an explanation of what must be done:

"She will want to take him back home with her," she said.

"Him?" Stevens said. "The body?" She watched him. The expression was neither shocked nor disapproving. It merely embodied some old, timeless, female affinity for blood and grief . . . . .

"He is the only child of her oldest daughter, her own dead first child. He must come home."

"He must come home," Stevens said quietly.

"I'll attend to it at once. I'll telephone at once."

". . . I will defray the expenses. Can you give me some idea ---?"

". . . "Ten or twelve dollars will cover it. They will furnish a box and there will be only the transportation."

"A box?" Again she was looking at him with that expression curious and detached, as though he were a child. . . . "Not just a box, Mr. Stevens. I understand that can be done by paying so much a month."

"Not just a box," Stevens said. (376-7)

Miss Worsham leads Stevens carefully through the affair as though she were leading a child through catechism, and Stevens, able only to react rather than act, follows her.

When Stevens visits Miss Worsham's home he encounters Molly and her relations mourning in rhythmic repetition the death of Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, Molly's criminal grandson. Confronted by the stifling intensity of their grief and their accusation of white guilt for his death, Stevens panics and flees:

He rose quickly. Miss Worsham rose too, but he did not wait for her to precede

him. He went down the hall fast, almost running; he did not even know whether she was following him or not. Soon I will be outside, he thought. Then there will be air, space, breath. Then he could hear her behind him --- the crisp, light, brisk yet unhurried feet . . . He descended the stairs almost running. It was not far now; now he could smell and feel it: the breathing and simple dark, and now he could manner himself to pause and wait, turning at the door, watching Miss Worsham as she followed him to the door. (380-1)

When Stevens forgets his manners, he is panicked indeed. But he, and the town which watches the Negro murderer's catafalque pass through Jefferson, are forced by the age-old guilt of their race to pay penance in the form of the "dollars and half-dollars and quarters" which Stevens has collected to bring Samuel Worsham Beauchamp home.

"Go Down, Moses" represents the culmination of the sequence of crime that begins with the hunting of Toney's Turl in "Was," the first story of the book. Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, Negro murderer, is the evil result of that development, gloomy counterpart to the symbol of hope embodied in the mixed race baby of "Delta Autumn." Before both, Ike McCaslin and Gavin Stevens are impotent witnesses.

In his early appearances in Light in August and Go Down, Moses, Gavin Stevens' functions primarily

as a more articulate advocate of the watching community's opinions. His attitudes to Joe Christmas differ little from the attitudes of the white community as a whole, and his fumbling and panic-stricken reactions to the grief of Molly Beauchamp parallel the reactions of bystanders like Roth Edmonds and Ike McCaslin in earlier stories of Go Down, Moses. Only in the short story "Hair" does Stevens function as a discrete and alternative vision from the other visions presented in the story. In subsequent stories and novels, this latter function predominates, but it is interesting to see Faulkner treating Stevens in the earlier fiction more as a communal voice than as an isolated intelligence. The character seems to originate as an articulate expression of community opinion, as a type of choric voice, but then develops into a more complex fusion of the attitudes of the town with the instincts of an outsider.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Collected Stories, p. 144. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Brooks, p. 69.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GAVIN STEVENS: DETECTIVE

In the stories and novels discussed in the previous chapter, Gavin Stevens was an incidental character, a bystander to the action which was of principal interest. In "Hair" (1931), Light in August (1932) and the later Go Down, Moses (1941), he seems almost an afterthought. But in three works published between 1948 and 1951, Faulkner developed Stevens' character extensively, turning a convenient literary device into one of the central personalities of his later fiction. These three works are particularly interesting in that they represent Faulkner's only published work for the decade after the publication of Go Down, Moses, a period which divides the masterpieces of the 1930's from his later, less acclaimed novels.

Intruder in the Dust (1948), Knight's Gambit (1949), and Requiem for a Nun (1951) all depict Gavin Stevens as a detective involved in solving some mystery. Arthur Mizener, in his study, The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel,<sup>1</sup> puts Stevens in the tradition of the intellectual as detective, a tradition represented by characters like Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson, Robert Penn Warren's Jack Burden, and Poe's C. Auguste Dupin. Faulkner's ventures in this form have been greeted, however,

with considerable critical hostility. William Van O'Connor suggests that "the genre of the detective story is ill adapted not merely to Faulkner's characteristic language, but to his themes and subject matter."<sup>2</sup>

Michael Millgate agrees: "the detective story form seems to have been one which excited his ingenuity without calling out the full extent of his powers."<sup>3</sup> It is certainly true that several of the stories in Knight's Gambit appear weak compared to Faulkner's writing at its best. In stories like "Monk" and the title story of the volume, "Knight's Gambit," however, Faulkner succeeds in fusing the type of the detective story with his usual concerns about human nature. Indeed, it would seem that when Gavin Stevens as perceiving intelligence is most closely integrated into the action of a story, the story is most successful. Novels like Absalom, Absalom! and Light in August are, in a sense, detective stories of a much greater kind in that they too concern the attempt to understand human motivation, but only occasionally does Faulkner approach such quality in Knight's Gambit.

One principal interest in the detective story is motivation, and speculations about the "why" of human behaviour are aspects of Faulkner's fiction from the beginning. It is interesting to notice that of the stories



in Knight's Gambit, only two are concerned with the identity of the criminal; the rest concentrate on motivation. In Intruder in the Dust, what is superficially a detective story turns into a study of character involved in social conflict. In Requiem for a Nun, there is never any question of legal justice; the problem Stevens helps Temple grapple with is a personal and spiritual one. In this sense, Faulkner's detective stories pursue the same goals as the rest of his fiction, the understanding of man's secret and mysterious nature.

In Knight's Gambit, published in 1949 but written over a seventeen-year span, Faulkner experimented both with the form of the detective story and with the personality of his most important bystander, Gavin Stevens. When Faulkner was asked about Stevens in this book and The Town, he drew an interesting distinction which helps us to understand Stevens' position in these stories:

he knew a good deal less about people than he knew about the law and about ways of evidence and drawing the right conclusions from what he saw with his legal mind. When he had to deal with people, he was an amateur, he was--at times he had a good deal less judgment than his nephew did.<sup>4</sup>

To use the image of the book's title, as long as Gavin is the Player moving the pieces in an intellectual exercise he is capable and in control, but when he becomes

one of the pieces himself in the game of life he shows to less advantage. John Lewis Longley sees Stevens' three areas of concern in Knight's Gambit as, one, the enforcement of ideal justice rather than the letter of the law, two, speculation on what justice is, and three, "speculation on the ultimate motives of the human heart."<sup>5</sup> As I have suggested above, this third interest is most important in that Faulkner's pre-eminent concern is human behaviour and its motivations. But just as important, I feel, is the technical experimentation of the stories as Faulkner tests his bystander in various situations, ending with the title story of the volume in which we witness Stevens' own involvement in the action. Narrative voice moves from omniscient narrator in "Hand Upon the Waters" to collective narrator in "Smoke" to the first person narrator in the person of Charles Mallison for the remaining stories in the volume.

"Hand Upon the Waters" is the simplest and least interesting of the stories; it is purely detective story, concerned with the "solving" of a crime. The question therefore is primarily "who", not "why". In the manner of Poe's M. Dupin, Stevens solves the murder of the half-wit, Lonnie Grinnup, by meticulous observation of detail and some intelligent research into county records.

All the elements of the classic detective story are here, including the confrontation with the criminal, the detective's near escape from death, and the explanatory epilogue in which the detective reveals the path of his ratiocination. The story is of interest primarily in that it contrasts so sharply with the other, more complex, stories of the book.

One other aspect of the story, however, bears examination. This is the strange affinity, despite his isolation as an intellectual, which Stevens has with the people of his community. This ambivalent position informs his emotions and actions in virtually all the works in which he appears. He is torn between involvement with his community and an impulse to retreat from the harsh realities of life. As Stevens approaches a small country store, he sees

the topless and battered cars, the saddled horses and mules and the wagons, the riders of which he knew by name. Better still, they knew him, voting for him year after year and calling him by his given name even though they did not quite understand him, just as they did not understand the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain.<sup>6</sup>

Stranger than this identification with his community, however, is Stevens' association with Lonnie Grinnup, the half-wit who has been murdered:

He was going to look at the dead man's face for a sentimental reason. What was now Yoknapatawpha County had been founded not by one pioneer but by three simultaneous ones. They came together on horseback, through the Cumberland Gap from the Carolinas . . . so that now, a hundred years afterward, there was in all the county they helped to found but one representative of the three names.

This was Stevens, because the last of the Holston family had died before the end of the last century, and the Louis Grenier, whose dead face Stevens was driving eighty miles in the heat of a July afternoon to look at, had never known he was Louis Grenier. He could not even spell the Lonnie Grinnup he called himself---an orphan too, like Stevens.  
 . . . (62-63)

This strange identification, the intellectual and the idiot, at opposite ends of society's spectrum, and both isolated from the rest of humanity, orphans in every sense, rescues an ordinary "whodunnit" from complete mediocrity. Detective and victim are identified and an emotional union appears which is the precursor of subsequent involvements Stevens cannot escape.

Indeed, each story in the volume deals with an outsider of some sort, a person who shares to some degree Stevens' isolation whether as a result of a different background like Anselm Holland in "Smoke" and Signor Canova in "An Error in Chemistry" or as a result of mental retardation like Lonnie and the hero of "Monk". Jerome F. Klinkowitz, in "The Thematic Unity of Knight's

Gambit?, says of these stories: "Stevens is a constant, but so is the community of which he is a part. The real theme of these stories is carried by the various outsiders to that community and the community's reaction to them."<sup>7</sup> Because Stevens shares the isolation from the community characteristic of the other outsiders in the volume, he is capable of understanding and, in some cases, identifying with them. Stevens, perhaps like Faulkner himself, is very much a member of his community, talking frequently with his fellow townsmen, but because of his intellectual background, he is often closer to outlanders like the Hollands of "Smoke" or Captain Gualdres of "Knight's Gambit".

In "Smoke", Faulkner has written a story with two types of bystander, the town itself, which acts as a collective, choric narrator similar to that in "A Rose for Emily", and Gavin Stevens, the detective who solves the crime. The counterpointing of these two voices creates the story's tension. The choric voice of the town, reacting against the foreign Hollands, creates more than witnesses a story which they accept as true; they regard Anselm Holland as "an underbred outlander" (9). The town sprinkles its narration of the events leading up to Anselm's death with phrases like "And so we said

among ourselves, taking it to be true" (11).

Because Virginus is a close-mouthed, mysterious man, the town assumes he is guilty of his father's murder rather than Young Anse whose emotions are always on the surface:

Because that was Virginus. You didn't know what he was thinking at the time, any time. Old Anse and Young Anse were like water. Dark water, maybe; but men could see what they were about. But no man ever knew what Virginus was thinking or doing until afterward. (11)

One scene in the story, the argument between Old Anse and Virginus, does not exist except in the town's imagination; its description begins with "and we could imagine it, about like this" (12). The narrator admits: "we always looked at Virginus a little askance too; he was a little too much master of himself. For it is human nature to trust quickest those who cannot depend on themselves" (13).

In retrospect, the narrator realizes the truth that the town's vision is more a product of its own misconceptions than of any reality:

But men are moved so much by preconceptions. It is not realities, circumstances, that astonish us; it is the concussion of what we should have known, if we had only not been so busy believing what we discover later we had taken for the truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at the moment. (28-29)

The reason that the town overlooks the real

murderer is his unnoticeability; Granby Dodge is "a small, sandy, nondescript man whom you would not remember a minute after you looked at his face and then away" (13). But even in his silence, there is the suggestion of something else which arouses the reader's suspicion:

We knew of him only that he was some kind of an itinerant preacher, and that now and then he gathered up strings of scrubby horses and mules and took them somewhere and swapped or sold them. Because he was a man of infrequent speech who in his dealings with men betrayed such an excruciating shyness and lack of confidence that we pitied him, with that kind of pitying disgust you feel for a crippled worm, dreading even to put him to the agony of saying 'yes' or 'no' to a question. But we heard how on Sundays, in the pulpits of country churches, he became a different man, changed; his voice then timbrous and moving and assured out of all proportion to his nature and his size. (23)

This voice suggests something beneath the surface which the town misses but which the other bystander, Gavin Stevens, sees. The image of the worm is strangely echoed later in the story, informing the reader of the murderer's true identity long before Stevens tricks him into self-revelation. As the narrator describes Stevens' speech, he says: "I still seem to feel that kind of disgust without mercy which after all does the office of pity, as when you watch a soft worm impaled on a pin, when you feel that retching revulsion" (28). The town, however,

remains in ignorance until the end.

Gavin Stevens, the other bystander, has a different vision of the crime, partly because he shares only to a degree the values of the community of Jefferson which he defends:

He was a Harvard graduate; a loose-jointed man with a mop of untidy iron-gray hair, who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who spent whole afternoons among the squatting men against the walls of country stores, talking to them in their idiom. He called these his vacations. (21)

Because he is both a part of and apart from his society, he understands the other isolated figures he encounters as county attorney. It is significant, moreover, that, although Stevens plays once again the role of detective, tricking Granby Dodge into confession, he nevertheless achieves his solution not through evidence or research, but by means of an extensive understanding of human nature. When Young Anselm confesses the murder of his father, Stevens replies "And I say that you are wrong, Anse" (25). It is impossible to quote completely the lengthy argument that Stevens develops in the courtroom to prove his case, but a little of it will reveal the nature of his deliberations:

The man who killed your father was the man who could plan and conceive to kill that old man who sat here behind this table every day. . . . Somebody that



wanted him dead too; not in anger and outrage, but by calculation. . . . you had lived alone until youth and wanting things were gone out of you; you just wanted to be quiet as you wanted your mother's dust to be quiet. (27)

This is hardly admissible evidence, but it is something more than that; it is the argument developed by a man more interested in human nature than legality. Stevens asks, "But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?" (28) The justice he speaks of here is that in harmony with the workings of human motivation, not merely the extension of a legalistic system.

In both "Hand Upon the Waters" and "Smoke", we find traditional detective story plots fleshed with the usual Faulknerian concerns about perception and human nature. But the two stories remain, basically, unexceptional genre pieces. In the other stories of Knight's Gambit, all narrated by Chick Mallison, who watches his uncle Gavin attempt to grapple with reality, Faulkner seeks to develop even further the traditional mode of the detective story, adding complexities which have been only suggested in the previous two stories. In none of the remaining stories is the fundamental question the identity of the criminal; the narrative shifts ever more to a concern with motivation, with an attempt to understand what Faulkner calls "the eternal verities of the

human heart."

"Monk", the second story in the volume, assumes the guilt of the title character, a guilt he never denies himself. What concerns Stevens is Monk's motive for murdering someone he seems to love and worship. At the beginning of the story, Chick states the difficulty he will confront in relating Monk's history:

I will have to try to tell about Monk. I mean actually try --- a deliberate attempt to bridge the inconsistencies in his brief and sordid and unoriginal history, to make something out of it, not only with the nebulous tools of supposition and inference and invention, but to employ these nebulous tools upon the nebulous and inexplicable material which he left behind him. Because it is only in literature that the paradoxical and even mutually negating anecdotes in the history of a human heart can be juxtaposed and annealed by art into verisimilitude and credibility. (40)

"Monk" deals with the difficulty of human communication; on one side, there is Gavin Stevens, the questioning bystander---on the other is the half-wit, Stonewall Jackson Odlethrop, called "Monk", who uses two murders in an attempt to reach the society he has been isolated from all his life. In the courtroom, Monk freely admits his crime:

But he never denied that he had killed somebody. It was not insistence; it was just a serene reiteration of the fact . . . trying to tell them something of

which they could make neither head nor tail and to which they refused to listen. He was not confessing, not trying to establish grounds for lenience in order to escape what he had done. It was as though he were trying to postulate something, using this opportunity to bridge the hitherto abyss between himself and the living world, the world of living men, the ponderable and travailing earth. . . . (41)

The typically Faulknerian style of this passage reflects the attempts to define the indefinable of Monk's behaviour by positing and rejecting possibilities and explanations which only approach the mysterious motivation of the man. But as Chick, the narrator, says, "nobody except my Uncle Gavin seemed to be concerned about Monk" (46). Stevens' inquiring mind searches for the clues to behaviour. When the true murderer confesses the crime, Stevens seeks to have Monk released, only to find that Monk has in reality committed murder, killing the jail warden, a man to whom "he had transferred . . . the same doglike devotion which he had given to old Fraser," (47) his first "victim". Of the first half of the story, Chick says: "You see? It just does not add up" (49).

In the second half of the story, Stevens learns why Monk has acted as he did: "Uncle Gavin discovered it by accident, and he never told anyone but me, and I will tell you why" (50). The reason that Stevens has told no one but Chick is that in the process of discovering

the reasons for Monk's behaviour, he confronts another, similarly baffling, problem in the person of the governor of the state. Stevens' confrontation with the amoral Governor leaves him even more disturbed than his speculation about Monk's motivations. He discovers that another convict had persuaded the simple-minded Monk to commit the murder of the prison warden, but when he reveals this fact to the governor he finds that the politician is willing to pervert justice for the sake of votes. This realization disturbs Stevens deeply and he flees the meeting of the Pardon Board:

So he left them. It was in the middle of the morning, and hot, but he started back to Jefferson at once, riding across the broad, heart-miraged land, between the cotton and the corn of God's long-fecund, remorseless acres, which would outlast any corruption and injustice. He was glad of the heat, he said; glad to be sweating, sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been. (58-59)

"Monk" is the story of Stevens' disturbing confrontation of evil and his ultimate flight from its presence into a natural order which he can accept, in spite of its remorselessness, more easily than the corruption which the Governor represents.

The second half of the story provides an interesting parallel to the first half: in the first half, Stevens' reaction to Monk's story is the calm and rational

interest of the detective; his reaction in the second half to the Governor's action is that of the despairing and defeated moralist. It is possible to see this change as typical of the development of Gavin Stevens in Faulkner's fiction. When the problem confronting him is an intellectual one, he functions ably and coolly; but when the problem he must come to terms with is a moral and personal one, he loses control. It is in this second stage, particularly, that Faulkner most frequently introduces Chick Mallison as the sympathetic observer of the man who was previously the observer himself. Faulkner was asked about this change in connection with Stevens as he appears in The Town, but his answer applies to the character's development in general:

Well, he had got out of his depth. He had got into the real world. While he was--- could be---a county attorney, an amateur Sherlock Holmes, then he was at home, but he got out of that. He got into a real world in which people anguished and suffered, not simply did things which they shouldn't do. And he wasn't as prepared to cope with people who were following their own bent, not for a profit but simply because they had to. That is, he knew a good deal less about people than he knew about the law and about ways of evidence and drawing the right conclusions from what he saw with his legal mind.<sup>8</sup>

In a sense, "Monk" portrays this development in little. Stevens moves from sympathetic interest to frustrated

moral action to panic and flight. Faulkner makes the relation between the two halves of the story more explicit by drawing our attention to the similarity between Monk and the Governor. He describes the Governor as "a man without ancestry and with but little more divulged background than Monk had" (50). The motive constantly associated with the Governor is "inscrutable" and the final description we have of him is as "smooth, completely inscrutable, completely false" (58). Just as Monk, of necessity remains a mystery, the Governor remains a mystery through choice, and as Stevens moves from the one kind of inscrutability to the other, his hold on events becomes less sure.

In "Tomorrow", Faulkner again shifts the center of interest in the story from the traditional question of "who" to the more interesting question of "why." Bookwright's killing of Buck Thorpe, the useless loiterer who attempts to steal his daughter, is obviously a matter of self-defence. The question for Stevens becomes why the jury that deliberates upon the case in which he acts as defender is hung by one man who refuses to concur in the obvious judgment of 'not guilty'. The motivation of the twelfth juror becomes the subject of the story; in other words, not facts, but human complexity and emotion,

are important. In summing up his defense, Stevens emphasizes this aspect of the case; he speaks of

all of us, human beings who at bottom  
want to do right, want not to harm  
others; human beings with all the complexity  
of human passions and feelings and beliefs,  
in the accepting or rejecting of which we had  
no choice, trying to do the best we can with them  
or despite them. . . . (79)

After his case is destroyed by the hung jury, Stevens seeks an understanding of Jackson Fentry, the twelfth juror, for no other reason than his need to understand human beings. "Because I've got to know," (81) he says.

The people Gavin questions seem to recognize the nature of this need for they tell him freely all they know:

"It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using" (82). As he moves from farm to farm, searching for the reason for Fentry's behaviour, his constant burden becomes the one word "Tell," which he reiterates continually until he achieves an understanding:

"The lowly and invincible of the earth---to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free" (95). When the twelve year old Chick asserts that he would have acted differently in Fentry's place,

Stevens replies:

"No, you wouldn't . . . It wasn't Buck Thorpe, the adult, the man. He would have shot that man as quick as Bookwright did, if he had been in Bookwright's place. It was because somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy . . . And you wouldn't have freed him either. Don't ever forget that. Never." (95)

In this story and "An Error in Chemistry", Chick's role is again that of admiring confidant, a role that rapidly changes in the final story of the volume. It is Chick who eavesdrops on the jury as they try to argue Fentry out of his adamant stand: "Nobody saw me. But I could look through the windy mulberry leaves into the room, and see and hear, both" (80). Chick serves as the almost invisible reporter and confidant with little of his personality involved, a sort of transparent eyeball.

In "An Error in Chemistry", Chick is not even a participant in the action or the culminating discussion about the action. His role in this story seems rather to be that of audience to the brilliant performance of Signor Canova, the man whose ignorance of southern customs is his only mistake. The mistake referred to in the title is the mistake this northerner makes in trying to mix sugar with raw whiskey, but it is an error that even Chick, a twelve-year-old, recognizes. His error is



illustrative of his contempt of the community; he had frequently abjured the ritual of mixing whiskey toddies as effete, and now his inability to do so correctly reveals him through his disguise as an outlander. As Jerome F. Klinkowitz says, "The recognition--the detection--is not made simply by Gavin Stevens, but by any and every member of the community present, and in particular by the narrator, Chick Mallison, who has been consistently characterized as one of the watching community."<sup>9</sup>

Gavin Stevens, therefore, displays no particular brilliance in solving this crime; indeed, his role is significantly diminished here in comparison to the other stories. Both he and Chick become part of the audience of townspeople before whom Signor Canova intends to display his skills before departing the stage of Jefferson; Stevens says at the end:

"His first regret right now is probably not that he was caught, but that he was caught too soon, before the body was found and he had the chance to identify it as his own; before Signor Canova had had time to toss his gleaming top hat vanishing behind him and bow to the amazed and stormlike staccato of adulant palms and turn and stride once or twice and then himself vanish from the pacing spotlight---gone, to be seen no more. (116)

As is so often the case in Faulkner's fiction, a protagonist's actions are determined to a considerable extent

by his sense of a watching consciousness, be it a community as a whole or an individual bystander.

In this story, again, the question is not who committed the crime; that problem is disposed of in the first sentence: "It was Joel Flint himself who telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife" (96). As is the case in "Monk" and "Tomorrow", Gavin Stevens' interest is in an understanding of human motivation. Because of this concern, Faulkner attempts to transform the typical detective story into a vehicle for his usual interests. Unlike the other stories, in the volume, however, "An Error in Chemistry" does not differentiate between the perceiving consciousness of the community as a whole and Gavin Stevens as an individual.

"Knight's Gambit", a story published in 1949 after Gavin Stevens' appearance in Intruder in The Dust, moves far beyond the type of story thus far discussed. In this story, for the first time in the volume, Gavin Stevens becomes completely a character in the action and, significantly, Chick Mallison develops a personality as narrator and interested bystander. Once more, as in "Monk", the story falls into two halves, vitally linked by Gavin Stevens' role in both of them---in one he is the compassionate though largely ~~disinterested~~ observer; in the

other he has become part of the action he observes. The story which Charles and the town witness involves four people: the rich widow Harriss, her two grown children, and Captain Gualdres, the Argentinian soldier, "The four of them like the stock characters in the slick magazine serial, even to the foreign fortune hunter. . . . the county had been watching it unfold as the subscribers read and wait and watch for the serial's next installment" (123). But unknown to Charles and the others, Stevens' vision of this story is influenced by his previous involvement with Mrs. Harriss. Only in the fifth chapter does Charles learn of his uncle's love affair, broken off so many years ago; moreover, the reader's understanding of the title alters as the center of attention shifts from Captain Gualdres' attempts to woo Mrs. Harriss to Stevens' renewed approaches to the same woman after twenty years. The "knight" in the first sections of the story is obviously Gualdres, the renowned horseman who sacrifices the interest of the Harriss girl in order to capture her mother, the "queen." In the fifth section, Stevens becomes the knight who, after twenty years retreat, claims ultimate victory. Gavin says about the chess game he plays with Charles, "Nothing by which all human passion and hope and folly can be mirrored and

then proved, ever was just a game" (169). Indeed, the complexity of a chess game reflects the manoeuvres and inter-relationships described in the story.

The development of Stevens from bystander to participant is paralleled by a concomitant development in Charles' attitude to his uncle. Charles begins the story as the respectful, admiring youth, watching his uncle's every move. When Stevens speaks to Max Harriss, it is in "the mild voice which he--Charles--knew anyway and, if it had been addressed to him, would have leaped at once to hold his hat" (120). But with all his reverence, Charles exhibits a fine perception when it comes to his uncle:

His uncle closed the door. But for a second his uncle didn't move. It was a pause, a check, an almost infinitesimal instant of immobility so quick and infinitesimal that probably nobody but he, Charles, would have remarked it. (121)

Even at the beginning of the story Charles is aware of a duality in his uncle which he will see more clearly as the story progresses:

What surprised him was his uncle: that glib and talkative man who talked so much and so glibly, particularly about things which had absolutely no concern with him, that his was indeed a split personality: the one, the lawyer, the county attorney who walked and breathed and displaced air; the

other, the garrulous facile voice so garrulous and facile that it seemed to have no connection with reality at all and presently hearing it was like listening not even to fiction but to literature. (122-123)

What surprises him now is that Stevens remains silent "in the face of what should have supplied [him] . . . with food and scope for garrulity for the rest of the night, since of possible things which might have entered this room from the whole country's remotest environs, this one concerned him least" (123). Of course, the answer to Charles' bewilderment is that this story of the Harrisses does indeed concern Stevens, but what is important to notice here is that Faulkner, through Charles Mallison, presents a picture of Gavin Stevens as a garrulous romantic interested chiefly in things that are none of his business. The description is hardly flattering and it is evident that Faulkner has created a character with "spots", not an ideal commentator to act as his mouthpiece. (This the year after Intruder in the Dust!) Faulkner suggests a reason for Stevens' garrulity; he describes "the voice which talked constantly not because its owner loved talking but because he knew that while it was talking, nobody else could tell what he was not saying" (128). In other words, Stevens' longwindedness provides him with a smokescreen to protect himself from

the view of Jefferson, "the Yoknapatawpha County spinster aunts of both sexes" (125).

But in the fifth section of the story, Charles discovers the truth about the story's "appendix or any-way appendage; a legend to or within or behind the actual or original or initial legend; apocryphal's apocrypha" (125). He learns how Stevens destroyed his romance with Mrs. Harriss by mistakenly mailing her a letter meant for his Russian mistress. When finally, after the twenty years of separation, the two of them re-unite, Charles' comment is indicative of the shift in attitude:

"Now what?" his uncle said. "You can say something, can't you? Even good afternoon Mrs. Harriss will do."

He started to say "Excuse me." But already he had thought of something better than that.

"Bless you, my children," he said. (211)

Charles' respect for Stevens is intact but positions have shifted. In a sense, Charles is now the more mature.

As Faulkner said of Stevens at the University of Virginia:

When he had to deal with people, he was an amateur, he was---at times he had a good deal less judgment than his nephew did. Which is not against education. Probably the passion he had for getting degrees, for trying this and trying that and going all the way to Europe to get more degrees, to study more, was in his own nature, it was the same character that made him shy away from marriage, he was probably afraid to be married.

He might get too involved with the human race if he married one of them.<sup>10</sup>

In this light, it would seem that Stevens' mistake with the letter was subconsciously deliberate, an impression reinforced by the fact that he made no attempt to rectify the situation. Charles expresses his doubt:

'Those letters. Two letters. Two wrong envelopes.' His uncle looked at him. 'You don't like coincidence?' 'I love it.' he said. 'It's one of the most important things in life. Like ~~maidenhead~~. Only, like maidenhead, you only use it once. I'm going to save mine a while yet.' (216)

In reply to this doubt, Stevens reveals the truth--Mrs. Harriss' awareness that Stevens didn't really want her then: "You didn't want me . . . I wasn't smart enough for you" (217). Stevens flees marriage until, at fifty, he has gained enough maturity to brave it. He prefers to observe life as a chess game with himself as player, not one of the pieces. The image Faulkner associates with him more than any other in "Knight's Gambit" is that of the cold pipe: "Then he put the stem of the cold pipe into his mouth and drew at it as if it had fire and tobacco in it" (198). This recurring motif suggests how remote Stevens is from the real fire and passion of life.

"Knight's Gambit" is the pivotal story in the development of Gavin Stevens for in it we see him move

from the capable and controlled observer to the reluctant and panicked participant. What makes this character interesting, moreover, is his continual fluctuation between the two states: he observes and influences action; he becomes involved with and influenced by action; and he himself becomes the observed, in his turn influenced by and influencing the new observer, Charles Mallison.

In "Knight's Gambit", as in the shorter stories of the volume, the clash of outsider-protagonist with community opinion as a whole also recurs. The townfolk react with amazement and hostility to the strangeness of the Harriss establishment:

And now not only Jefferson but the whole county watched it, not only what his uncle called the spinster aunts who watched by hearsay and supposition (and maybe hope) from their front galleries, but the men too, and not just men from the town who had only six miles to go, but farmers who had the whole county to cross.

They would come by whole families in battered dusty cars and wagons, or singly on horses and mules taken last night from the plow, to stop along the road and watch.

. . . . .  
They would ride past mile after mile of white-painted panel fence, to sit in the cars and wagons or on the horses and mules, and watch long rows of stables being built of better material than was in most of their houses. . . .

(134)

The attitude of the watching community combines jealousy



of the Harriss' wealth with admiration of their extravagance and mistrust of their unusual occupations. They are not above acquiring a little of Harriss' bootleg money by planting their animals in the path of his guests' onrushing cars and, after Harriss dies, they accept with equanimity, "sardonic and contained" (138), the attempts of Captain Gualdres to marry Harriss' widow in order to get his money.

When Gualdres uses the trick with a blind horse to cover his affair with another woman, however, the town is outraged:

they knew the answer now, to the mare, the blind mare and the night. He, the matchless horseman, was using a horse not as a horse but as a disguise; he the amoral preyer on aging widows, was betraying the integrity of his amorality.

Not his morals: his morality. They had never had any illusions about his---a foreigner and a Latin---morals, so they had accepted his lack of them already in advance before he could have demanded, requested it even. But they themselves had foisted on, invested him with a morality, a code which he had proved now was not his either, and they would never forgive him.

(150)

Max Harriss, the young son and brother, who attempts to murder Gualdres, is as much an outsider to this community as the Argentinian captain. Significantly, Gavin Stevens, who is a member of the local draft board, is aware of the fact that Max has not registered. As Jerome Klinkowitz

points out, "the most important event to the national community at the time of the story, the Second World War, figures in the resolution of nearly all the characters."<sup>11</sup> In return for concealing Max's attempted murder of Gualdres, Stevens demands that the boy join the armed forces so that like Chick, who is a member of the ROTC and who fears being left out of the war, Max becomes a member of the community.

In his role as manipulator of both Gualdres and Max, Stevens functions as the community's representative and agent. Similarly, in finally marrying Melisandre Harriss, Stevens reintegrates her into the community from which she has been alienated by the Harriss money. But, as has been already shown, Stevens is frequently the outsider himself. Indeed, throughout the final story of this volume the reader is reminded of Stevens' dual personality, on one hand the lonely intellectual with his Greek Old Testament, on the other hand, the district attorney and defender of Jefferson's sense of community. He is the garrulous gossip who uses his talkativeness to hide behind, who uses conversation to prevent communication.

More than any other novel of Faulkner's later canon, Intruder in the Dust incites controversy over the role of Gavin Stevens. That Stevens represents Faulkner's ideas in the novel, acting as the author's spokesman, is almost a critical commonplace. Irving Howe, for instance, says: "I assume that Gavin Stevens speaks for Faulkner. . . . the assumption would seem to hold, alas, in relation to Intruder in the Dust, where Stevens is so clearly admired in his role of raisonneur."<sup>12</sup> Howe does not, however, reflect upon the fact that the admiration comes from Chick Mallison, the central consciousness of the novel, rather than Faulkner, and, even in Chick's case, is tempered by some rather harsh criticism. Joseph Gold is more savage in his criticism of the novel:

the second half of the novel is largely taken up with the pseudophilosophical ramblings of Gavin Stevens, who as the occasional mouthpiece of Faulkner, can never quite make the distinction between a universal commentary on man and a series of observations on race relations in the South. . . . Only this can explain the trailing off in the novel, the self-consciousness, and the unjustifiable intrusion of sermonizing that is unrelated to the plot.<sup>13</sup>

Edmond L. Volpe quite flatly states: "Intruder in the Dust is a propaganda novel. Judging from Faulkner's letters to newspapers and other public statements, the ideas that Gavin expounds are Faulkner's own."<sup>14</sup>

Such adverse critical reaction assumes a number of facts, none of which, it seems to me, are true. Howe admits that Gavin Stevens is a character, not a mouthpiece, in Faulkner's other novels of this period, but does not explain why he should appear as the author's spokesman in this one novel. Gold assumes a subject for the novel and then confesses his inability to see any relation between the "sermonizing" and the story line. Because some of the ideas Stevens expresses have at various times been expressed by Faulkner himself, Volpe assumes that Stevens therefore represents Faulkner's point of view in the novel. In this section, I hope to show that all these assumptions are fallacious. Stevens in Intruder in the Dust is a fallible, flawed human being whose presence serves a real purpose in manifesting the novel's theme.

Indeed, Faulkner himself has denied that Stevens is his mouthpiece in the novel. At Nagano when one of Faulkner's questioners mentioned Stevens' opinions about the North and the South, Faulkner replied:

Well, now you must remember that that was that character's opinion and it need not necessarily be mine. I'm writing about people, not trying to express my own opinions, so that could have been his and I would have disagreed with him possibly. I don't remember the context from which that came but that's possible that that was his own opinion.<sup>15</sup>

Malcolm Cowley described a conversation he had with Faulkner about Gavin Stevens in the novel: "We talked about Intruder in the Dust, though without mentioning my review; I assumed that he hadn't read it. Still, what he said about Gavin Stevens may have been an indirect answer to my interpretation of the novel. Stevens, he explained, was not speaking for the author, but for the best type of liberal Southerners; that is how they feel about the Negroes."<sup>16</sup> It is true that one need not accept an author's opinion about his novel if the work itself seems to provide evidence to the contrary, but I will suggest in this section that a close reading of Intruder in the Dust will prove Faulkner right.

I will examine three aspects of the novel: the development of Chick Mallison, whose perceptions control and mold the picture we receive; the change in Chick's attitude to Gavin Stevens from adulation to shame to a more qualified and mature admiration (a development paralleled by his reaction to Southern society); and finally, Gavin's speeches in the last half of the novel.

Intruder in the Dust portrays the development of an adolescent who has accepted unthinkingly the prejudices and ideas of his society into a young man who finds it difficult to accept his newly-awakened awareness

of his uncle and his society. In another sense, Chick's progression (and the novel's) involves the violation of a series of stereotypes, the most important of which is that of the "nigger." Another is that of the poor-white redneck. Chick watches Nub Gowrie, the illiterate, backwoods bigot they all have expected to lead the lynching of Lucas Beauchamp:

he thought suddenly with amazement: Why, he's grieving; thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being: once in an old nigger who had just happened to outlive his old nigger wife and now in a violent foulmouthed godless old man who had happened to lose one of the six lazy idle violent more or less lawless a good deal more than just more or less worthless sons, only one of whom had ever benefitted his community and kind and that only by the last desperate resort of getting murdered out of it.<sup>17</sup>

Nub Gowrie is both the "violent foulmouthed godless old man" and the grieving father; Faulkner does not replace one stereotype with another. Rather, the reader, along with Chick, is forced to realize the complexity of human behaviour. In a larger sense, Faulkner is also attempting to invalidate the stereotype of Southern society and its most articulate representative, Gavin Stevens. Chick views a violent and bigoted society which he nevertheless loves. Gavin Stevens loses stature in his eyes, but is still his admired uncle.<sup>18</sup>

Chick begins by accepting his society's attitudes; or rather, he is hardly aware that he believes them. The smell in Lucas' cabin represents for Chick the consciousness of the Negro position which he achieves only with Lucas' denial of it:

that smell which if it were not for something that was going to happen to him within a space of time measurable now in minutes he would have gone to his grave never once pondering speculating if perhaps that smell were really not the odor of a race nor even actually of poverty but perhaps of a condition. . . . But the smell meant nothing now or yet; it was still an hour yet before the thing would happen and it would be four years more before he would realize the extent of its ramifications and what it had done to him and he would be a man grown before he would realize, admit that he had accepted it. (11)

Chick's awareness of the smell represents his realization of "his heritage as a Southerner" (12), a heritage which involves the guilt of a race for its treatment of the Negro. When Lucas refuses to accept the money Chick proffers in payment for his dinner, Chick's humiliation and anger drive him to echo the sentiments of his society about Lucas:

he was already thinking of the man whom he had never seen but once and that only twelve hours ago, as within the next year he was to learn every white man in that whole section of the country had been thinking about him for years; We

got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted. (18)

Chick's motivation in helping Lucas is not humanitarian; rather it is another step in his campaign to pay off the debt that Lucas put him under on the night he refused Chick's payment for the meal. When he first hears of Lucas' arrest for the murder of a white man, Chick's first impulse is to saddle his horse and flee the country until the lynching is over. But his sense of debt forces him to stay; as he returns to Lucas' cell, he is thinking: "Maybe he will remind me of that goddamn plate of collards and sidemeat or maybe he'll even tell me I'm all he's got, all that's left and that will be enough" (68).

Earlier, when he and his **uncle** had seen Lucas sleeping in his cell, Chick had thought:

He's just a nigger after all for all his high nose and his stiff neck and his gold watch-chain and refusing to mean mister to anybody even when he says it. Only a nigger could kill a man, let alone shoot him in the back, and then sleep like a baby as soon as he found something flat enough to lie down. . . . (58)

This is the most blatant racism, and it is obviously the attitude Chick has absorbed from the society which surrounds him.

After Chick returns to Lucas' cell, however,



his attitude and his motivation change remarkably. When Lucas tells him to dig up Vinson Gowrie's grave, Chick's reaction differs from what we might expect:

He wasn't even thinking anymore So this is what that plate of meat and greens is going to cost me. Because he had already passed that long ago when that something ---whatever it was---had held him here five minutes ago looking back across the vast, the almost insuperable chasm between him and the old Negro murderer and saw, heard Lucas saying something to him not because he was himself, Charles Mallison junior, nor because he had eaten the plate of greens and warmed himself at the fire, but because he alone of all the white people Lucas would have a chance to speak to between now and the moment when he might be dragged out of the cell and down the steps at the end of a rope, would hear the mute unhoping urgency of the eyes.  
(68-69)

Lucas has changed here from "nigger" to "Negro", from stereotype to individual, and Chick's motivations have changed from payment-retribution to humanitarian concern.

In one sense, Intruder in the Dust documents Charles Mallison Junior's attempt to shuck the chrysalis of his social beliefs in order that he may be born as an individual. His nickname, Chick, reinforces the imagery:

(it would be some time yet before he would realise how far he had come: a provincial Mississippian, a child who when the sun set this same day had appeared to be--and even himself believed, provided he had thought about it at all--still a swaddled unwitting infant in the long tradition of his

native land--or for that matter a witless  
foetus itself struggling--if he was aware  
that there had been any throes--blind and  
insentient and not even yet awaked in the  
simple painless convulsion of emergence).  
(96-97)

Seen from this point of view, the first five chapters of the book represent the birth pangs of Chick Mallison. In these chapters, he is protagonist and his thoughts and emotions are the center of our attention. Once Charles has achieved his self-creation, however, the point of interest shifts to the actions of the adults of his society. (Gavin Stevens, Mr. Hampton, and the others), and he becomes more a witness of the action rather than a participant in it. For, once Charles has come to terms with his own feelings and beliefs, he must then attempt to reconcile these new feelings with the predominant attitudes of his society. Therefore, the novel falls into two sections: the first with Chick as participant, the second with Chick as bystander. Gavin Stevens, on the other hand, who has refused to involve himself in the important actions which lead to proving Lucas innocent, in the second half, retroactively abandons the role of uninvolved bystander to dominate the action for the rest of the novel.

We must therefore examine now Chick's changing attitudes to Gavin Stevens and, more broadly, his altered

vision of his society, a society of which Gavin Stevens is the best representative. In the opening chapters, Chick's attitude towards his uncle is one of unqualified adulation. Speaking of Chick's service as errand boy at his uncle's office on Saturday's, Faulkner says: "He had begun it when he was a child when he could scarcely remember, out of that blind and absolute attachment to his mother's only brother which he had never tried to reason about, and he had done it ever since" (21). His speech and thoughts are full of epigrams and dicta caught from his uncle's lips and used to formulate his experience. Again and again, Chick's observations are prefaced by an expression such as "and he remembered his uncle saying once" (47). He sees Stevens as "his uncle who had for everything an explanation not in facts but long since beyond dry statistics into something far more moving because it was truth" (50).

The matter of Lucas' "crime", however, begins a process for Chick which reveals his uncle's feet of clay. Both Stevens and Chick initially assume the truth of the charges against Lucas; Stevens says to Chick:

'Your friend Beauchamp seems to have done it this time.'  
 'Yes,' he said. 'They're going to make a nigger out of him once in his life anyway.'  
 (31-32)

Because Stevens still remains convinced of Lucas' guilt,

Chick is forced to see his uncle's limitation. When Chick tries to tell Stevens about what he has learned, Gavin's reply is: "And he told you a tale. I hope it was a good one" (78). Chick realizes that Lucas has revealed the truth to him and not to Stevens because no white Southerner would ever believe his story: "Lucas had told him that thirty minutes ago in the jail when even he had come almost to the point and even under the very shadow of the Gowries had in the end known better than to try to tell his uncle or any other white man" (78). Chick remembers a similar incident years before in which Ephraim, an old Negro, had told him:

'a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks. In fact, you mought bear this in yo mind; someday you mought need it. If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, dont waste yo time on the menfolk; get the womens and children to working at it.' And he remembered his father's not rage so much as outrage, his almost furious repudiation, his transference of the whole thing into a realm of assailed embattled moral principle, and even his uncle who until now had had no more trouble than he believing things that all other grown people doubted for the sole reason that they were unreasonable. (71-72)

Even more damning from Chick's point of view than this refusal to believe Lucas is Stevens' echoing of his society's cliched expressions about this old Negro.

When Chick first hears of Lucas' ostensible murder of Vinson Gowrie, he hears also the choric voice of the town commenting on the occasion:

'No. They wont do nothing today. They're burying Vinson this afternoon and to burn a nigger right while the funeral's going on wouldn't be respectful to Vinson.'

'That's so. It'll probably be tonight.'

'On Sunday night?'

'Is that the Gowrie's fault? Lucas ought to thought of that before he picked out Saturday to kill Vinson on.' (40)

When Gavin and Chick meet one of the small farmers, Mr. Lilley, on their way to the jail, Chick notices the same use of language:

'Maybe they'll decide to stay at home on a Sunday night,' his uncle said pleasantly, passing on: whereupon the man said almost exactly what the man in the barber shop had said this morning (and he remembered his uncle saying once how little of vocabulary man really needed to get comfortably and even efficiently through his life, how not only in the individual but within his whole type and race and kind a few simple cliches served his few simple passions and needs and lusts):

'Sho now. It ain't their fault it's Sunday. That sonofabitch ought to thought of that before he taken to killing white men on a Saturday afternoon.' (47-48)

But most important, Chick hears the same expression echoed by Gavin Stevens, and, unwittingly, Stevens is judged by his own comments. When Chick tries to convince his uncle of Lucas' innocence, he hears once again the cliché:

and now he heard for the third time almost exactly what he had heard twice in twelve hours, and he marvelled again at the paucity, the really almost standardised meagreness not of individual vocabularies but of Vocabulary itself, by means of which even men can live in vast droves and herds even in concrete warrens in comparative amity: even his uncle too:

'Suppose it then. Lucas should have thought of that before he shot a white man in the back.'

(80)

As Gavin attempts to explain his legal alternatives and plans, Chick, realizing the futility of further discussion, leaves the room, "closing the door upon the significantless speciosity of his uncle's voice" (80-81). At this point Chick's disillusionment with his uncle seems obvious.

Chick's disappointment is partially allayed by Stevens' readiness to admit his error; though limited by his society and background, even by his vocabulary, Stevens can learn, though his tutor must be his own nephew. After Chick has revealed the discovery made at Gowrie's grave to him, Stevens begins preparations for an investigation and suggests that Chick should stay behind this time, in bed. But suddenly he realizes the irony of the situation; he says: 'We are going at this a little hindpart-before, aint we? I'm the one who should be asking you if I can go' (121). In a sense, Stevens and Chick have changed places. Stevens asks his

nephew, now his teacher: 'When did you really begin to believe him [Lucas]? When you opened the coffin, wasn't it? I want to know, you see. Maybe I'm not too old to learn either. When was it?' In spite of these protestations of regret and humility, however, Stevens proceeds to take charge from this point in the novel, and Chick, as was suggested above, becomes less participant than observer.

Faulkner establishes an interesting parallel between Chick's father and his uncle, a parallel which reveals to Chick another aspect of Stevens' personality. He sees his father as:

the man who had begot him looking back at him from beyond the bridgeless abyss of that begetting not with just pride but with envy too; it was his uncle's abnegant and rhetorical self-lacerating which was the phony one and his father was gnawing the true bitter irremediable bone of all which was dismatchment with time, being born too soon or late to have been himself sixteen and gallop a horse ten miles in the dark to save an old nigger's insolent and friendless neck.  
(133)

The criticism of Stevens here is bitter and revealing; his statements of regret are, in his nephew's eyes at least, rhetorical and phony. In light of a comment like this it is difficult to accept the speeches Stevens makes in the last half of the book as simply embodying the author's thematic concerns.

Indeed, in the last pages of the book, when Stevens launches into another of his lengthy and facile speeches, Chick denies his contentions and argues with him. Stevens attempts to explain the American love of the automobile as the male's sexual surrogate:

'Which is why let him live in a rented rathole though he must he will not only own one but renew it each year in pristine virginity, lending it to no one, letting no other hand ever know the last secret forever chaste forever wanton intimacy of its pedals and levers, having nowhere to go in it himself and even if he did he would not go where scratch or blemish might deface it, spending all Sunday morning washing and polishing and waxing it because in doing that he is caressing the body of the woman who has long since now denied him her bed.'

'That's not true,' he said.

'I am fifty-plus years old,' his uncle said. 'I spent the middle fifteen of them fumbling beneath skirts. My experience was that few of them were interested in love or sex either. They wanted to be married.'

'I still don't believe it,' he said.

'That's right,' his uncle said. 'Don't. And even when you are fifty and plus, still refuse to believe it.' (239-240)

At this stage in the novel, Chick is willing to contradict his uncle flatly in spite of Stevens' timeworn appeal of more extensive experience; Chick has moved from blind idealization to an awareness of his uncle's limitations.

Yet Chick still respects Gavin Stevens, and Faulkner, I believe, still intends the reader to see him



as a worthy man. Perhaps the average reader wishes his insights and conclusions proffered by an intellectually immaculate spokesman, but Faulkner, in his continued determination to violate the stereotype, refuses to portray Gavin Stevens simply as a Southern bigot, limited by his experience and his intellect, or as a beneficent wiseman watching the growth to maturity of his nephew. Gavin is neither fool nor guru, and his speeches are neither authorial statements nor so much racist chaff. The difficulty in approaching Intruder in the Dust lies with this ambivalence: just as Chick finds it difficult to see Nub Gowrie as more than a stereotype of the Southern redneck, the reader finds it difficult to see Gavin Stevens as a complex and flawed human being. Chick's final attitude to Gavin Stevens mixes love and respect with disillusionment and criticism.

Indeed, we can see Chick's relationship with Gavin Stevens as representative of his relationship with Southern society as a whole. His shame for his country is firmly rooted in his love for it; he must criticize the South himself in order to defend it more effectively from outside attack:

he realized that that was part of it too  
 --that fierce desire that they should be  
 perfect because they were his and he was

theirs, that furious intolerance of any one single jot or tittle less than absolute perfection---that furious almost instinctive leap and spring to defend them from anyone anywhere so that he might excoriate them himself without mercy since they were his own and he wanted no more save to stand with them unalterable and impregnable: one shame if shame must be, one expiation since expiation must surely be but above all one unalterable durable impregnable one: one people one heart one land. . . .  
(209-210)

This sense of unity finds bizarre expression in Chick's surrealistic visions of the mob that awaits Lucas Beauchamp's lynching. The faces of the townspeople merge into a composite face which Chick sees watching his actions: "for a second or maybe two he actually saw it---not faces but a face, not a mass nor even a mosaic of them but a Face: not even ravening nor uninsatiate but just in motion, insensate, vacant of thought or even passion" (182). This face is the visage of the choric voice Chick heard earlier pronouncing Lucas' doom; it is the face of his society, "a Face, the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own" (194). When the mob flees town and the knowledge of Lucas' innocence, it is not a face "because their backs were toward him but the back of a head, the composite one back of one Head one fragile mushfilled bulb indefensible as an egg yet terrible in its concordance unanimity rushing not at him but away" (191-192)

At this point, the unity of his society is not an admirable "homogeneity", in Gavin's terms, but a frightening fellowship in shame and bigotry. Combined with his shame for the South, however, Chick has a love and pride which soften the book's criticism; he feels, for instance, that the quality he possesses ~~that~~ led him to save Lucas can have originated only in his native land: "it had also integrated into him whatever it was that had compelled him to stop and listen to a damned high-nosed impudent Negro" (151). Chick's identification with his native land is, at this point, complete; his victory over its bigotry can have resulted only from principles which the land itself had inculcated within him. This duality of criticism and justification in Chick's approach to his native land reflects a similar duality in his feeling about Gavin Stevens.

Any discussion of Gavin Stevens' role in Intruder in the Dust must take into account the development of Charles Mallison from youth to adult and the way in which this development affects his relationship with his uncle. But ultimately the central critical problem of the novel involves the series of set-piece speeches which Stevens delivers at various occasions during the last half of the book. Critics have seen these speeches

as poorly integrated into the plot and as blatant authorial intrusion. In the context of what I have said about the novel, however, it is possible to see not only the content of the speeches, but also the structural form of the speeches as indicative of Faulkner's thematic concerns.

In Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner seems to establish a duality of action and thought with Charles Mallison representing the "man" of action, Gavin Stevens the man of thought. Philosophize as he may about the need for the South to initiate its own programme of desegregation, Stevens fails to act at the crucial moment. This is typical of the man in that inevitably he prefers to talk rather than to do. As Olga Vickery suggests in her article, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic", Stevens employs language as "a rhetorical buttress, a buttress which threatens to imprison him even while it protects." She further suggests that the "wide discrepancy between Gavin's words and his actions renders him a study in irony, if not in outright satire."<sup>19</sup> One might compare Stevens' role in this novel with the similar function he played in Light in August, where his opinions, introduced near the end of the novel, served as a dramatic device rather than as the expressions of the author's views. John A. Hart points out another aspect of his

speeches which makes this comparison more telling:

The untenable view of white supremacy held by the mob and the more "advanced" view of Gavin Stevens that a long period will eliminate the feeling of tension and significant distinction between the races, are both made to look a little foolish because the change intellectualized so pompously by Stevens is occurring, has been fought and won, <sup>20</sup>inside the consciousness of the narrator.

Just as Stevens' point of view in Light in August is part of the town's point of view, though "refined" and intellectualized, so his statements in Intruder in the Dust reflect the less palatable dogmas of his countrymen.

Much has been made of the similarity of Gavin Stevens' ideas and the ideas expressed by Faulkner in several letters and essays, particularly the "Letter to a Northern Editor", published in Life, March 5, 1956. The argument runs that, because the views expressed here are similar to Stevens', therefore Stevens serves as Faulkner's mouthpiece in the novel. This is a dangerous assumption since, no doubt, it would be as easy to find similarities between Faulkner's opinions and those of a number of fictional characters in other works. The author uses his own ideas, among other things, to create the intellects and personalities of his characters. But even if this fact were not so, I believe it is possible to show differences between Stevens' and Faulkner's opinions which

will invalidate this kind of argument. Elizabeth M. Kerr, in Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil", points out two differences: Gavin's use of the racially offensive term, "Sambo", which reminds us of Chick's comments on Vocabulary; Faulkner's constant emphasis upon the importance of education, an emphasis found nowhere in Stevens' speeches. Miss Kerr goes on to say:

A creditable member of the upper class in Jefferson, Gavin Stevens nevertheless reveals some of the reasons for the failure of that class to exercise positive, effective leadership and thus to serve effectively the cause of truth and justice they espoused: his Southern romanticism and rhetoric are symptomatic of his limited grasp of reality and his acceptance of much of the Southern myth.<sup>21</sup>

Faulkner's protestation to Malcolm Cowley, quoted above, would seem to confirm the argument that Stevens is representative of the Southern liberal, not of the author's opinion.

However, there is a more subtle difference, not as yet mentioned, between Stevens' speeches and Faulkner's statements. Stevens' opinions are symptomatic of the trend in the Southern intellectual community which Faulkner warns Northern liberals not to encourage. Stevens says to Chick:

we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves nor even the two of us as one to remain one nation because that will be the inescapable byproduct of what we will preserve: which is the very thing that three generations ago we lost a bloody war in our own back yards so that it remain intact: the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and hence must be free. That's what we are really defending: the privilege of setting him free ourselves. . . . (154)

Stevens claims that the South must achieve integration without outside intervention and goes on to argue the inherent superiority of the South's "homogeneity", a regional unity that includes both whites and blacks. On the other hand, Faulkner speaks of the South's racial division, with the white liberals championing the underdog Negro against the white racist majority, and he appeals to the NAACP:

Go slow now. Stop now for a time, a moment. You have the power now; you can afford to withhold for a moment the use of it as a force. You have done a good job, you have jolted your opponent off-balance and he is now vulnerable. But stop there for a moment; don't give him the advantage of a chance to cloud the issue by that purely automatic sentimental appeal to that same universal human instinct for automatic sympathy for the underdog simply because he is under. ("Letter to a Northern Editor")<sup>22</sup>

What Faulkner describes is the Southern intellectual climate of which Gavin Stevens in Intruder in the Dust

is symptomatic; Stevens' statement is an outcry against Northern intervention, Faulkner's a tactical suggestion based upon a knowledge of his society. Faulkner warns that the Northerner "assumes that he is dealing with a simple legal theory and a simple moral idea. He is not. He is dealing with a fact: the fact of an emotional condition of such fierce unanimity as to scorn the fact that it is a minority and which will go to any length and against any odds at this moment to justify and, if necessary, defend that condition and its right to it."<sup>23</sup> Faulkner points out a fact; Gavin Stevens is an obvious manifestation of that fact.

If Gavin Stevens' lengthy speeches, which seem, at first sight, to act as authorial statements of theme, are not in fact Faulkner's own credo, what purpose do they serve? As has been suggested previously, Stevens' lengthy and rhetorical speeches counterpoint Chick's active involvement; they are static and theoretical, Chick's actions are practical and successful. Gavin Stevens represents here, as elsewhere, the intellectual fending off the dirty reality of life with an immaculate screen of rhetoric. Faulkner can view him sympathetically, but finally he must reveal Stevens as essentially impotent. Like Horace Benbow in Sanctuary and Gail Hightower in



Light in August, he has been defeated by experience; the difference here is that the character is moving closer to the center of the stage, as he will continue to do in The Town and The Mansion.

There is another reason for Stevens' "intrusion" into the later parts of the novel. His speeches serve as an articulation of thoughts and emotions developing in the young Chick Mallison. Robert H. Elias, in "Gavin Stevens: Intruder?", points out that "When one notes the way the uncle's words and the boy's reflections are juxtaposed, one realizes that Stevens' words are the boy's thoughts anticipated and articulated."<sup>24</sup> As Chick agonizes at his position and his society's problems, "once more his uncle spoke at complete one with him and again without surprise he saw his thinking not be interrupted but merely swap one saddle for another" (153). This does not contradict what was said previously about Gavin's speeches as counterpoint to Chick's actions. Gavin is not always, or necessarily, wrong in what he says; the problem is that he lets his saying of truth substitute for action. Speech becomes a protective device behind which he can hide. Gavin has all the right motives, but his inability to become an intruder in the dust, his reluctance to leave the ivory tower of his words, is his weakness.

In Knight's Gambit, Intruder in the Dust, and, again, in Requiem for a Nun, Gavin Stevens has appeared to many critics as a spokesman for Faulkner's ideas, an intrusive voice violating the fictions. Michael Millgate voices this argument in the most cautious and balanced fashion. Speaking of Stevens, he says: "he is an agent, an instrument, rather than a participant---not himself the central figure but one of the means by which attention is focussed on that figure---and although Faulkner's presentation of Stevens is never free of ambiguity it would seem possible in these instances to accept him at a positive valuation."<sup>25</sup> I have attempted to suggest the modifications that must be made to this "positive valuation" in Knight's Gambit and Intruder in the Dust; no less is it essential to understand Stevens' limitations in Requiem for a Nun because they determine the role he plays in that book.

Stevens' role changes from act to act within the play. In Act I he is an uncharacteristically reticent bystander who by his physical presence more than his rhetorical persuasiveness stimulates the protagonists into speech. In Act II, however, Stevens moves stage center and, despite the frequent protestations of the other characters, demands that he share in the telling of

the story. After this loquacious eruption into the foreground, Stevens, in Act III, seems to relinquish the spotlight to Nancy Mannigoe and his questions become sincere requests for knowledge rather than Socratic probings. Stevens' initial approach to the problems of Temple and Gowan is restrained, avuncular, and tentative, but as the action progresses, he is caught up emotionally, vicariously, in the problems of his nephew's wife to the point that he too participates in the conflict and finds himself, a fellow-sufferer with Temple, seeking answers from Nancy, "a nigger dope-fiend whore."

In Act I, Stevens is strangely reticent, yet his silent, watching presence infuriates Temple and drives her to self-revelation. Gowan and Temple speak, ostensibly to one another, but in fact to Stevens, who watches them. The stage directions make clear the purpose of their statements; as Temple addresses Gowan "she is watching, not Gowan but Stevens, who watches her in return, grave and soberly."<sup>26</sup> Temple asks Stevens how much he knows about the background of Nancy Mannigoe's case: "You know what I mean---her lawyer---seeing her every day ---just a nigger, and you a white man---even if you needed anything to frighten her with---you could just buy it from her with a dose of cocaine or a pint of. . . ." (63) But

Temple realizes suddenly that it is not Nancy who has revealed anything to Stevens; she herself has made him suspicious: "Oh, God, oh, God, she hasn't told you anything. It's me; I'm the one that's---Don't you see? It's that I cannot believe---will not believe---impossible---" (63-64), and Stevens assures her that Nancy has told him nothing. This is made clear in Act I, Scene 3: "TEMPLE: Listen. How much do you know? STEVENS: Nothing. TEMPLE: Swear. STEVENS: Would you believe me? TEMPLE: No. But swear anyway. STEVENS: All right. I swear" (92-93).

Although he knows nothing factual, Stevens does know that something is terribly wrong with Temple. Moreover, he knows that if the ghost that haunts her is to be laid, Temple must purge herself through telling what she knows. His repeated answer to her question of what she must tell is: "Everything" (94) for, as he has sworn to her, he knows nothing.

Even more important, however, Temple's revelation of her sins will act like a Roman Catholic confession.<sup>27</sup> To save herself, even in a strictly non-religious sense, she must come to terms with her own guilt by revealing it to someone else. As Temple says:

For no more than that. For no better  
reason than that. Just to get it told,

breathed aloud, into words, sound.  
 Just to be heard by, told to, some-  
 one, anyone, any stranger none of  
 whose business it is, can possibly  
 be, simply because he is capable of  
 hearing, comprehending it. Why  
 blink your own rhetoric? Why dont  
 you go and tell me it's for the good  
 of my soul---if I have one? (90)

To this Stevens replies: "I did. I said, so you can sleep at night" (90). This is the existential version of Temple's religious suggestion; her confession will allow her to sleep at night because it will involve her coming to terms with her own conscience. The journey to the Governor's mansion is not, as Temple realizes, to seek a reprieve for Nancy Mannigoe, but rather to seek absolution for Temple Drake: "Because you aren't going to save her, are you? Because all this was not for the sake of her soul because her soul doesn't need it, but for mine" (196). That Temple's journey to Jackson is a moral rather than a legal pilgrimage is symbolized by the fact that her husband Gowan, unknown to her, takes the Governor's place as she conducts her confession. Her position at the beginning of Act II, Scene 3 is significant: "Temple now kneels before the desk, facing it, her arms on the desk and her face buried in her arms" (194). In the traditional position of the suppliant, she confesses to the one person who most needs her con-

fidence; her husband must learn what has passed through her mind in order to achieve a reconciliation with her.

Temple extends the significance of the confessional when she describes how she used Nancy as a confidant:

Somebody to talk to, as we all seem to need, want, have to have, not to converse with you nor even agree with you, but just keep quiet and listen. Which is all that people really want, really need . . . which is an idea the Catholic Church discovered two thousand years ago only it just didn't carry it far enough or maybe it was too busy being the Church to have time to bother with man.

(158-159)

In this context, Gavin Stevens' presence, even his passive, watching presence, is necessary for Temple's spiritual regeneration. The bystander, by the very act of witnessing, shapes and influences the actions of the protagonist. Temple refers to Gavin's clients as patients (115), the patients of a doctor of the mind; like the psychoanalyst, Stevens' job is to listen and, by means of delicate probing, open up the recesses of Temple's past.

Gavin Stevens' position in the novel, however, is not as simple (or positive) as this might imply. A major concern throughout the book is the violation of the individual's privacy by the prying outsider, of whom

Stevens is the best example. In the opening act, Temple urges Stevens: "if you're not sitting down, why dont you go? Let me be bereaved and vindicated, but at least let me do it in privacy, since God knows if any one of the excretions should take place in privacy, triumph should be the one" (56). In spite of her protestations, Stevens persists in intruding into her grief and guilt, sending her a telegram even to California to jog her conscience. As the play progresses, he changes from the reticent witness into a garrulous and intrusive voice, demanding an ever increasing amount of the spotlight. Temple protests to the Governor: "I'm trying to tell it, enough of it. Can't you see that? But can't you make him let me alone so I can. Make him, for God's sake, let me alone" (147). In response to her pleas, the Governor repeatedly stops Gavin from speaking (147, 156). The most grotesque violation of privacy is Popeye's, whose impotence leaves him only the pleasures of the voyeur watching Temple and Red make love. Temple's explanation of Red's motives for returning to her secretly reminds us of her protestations about Gavin's intrusion:

the one time, the first time, the only  
time when we thought we had dodged,  
fooled him could be alone together, just  
the two of us, after all the . . . other

ones.---If love can be, mean anything, except the newness, the learning, the peace, the privacy: no shame: not even conscious that you are naked because you are just using the nakedness because that's a part of it. . . . (153)

Faulkner sympathized with this lust for privacy himself; his letters and essays reiterate constantly his demand that no one violate his own and that privacy should remain every individual's inalienable right. Indeed, he wrote an essay called "On Privacy (The American Dream: What Happened to It?)" in which he stated: "one man's liberty must stop at exactly the point where the next one's begins."<sup>28</sup> He goes on to protest the ever increasing violation of the individual's privacy in modern America, particularly by means of the press. It was the respect of this value that he saw as the chief virtue of New Englanders:

It is the people---the men and women themselves so individual, who hold individual integration and privacy as high and dear as they do liberty and freedom; holding these so high that they take it for granted that all other men and women are individuals, too, and treat them as such, doing this simply by letting them alone with absolute and complete dignity and courtesy. ("A Guest's Impression of New England", New England Journeys Number 2, Dearborn, Michigan, 1954)<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, Faulkner realized, as he pointed out in an essay called "An Innocent at Rinkside"



which he wrote for the January 24, 1955 edition of Sports Illustrated, that "We--Americans--like to watch; we like the adrenalic discharge of vicarious excitement or triumph or success."<sup>30</sup> He manifests this sense of the voyeuristic threat to the privacy he cherished in Requiem for a Nun.

Gavin Stevens, like Popeye, enjoys watching people's behaviour, particularly if it is none of his business (as Chick Mallison notes in Knight's Gambit). His initial concern for his nephew's marriage is real enough, and his position as Nancy's lawyer motivates his initial interest in the case, but in Act II he presses continually for more details and interrupts Temple's narrative to the extent that the reader, along with Temple and the Governor, feels a growing impatience. Stevens, who has sworn in Act I that he knows nothing about Temple's story, seems remarkably well informed in Act II. Saying "Wait. Let me play too." (126), he launches into lengthy descriptions of the events leading up to Nancy Mannigoe's trial.

Stevens' interruptions are functional, however, in that they direct the narrative toward the conclusion Temple shies away from; she is telling the story of her past and he is attempting to tell the story of her present from the point of view of her past, for, as Stevens

insists, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (92). Two Temples are being revealed, and two Gavin Stevens, one the bystander, the other the active participant, help in the revelation; as Temple says:

I mean I'm trying to tell you about one Temple Drake, and our Uncle Gavin is showing you another one. So already you've got two different people begging for the same clemency; if everybody concerned keeps on splitting up into two people, you won't even know who to pardon, will you? (156)

Stevens exemplifies the fact that every person embodies a duality of witness and participant, a duality which fluctuates constantly, forcing the involvement of the bystander who initially influenced the action by his watching but who is now himself influenced by what he sees. Temple tells the Governor: "Uncle Gavin said . . . how there is a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident" (129). For this reason, Stevens cannot help but interfere in the affair which, in a very real sense, involves him. As Act II, Scene 1 draws to a close, Stevens' voice dominates the narrative, leading Temple up to the flashback revealed in Act II, Scene 2. As Scene 2 fades into Scene 3, Temple's voice, not Stevens', returns to the reticence of the first act.

In the final act, Stevens like Temple, is the humble petitioner, asking Nancy Mannigoe questions which

are neither Socratic nor leading, but which are sincerely interrogatory. He and Temple both seek from Nancy an answer to the problem of human evil and suffering revealed to them by their dual narrative. Stevens is no longer the stage manager for Temple's confession; he has been caught up in the moral problem and now seeks an answer from Nancy's Delphic utterances.

Gavin Stevens, whose initial intention Olga Vickery describes as <sup>that of</sup> "a Socratic midwife presiding over the moral dialectic which focusses on Temple Drake"<sup>31</sup> becomes emotionally involved with the moral dilemma he initially only watches. He becomes, almost, a fellow participant in the narrative Temple relates, moving from vicarious voyeurism to active involvement so that in the final act both he and Temple must seek answers from Nancy. It is Stevens who sits with Nancy in her cell every night, singing hymns, participant now in a quest for significance.

As ~~is~~ the case in Knight's Gambit and Intruder in the Dust, Gavin Stevens in Requiem for a Nun develops from interested but uninvolved bystander to emotionally involved protagonist. In Act I, his presence as legalistic bystander, the district attorney, provokes Temple Drake into action, but in Act II his intruding comments, while

functional as an artistic device, are morally questionable. The reader, along with the governor, feels compelled to protest his intervention. In Act III, Stevens becomes again taciturn, but his involvement increases as an understanding of Nancy's actions becomes for him a personal necessity, not simply the satisfaction of an overactive curiosity. As is usual with the appearance of Gavin Stevens in Faulkner's fiction, the reader's reaction to the character tends to be ambivalent. His violation of Temple's privacy may be seen as necessary or unconscionable. The position of the bystander is usually complex: he is apart from and a part of the action he views; he is an intruder and a catalyst.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Mizener, The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), pp. 161-181.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Millgate, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> Longley, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), p. 64. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Jerome F. Klinkowitz, "The Thematic Unity of Knight's Gambit," Critique: Modern Fiction, 11 (1969), 81.

<sup>8</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Klinkowitz, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> Faulkner in the University, pp. 140-141.

<sup>11</sup> Klinkowitz, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Howe, p. 99, footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Gold, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Volpe, p. 264.

<sup>15</sup> Lion in the Garden, pp. 160-161.

<sup>16</sup> Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944-1962 (New York: Viking Press, 1966), pp. 110-111.

<sup>17</sup> William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 161. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>18</sup> In his Letter to a Northern Editor, Faulkner said: "The rest of the United States knows next to nothing about the South. The present idea and picture which they hold

of a people decadent and even obsolete through inbreeding and illiteracy . . . is as baseless and illusory as that one a generation ago of (oh, yes we subscribed to it too) columned porticoes and magnolias." Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, p. 88.

19 Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, 2 (Spring 1953), 2.

20 John A. Hart, "That Not Impossible He: Faulkner's Third Person Narrator," in Studies in Faulkner, Carnegie Series in English, No. 6 (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1961), p. 40.

21 Elizabeth M. Kerr, Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil" (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969), p. 124.

22 Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, pp. 87-88.

23 Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, pp. 90-91.

24 Robert H. Elias, "Gavin Stevens: Intruder?" Faulkner Studies, 3 (Spring 1954), 2.

25 Millgate, pp. 224-225.

26 William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 61. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

27 James R. Giermanski, "William Faulkner's Use of the Confessional," Renascence, 21 (Spring 1969), pp. 119-123 and 166.

28 Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, p. 66.

29 Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, p. 44.

30 Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, p. 50.

31 Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," p. 4.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE TOWN

Any study of The Town entails a consideration of the unfavorable critical comments mentioned in previous chapters, for in no other book except Intruder in the Dust has the figure of Gavin Stevens attracted so much hostile criticism. The novel is considered by many to be the weak link in the Snopes trilogy, standing between the vivid realism of The Hamlet and the tragic intensity of The Mansion, and the characterization of Gavin Stevens is seen as partly responsible for its weakness. Joseph Gold, for instance, says: "Gavin Stevens is perhaps most detrimental to the novel. Wherever he appears in Faulkner's work, he destroys fictional illusion, creating about him the atmosphere of the pulpit."<sup>1</sup> James L. Roberts, in his "Snopeslore: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion", extends the criticism: "Gavin and Ratliff function not as objective commentators but as convenient mouthpieces for Faulkner's new view of man."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Irving Howe attacks the narrators of the novel, saying: "The action of The Town and, to a large extent, The Mansion is usually strained through the blurred and blurring consciousness of Gavin Stevens, surely the greatest wind-bag in American literature, and Charles Mallison, who shows promise of becoming the **runner-up**."<sup>3</sup> Such statements are widespread in Faulknerian criticism.

Why has reaction to The Town been so negative?

The answer to this question, it seems to me, is that many critics have approached the novel's narrative voices as either authorial spokesmen whom Faulkner intends we should trust, or as loquacious interlocuters who unnecessarily delay the telling of the story. Neither of these assumptions, however, is valid. Throughout the novel, we see Faulkner's narrators making false or ill-grounded assumptions which are subsequently proven wrong, and in no case is the error as great as in Stevens'. Furthermore, the delaying of the story's progress only focusses the reader's attention more closely upon the true subject of the novel which is the nature of the narrators' perceptions. Flem Snopes, for instance, is essentially unknowable, but the struggle for perception and understanding, however futile, attracts our interest. The three narrators correct, contradict, and inform one another as they attempt to achieve insight into the mysteries of human motivation. Furthermore, the collective choric voice of the town itself, its importance emphasized by the novel's title, renders virtually all action self-conscious and dramatic.

Gavin Stevens is the most interesting of the three narrators for he progresses from witness to participant during the course of the novel. In spite of himself,



he finds himself sucked into the vortex of the action with his initial curiosity transmuted into passionate involvement, an involvement which clouds his vision, blinding him to the truth of the action in which he participates. Stevens' narrative makes up thirty-five percent of the novel's length (compared to Charles' fifty-five percent. and Ratliff's ten percent.), but by far the greater bulk of this narrative occurs in the last half of the novel. To illustrate, a sequence made up of the length in pages of Stevens' chapters in the novel. reveals a significant increase in size toward the end of the book: 14, 8, 20, 2, 28, 34, 23, 1. These figures represent the growing involvement of Stevens in the action; in the opening pages of the novel, he narrates, like Charles and Ratliff, a story he finds interesting. But his love for Eula Varner (and, subsequently, for her daughter, Linda Snopes) combined with his detestation of Snopesism, forces his futile involvement in the action. As a result, his feelings and interpretations become central to an understanding of the story, no matter how mistaken and wrongheaded they are.

Even in the opening chapters of the novel, one senses that Gavin Stevens' perceptions are blurred by emotion. Chick realizes that Stevens' interest in the Snopes era dawning before his eyes is more than academic when he

says: "this time it had already gone a good deal further than just curiosity. This time it was alarm." In Stevens' speech are the tones of outrage and panic which he is reluctant to admit: "'Farming?' I said (all right, cried if you like)" (31). He speaks of Eck Snopes as "a threat to his whole family's long tradition of slow and invincible rapacity because of that same incredible and innocent assumption that all people practise courage and honesty for the simple reason that if they didn't everybody would be frightened and confused" (33). His anger extends even to Ratliff whom he describes as "Ratliff with his damned smooth face and his damned shrewd bland innocent intelligent eyes, too damned innocent, too damned intelligent" (33). The reason for the tone of outrage which colours his narration is terror; he stands awestruck before the progression of Snopesism which he calls "outrageous and portentous and terrifying" (36). Ratliff is aware of Stevens' loss of humour when confronted with this spectacle: "You used to laugh at them too" (44) he says, emphasizing the difference between Stevens' emotional involvement and his own ironic distance. Stevens' interest in the advent of Flem Snopes and his clan is compulsive; he seems incapable of ignoring them, with the result that he must confront them; Charles describes his uncle:

just sitting there talking about Snopeses like he had been doing now through every meal for the last two weeks. It was almost like he was talking to himself, like something wound up that couldn't even run down, let alone stop, like there wasn't anybody or anything that wished he would stop more than he did. It wasn't snarling. Gowan didn't know what it was. It was like something Uncle Gavin had to tell, but it was so funny that his main job in telling it was to keep it from being as funny as it really was. (45)

As John Lewis Longley, Jr. says, Gavin Stevens' "fatal flaw is an imperfect sense of ironic detachment; he has such a sense, but it seems to operate either too well at the wrong time or not at all."<sup>5</sup>

This "imperfect sense of ironic detachment" is symptomatic of Stevens' fluctuation between involvement and disengagement. At one moment, he fervently desires to retire from any confrontation with the reality represented by Snopes; at the next moment, he involves himself, almost intrudes himself, in action which is, strictly speaking, none of his business. Stevens recalls Ratliff's description of the fate of lesser men who never confront the opportunity to act heroically:

Knowing always you wont never be man enough to do the harm and damage you would do if you were just man enough. ---and, he might add, or maybe I do it for him, thank God for it. Ay, thank God for it or thank anything else for it that will give you any peace

after it's too late; peace in which to  
coddle that frail web and its unsleeping  
ensnared anguish (both on your knee and  
whisper to it: There, there, it's all  
right; I know you are brave. (88)

What Stevens particularly fears is what he particularly loves. Attracted to Eula Snopes, he is nevertheless incapable of accepting her. Stevens' bachelorhood is a symbol of his ultimate refusal to become involved in life. When Ratliff urges him to marry Linda Snopes to save her from her father, Stevens replies:

"No . . . That's my fate: just to miss marriage."

"You mean escape it?"

"No, no," he says. "I never escape it. Marriage is constantly in my life. My fate is constantly to just miss it or it to, safely again, once more safe, just miss me." (351)

As Faulkner said at the University of Virginia:

Probably the passion he had for getting degrees, for trying this and trying that and going all the way to Europe to get more degrees, to study more, was in his own nature, it was the same character that made him shy away from marriage, he was probably afraid to be married. He might get too involved with the human race if he married one of them.<sup>6</sup>

This explains Stevens' penchant for young girls like Melisandre Backus and Linda Snopes; their very youth distances them from sexual concerns. Indeed, Stevens seems to exhibit considerable disgust towards the paraphernalia of young womanhood; he describes Linda's make-up as "the

placentae of worms and the urine and vomit of cats and cancerous whales" (218). Later, he chastises Linda angrily for wearing them, saying "it was your mother who insisted on the lipstick and the perfume and the silk stockings and the high heels. Isn't that right?" (230) Gavin recoils from sexuality and wishes to retire to his ivory tower.

In spite of this desire to escape reality, however, Stevens still finds himself burdened with the task of defending Jefferson against the incursion of Snopesism. He takes Montgomery Ward Snopes to France with him because, according to Ratliff, Montgomery Ward is one of the relatives of Eula Varner Snopes, the love Stevens lost:

He was the hair-shirt of your cousin's lost love and devotion, whether he knowed it or not or cared or not. . . . Because Montgomery Ward was the hair-shirt; likely your cousin taken the same kind of proud abject triumphant submissive horror in keeping up with his doings that them old hermits sitting on rocks out in the hot sun use to take watching their blood dry up and their legs swivelling.  
(114-15)

The suggestion of an abnegation of sensuality and the flesh which Ratliff makes here is illustrative; Stevens' emphasis upon idealism and spirituality is the source of many of his problems. Stevens is aware that his relationship with Eula has conferred on him "foster-uncleship over every damned Snopes wanting to claim it" (136). Particularly, he sees himself as Linda's father (135), rather than

her lover. He must act as her protector from the evil influence of Flem Snopes.

This burden which Stevens feels compelled to assume drives him into a romantic crusade against Snopesism in Jefferson, a moralistic fight against what he perceives as wrong. Even Stevens' style suggests that he views his confrontation with Flem Snopes and clan as romantic and ~~epic~~. For example, seeing Eula Varner, he tells Chick: "Oh ay, . . . Even at twelve dont think you are the first man ever chewed his bitter thumbs for a reason such as her" (6). Describing Eck Snopes, he explains Eck's un-Snopes-like behaviour, saying that Eck's mother, "like her incredible sister-by-marriage a generation later, had, must have, as the old bucolic poet said, cast a leglin girth herself before she married whatever Snopes was Eck's titular father" (31). Remembering Eula Varner's first appearance in Jefferson, he thinks of the autumn:

when she first crossed the Square that day  
sixteen years ago, appeared not so much as  
snatching in desperate haste to hide them  
but rather to spring in suppliance and adu-  
lation to the moving limbs, the very flowing  
of the fabric's laving folds crying Evoe!  
Evoe! (220)

Stevens' description of the action of The Town abounds in such Romantic, Spenserian, and Greek allusions culled from his extensive education.

These references are more than a matter of style; they reflect Stevens' world view. He regards his fight for Eula and Linda against Flem Snopes as a highly moral crusade. In reply to his sister's suggestion that he get a haircut, he says "if I'm to go on this crusade with any hope of success, the least I can do is look wild and shaggy enough to be believed" (45). Stevens' fight with Manfred de Spain involves one of the basic tenets of courtly love and chivalry: "What he was doing was simply defending forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not" (76). When Matt Levitt imitates Manfred de Spain's tactics in his fight against Stevens for Linda's interest, Charles' father taunts Stevens: "What's the matter, boy? Where's your spear and sword? Where's your white horse?" (185)

Indeed, Stevens' crusade is more Quixotic than Arthurian. The fact that he is determined to defend feminine chastity and virtue "whether they exist or not", seems ludicrous. Maggie, his sister, describes him as "acting just like a high-school sophomore" (63) when he encourages Chick to scatter tacks in front of Major de Spain's car. In retrospect, Stevens realizes that he must appear ridiculous to Eula:

If she had ever even seen me yet while I was too busy playing the fool because of her to notice, buffoon for her, playing with tacks in the street like a vicious boy, using not even honest bribery but my own delayed vicious juvenility to play on the natural and normal savagery (plus curiosity; don't forget that) of an authentic juvenile---to gain what? for what? what did I want, what was I trying for: like the child striking matches in a hay-stack yet at the same time trembling with terror lest he does see holocaust.  
(89-90)

Again, the simile is enlightening: the fire represents for Stevens a passion which he fears will consume him. When all Stevens' attempts to punish De Spain fail, he is truly reduced to the level of a helpless adolescent, saying to his father, Judge Stevens: "What must I do now, Papa? Papa, what can I do now?" (99) What Stevens does is to flee Jefferson for the relative security of the Ph.D. programme at Heidelberg.

When Eula comes to Stevens' office, she explains to him what his problem is: "You spend too much time expecting. . . . Dont expect. You just are, and you need, and you must, and so you do. That's all. Dont waste time expecting" (94). But for Stevens this confrontation is horrifying; he sees Eula "just standing there facing me so that what I smelled was not even just woman but that terrible, that drowning envelopment" (95). In a comic reversal of the traditional sexual escapade, Stevens cries, as Eula



advances upon him, "Dont touch me!" (94) A similar reversal occurs in Stevens' relationship with Linda, although he is sardonically aware this time of his comic role in the affair. Stevens deliberately avoids Linda as a means of letting her know their meetings should stop; he says:

And that was the fun, the excitement. I mean dodging her. It was adolescence in reverse, turned upside down: the youth, himself virgin and--who knew?--maybe even more so, at once drawn and terrified of what draws him, contriving by clumsy and timorous artifice the accidental encounters in which he still would not and never quite touch . . . That was me: not to encounter; continuously just to miss her yet never be caught at it. (208-9)

Stevens' inverted adolescence, his idealism, half terror and half moral discretion, prevent him from coming to terms with the reality represented by Eula Varner. Eula says to him, "You dont know very much about women, do you?" (226), and his sister, Maggie, assuages his fears about Chick, saying "Anything he will learn about sixteen-year-old girls from you will probably be a good deal more innocent than what he will learn some day from sixteen-year-old girls" (181). Stevens' romantic idealism, gained in part from his university career, plus his Methodist conscience, impressed upon him by a Puritan society, render him incapable of dealing with Eula's reality. As Michael Millgate says, "the real business of the book reveals it-

self as the internal conflict within Stevens himself, between, on the one hand, the principles inculcated into him by his background and his education, and, on the other, the often contradictory demands of actual living."<sup>7</sup>

Gavin Stevens' peculiarities and emotional limitations cannot help but limit his view of the events which make up The Town. His idealism and romanticism filter reality into interpretation, fitting the actions of Flem Snopes and others into the preconceived construct Stevens has created. Indeed, his descriptions of events have the characteristics of speculation and supposition. For instance, here is the description of I.O. Snopes:

And no schoolmaster himself either. That is, unlike his cousin, he was not even with us long enough to have to prove he was not. Or maybe, coming to us in the summer and then gone before the summer was, he was merely between assignments. Or maybe taking a busman's holiday from a busman's holiday. Or maybe in and about the boarding house and the Square in the mere brief intervals from his true bucolic vocation... . . . (41, my italics)

Such playful speculation, fictionalizing for fun, turns serious when Stevens directs his attention to Flem Snopes rather than his relatively harmless cousin. Chapter Seventeen is a lengthy supposition by Stevens about Flem's motivations. The conclusions reached are unconvincing; indeed, they sound like motives more fitting for

Gavin Stevens than for Flem Snopes. Here is Stevens' explanation for Flem's determination to oust Manfred de Spain from the bank:

Civic virtue which, like all virtue, was it's own reward also. Because in that same blinding flash he saw his own vengeance and revenge too, as if not just virtue loved virtue but so did God since here He was actually offering to share with virtue that quality which He had jealously reserved solely to Himself; the husband's vengeance and revenge on the man who had presented him with the badge of championship; vengeance and revenge on the man who had not merely violated his home but outraged it--the home which in all good faith he had tried to establish around a woman already irrevocably soiled and damaged. (270)

That Stevens could seriously attribute such ideas and emotions to Flem Snopes is revealing. These are the motives Stevens would have if he were in Flem's place, but they are certainly not those of the materialistic, unfeeling man whose progress has been recorded in The Hamlet and The Town. Stevens suggests again that Flem has stolen the brass from the power plant "not for the petty profit it brought him but rather to see what depth De Spain's base and timorous fear would actually descend to" (273). The moral revulsion here is Stevens', not Flem's; Flem is more interested in the "petty profit."

That Stevens is creating his own set of motives for Flem is obvious from the very language he uses;

describing Flem's transfer of money to the Bank of Jefferson, Stevens says: "And I like to imagine it" (268). Again, describing Flem's trip out to Frenchman's Bend, Stevens says: "So you will have to imagine this too since there would be no witnesses even waiting in a synthetic hall this time" (291). Speculating about what Flem must have said to Uncle Billy, Stevens indicates the tentative manner of his thoughts with the recurring "Or maybe" (274) of the creator enjoying the alternatives of his story.

Above all, Stevens reveals his own romantic idiosyncrasies and biases by telling his version of the story of Flem Snopes. As Warren Beck says: "Involved in the event both as beholder and evaluator, the narrator becomes more genuinely the persona, and in the act of noticing and judging it is himself he tells of too, sometimes himself he celebrates, himself he mourns for."<sup>8</sup> When Stevens explains Flem, saying: "in sacrificing the sanctity of his home to the welfare of Jefferson, he immolated the chastity of his wife on the altar of mankind" (276), it is impossible for the reader to agree.

At the beginning of Chapter ~~Seventeen~~, Ratliff sums up what must be the reader's reaction to Stevens' lengthy speculations:

No no, no no, no no. He was wrong. He's a lawyer, and to a lawyer, if it aint

complicated it dont matter whether it works or not because if it aint complicated up enough it aint right and so even if it works, you dont believe it. . . . It wasn't that. I dont know what it was. (296)

Ratliff cannot explain Flem's actions any more than Stevens can, but his long experience with Snopesism has made him less eager to try. With little success, Ratliff constantly attempts to stop Stevens' plunge into misconception. Earlier in the book, Stevens expresses the same theory about why Flem has withdrawn his money from De Spain's bank as he expresses in Chapter XVII and Ratliff tries to correct his mistake:

"So he's hoping--wishing--dreaming of starting a run on his own bank, not to loot it but to empty it, abolish it. All right. Why? For revenge on Manfred de Spain because of his wife?"  
 "No no, I tell you!" Ratliff said. "I tell you, you got Flem Snopes all wrong, all of you have." (142)

The complete text of Chapter IX, indeed, is Ratliff's simple declaration of Stevens' error: "Because he missed it. He missed it completely" (153). When Stevens asks Ratliff how he has learned so much about women and life, Ratliff's answer is: "Maybe by listening", and he tells Stevens: "You never listened to nobody because by that time you were already talking again" (229). Stevens' constant exercise is to impose his vision of reality upon

life whereas Ratliff has been able to learn by relying on perception rather than preconception. For the same reason, as Chick points out, "Uncle Gavin was incapable of having a secret life which remained secret; he was, Ratliff said, "a feller that even his in-grown toenails was on the outside of his shoes'" (342). Stevens' long-winded speeches and analyses focus attention not on the story told, but on the personality of the teller.

Confronted with the terrible beauty of life which Eula represents for him, and incapable of doing more than talk, Stevens becomes painfully aware of his own limitations, and a bitter self-contempt colours much of his narrative. He speaks of his own tears as "the jewel-baubles of the belated adolescence's clown-comedian" (134). When he visits Eula Snopes' house, he thinks that perhaps she is preparing herself for him "if any woman's soul ever needed pre-readying and pre-arming against anything in pants just named Gavin Stevens" (219). He is ruefully aware of his position in comparison to Eula and Manfred:

But for him (the accuser) only the grieving  
without even the loss; for him not even  
ruin to crown the grieving; only the deso-  
lation, who was not competent for but merely  
vulnerable to, since it was not even for  
him to hold her hand. (274)

In his speech, Stevens echoes another self-

conscious, self-contemptuous intellectual, J. Alfred Prufrock. As Stevens waits, indecisive, for Linda to pass his office, he says:

now only the afternoon remained: the  
interminable time until a few minutes  
after half past three filled with a  
thousand indecisions which each fierce  
succeeding harassment would revise.  
(206)

One is reminded of the Prufrock figure of the Reporter in Pylon, similarly alternating between fascination and repulsion with the exuberance and vitality of Laverne and her entourage.

When Stevens is seen in these terms, it is difficult to agree with Warren Beck's enthusiastic and sympathetic description of him as "the idealist proceeding pragmatically"; Beck believes that

Above all, it can be seen that Gavin Stevens as quixotic champion, a man of refined feeling and imperative sentiment, is also judicious and decisively active, a man whose alertness to fact is the very opposite of sentimentality, and whose idealism does not scorn the serviceably practical. The nature of his involvement with mankind, however, can be fully realized only in the thematic terms of ethical issue, humanely defined and asserted as an act of personal responsibility. So viewed, Gavin will emerge as a character most credible and empathetically engaging, his eccentricities wrung from him by ordeal and his extravagances the gestures of one ready at any time to go all out in the disinterestedly approximated right direction.<sup>9</sup>

This kind of criticism is the reverse of the criticism which

dismisses Stevens as the boring and garrulous mouthpiece of a boring and aging author. Both views are considerably oversimplified. In Gavin Stevens, Faulkner expressed his vision of the intellectual idealist, a man whose motives are well-meaning but whose understanding of fact, of hard experience, is limited severely by his propensity for retreating to the ivory tower of his preconceptions. When he ventures from the safe confines of a world defined by his essentially useless translation of the Bible back into the original Greek, when he leaves the protection of genteel society to become a Ph.D. among the overalls, Stevens becomes ludicrously inept. At the end of The Town, he is a defeated man, used as a passive tool by the triumphant Flem Snopes in Snopes' drive for respectability. Stevens' fate is the tragedy of the idealist, one might say the sentimentalist, who is incapable of making his ideals real.

Before leaving the figure of Gavin Stevens, we must examine one of his most famous and oft-quoted speeches, the "from Jefferson to the world" section of The Town, because it is here, above all, that it is possible to confuse the voice of the author and the voice of the character. Stevens' description of his position in relation to Jefferson sounds like Faulkner's statement of the artist's attitude to his environment. An examination of this passage,



however, reveals how closely it expresses Stevens' motivations as they have been defined above:

There is a ridge; you drive on beyond Seminary Hill and in time you come upon it; a mild unhurried farm road presently mounting to cross the ridge and on to join the main highway leading from Jefferson to the world. And now, looking back down, you see all Yoknapatawpha in the dying last of day beneath you. . . . And you stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life beneath that incessant ephemeral spangling . . . yourself detached as God Himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity and of the men and women who made you, the record and chronicle of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past; you to preside unanguished and immune above this miniature of man's passions and hopes and disasters . . . you, the old man, already white-headed (because it doesn't matter if they call your gray hairs premature because life itself is always premature which is why it aches and anguishes) . . . standing there while there rises to you, about you, suffocating you, the spring dark peopled and myriad, two and two seeking never at all solitude but simply privacy . . . the cup, the bowl proffered once to the lips in youth and then no more; proffered to quench or sip or drain that lone one time and even that sometimes premature, too soon. Because the tragedy of life is, it must be premature, inconclusive and inconcludable, in order to be life; it must be before itself, in advance of itself, to have been at all.  
(315-18, passim)

Two apparently contradictory themes dominate this long passage: the sense of remaining "unanguished and immune" above the turmoil of life, and the feeling of having failed to capture the fleeting joy of life which is

"premature." Both are representative of Stevens' feelings in The Town. He is pulled into the action by his longing to possess the vitality and joy represented by Eula, and he wishes to flee the involvement which he finds impossible to avoid. His hair, prematurely white, paradoxically emphasizes both his advancing age and his lack of maturity. He wishes the tranquility of the uninvolved witness, but he realizes how much he has lost by refusing to become a participant. The context of this lengthy passage makes the point even clearer; Stevens is on his way back to Jefferson where the affair between Eula and Manfred has been brought to a crisis. Eula has written him a note asking him to meet her and, as he drives back, he ponders "whether or not to say Why me? Why bother me? Why cant you let me alone?" (318) Stevens desires above all to remain "unanguished and immune."

It has been suggested that Gavin Stevens' idiosyncrasies, as much as they are interesting in themselves, help to destroy the reliability of his observations about Flem Snopes. His ruminations in Chapter XVII seem incredibly naive as interpretations of Flem's behaviour. What makes the act of perception, in this case, even more difficult is the enigmatic nature of Flem Snopes himself. The object of the entire town's concern and interest, he remains

essentially unknowable; the narrators' speculations are never more than unconfirmed speculations. As Warren Beck says, "Flem . . . is an ultimate and unvariable point of reference, the one whom all the others watch, the figure who haunts all other minds yet whose mind is never seen into, the object to which the variously subjective modes of the trilogy are related."<sup>10</sup> Because Flem remains enigmatic, the reader must concentrate his attention not upon the person perceived, but upon the quality of the perceiving intelligence. Thus Faulkner forces us to take as the subject of The Town the act of narration itself.

Ratliff protests the interpretations Gavin makes of Flem's behaviour, but he is forced to admit that he himself finds it inexplicable. "I don't know . . . I jest dont know. We got to figger. That's why I come up here to see you: in case you did know. Hoping you knowed . . . But naturally you dont know neither. Confound it, the trouble is we dont never know beforehand, to anticipate him" (142-3). Chick later concurs in this estimation: "That was Mr. Snopes's trouble. I mean, that was our trouble with Mr. Snopes: there wasn't anything to see even when you thought he might be looking at you" (167). Ratliff defines their ignorance as a limitation of vision, not just the inscrutability of Flem Snopes: "The trouble with us

is, we dont never estimate Flem Snopes right. At first we made the mistake of not estimating him a-tall. Then we made the mistake of overestimating him. Now we're fixing to make the mistake of underestimating him again" (175). Warren Beck suggests that the typically Faulknerian style is a manifestation of the futile attempt to understand the enigma of man:

in all Faulkner's full style, with its epithets, its alternative speculations, its multifariously detailed imagery, and its juxtaposition of the sharply factual and the fantastic, there is nevertheless the opposite of any pretense to complete comprehension and definitiveness, but rather the hint, by extensions that fade out like searchlights into space, as to the only partially penetrable mysteries of being and conduct.<sup>11</sup>

Each of the three narrators, in turn, attempts to discover the springs of motive behind Flem's implacable face, and each in turn is forced to admit his failure.

Another aspect of Faulkner's style is indicative of this sense of the limitation of vision which he wishes to communicate to the reader; the association of leit motif with Flem suggests not so much a static and shallow personality as an enigmatic one. Whenever Flem is described, it is always in terms of a few repeated images. He appears as "a squat uncommunicative man with a neat minute bow tie and opaque eyes and a sudden little hooked nose like the

beak of a small hawk" (4). He is most frequently seen "chewing, with his eyes looking like two gobs of cup grease on a hunk of raw dough" (22). Many years after his appearance in Jefferson, he appears, "still in that little cloth cap and the snap-on-behind bow tie he had come to town in thirteen years ago and his jaw still moving faintly and steadily as if he were chewing something though I anyway in my part of those thirteen years had never seen him spit" (137). The images themselves are revealing: his hawk like nose suggests his rapacity, and his eyes like cup-grease are representative of the inhumanity of a machine. But the strength of the images comes from their constant and (almost) unvaried repetition, a repetition which indicates Flem's enduring, unmoving nature. Moreover, by limiting the descriptions of Flem to these sparse and reiterated details, Faulkner seems to suggest that this is all we shall ever know of Flem. This surface view is as deep as we shall ever penetrate the mystery of his personality.

The images are, however, not completely static; subtle changes in the descriptions adumbrate significant shifts in Flem's nature. In the later pages of The Town, for instance, Flem appears "placid, inscrutable, unchanged, in the broad black planter's hat and the minute bow tie"

(291). The bow tie, which looks as though it were stamped out by a machine, remains, but the small cloth cap has become a "broad black planter's hat." This change reflects the change in Flem's status as he progresses ever further up the ladder of Jefferson society, finally becoming president of one of its banks. In The Mansion, other changes reflect Flem's development; those changes will be discussed in the next chapter.

The task of understanding Flem Snopes is made more difficult by a new interest he acquires after he he arrives in Jefferson. He develops a longing for respectability, a longing which, in Ratliff's opinion, is even more dangerous than mere pecuniary greed:

When it's jest money and power a man wants, there is usually some place where he will stop; there's always one thing at least that ever---every man wont do for jest money. But when it's respectability he finds out he wants and he's got to have, there aint nothing he wont do to get it and then keep it. And when it's almost too late when he finds out that's what he's got to have, and that even after he gets it he eant jest lock it up and set---sit down on top of it and quit, but instead he has got to keep on working with ever---every breath to keep it, there aint nothing he will stop at, aint nobody or nothing within his scope and reach that may not anguish and grieve and suffer. (259)

In a sense, this concern is the controlling concept of the novel. Respectability, which is a concern with what others think about you, provides the raison d'etre for the triple

narration. In The Hamlet, when Flem's need's were primarily financial, the narration was by the traditional omniscient narrator, but when Flem's interests shift in The Town, Faulkner creates a gallery of narrators to view the struggle for respectability, a respectability which their very viewing and concern creates and defines. The course of the novel portrays Flem's campaign to banish from Jefferson what Ratliff calls "Snopes out-and-out-unvarnished behaviour" (370). The novel begins with the imprisonment of Mink Snopes, chronicles the banishment by one means or another of Montgomery Ward Snopes and I.O. Snopes, and ends with the disposal of Byron Snopes' half-Apache offspring who, in their elemental ferocity, recall an earlier, less "civilized" era of Snopesism. Their purpose in the novel is to counterpoint the subtle, intellectual, "respectable" villainy Flem has achieved, with a cruder if more honest immorality.

In contrast to Flem's discreet machinations are the flagrant sexual indiscretions of Eula and Manfred. Olga Vickery points out that Eula, who is initially accepted by Jefferson society, is ultimately excluded from it, but that Flem, whose initial actions with the brass at the power plant and willingness to accept cuckoldry exclude him from social approval, eventually gains acceptance

because of his ability to regulate his behaviour to conventions.<sup>12</sup>

Yet it is not Eula's actual behaviour so much as her very appearance that seems indiscreet. As Maggie Mallison explains: "The ladies of Jefferson dont care what she does. What they will never forgive is the way she looks" (48). What makes the situation worse is Eula's complete disregard of what other people think. As Gavin waits for her in his office, he wishes she would come disguised and quiet, but immediately he realizes:

how the simple suggestion of secret shoes and concealing cloak would forever abrogate and render null all need for either since although I might still be I, she must forever be some lesser and baser other to be vulnerable to the base insult of secrecy and fearfulness and silence.

(89)

It is this disregard of respectability, the essence of Eula's grandeur, which brings down upon her the wrath of the town.

On the other hand, it is Flem's pursuit of respectability and wealth, two factors now indistinguishable, which leads him to precipitate the crisis which drives Manfred out of town and brings about Eula's suicide. In his campaign, Flem makes extensive use of the talents of Gavin Stevens, the man he regards as "the best witness" (246) because of Stevens' concern for appearance and other



people's affairs. Ratliff describes Snopes' intentions:

he had already milked out of Lawyer Stevens all he needed from him, which was to get his wife buried all right and proper and decorous and respectable, without no uproarious elements making an unseemly spectacle in the business. His game of solitaire was against Jefferson. It was like he was trying to see jest exactly how much Jefferson would stand, put up with.. It was like he knowed that his respectability depended completely on Jefferson not jest accepting but finally getting used to the fact that he not only had evicted Manfred de Spain from his bank but he was remodeling to move into it De Spain's birth-site likewise. (348)

The epitaph Snopes has chosen for Eula's grave is: "A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed" (355). This inscription is the final blow in Flem's battle for decorum and form; he intends to force the public into accepting the superficial appearances as the reality whether they believe it or not. The initial enigma of Flem's behaviour has been compounded by his determined attempt to mask any fact he feels does not support his bid for respectability.

Given this enigma, one can hardly expect the narrators of the novel to make any completely convincing explanation of Flem's behaviour. We have already seen how limited Stevens' perceptions are, and, although he is the person most concerned with the problem of Flem Snopes, there are three other points of view which complicate the

novel's structure, those of V.K. Ratliff, Chick Mallison, and the Community of Jefferson itself.

Olga Vickery suggests that the trio of narrators, Ratliff, Stevens and Charles, "convey the completed past, the developing present, and the incipient future of the legend of Flem and Eula."<sup>13</sup> Michael Millgate provides another, more tentative, relationship for the three voices:

It would be an oversimplification to speak of the distinction between the points of view of Mallison, Stevens, and Ratliff as one between, respectively, fact, theory, and truth, but there are important respects in which such a categorisation could be justified, and certainly this placing of Stevens, the identification of him as the odd man out in the trio, seems crucial to any understanding of his role in the novel as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

As Millgate suggests, Stevens is the "odd man out", largely because he, more than the other two, has become emotionally and personally involved in the events he narrates. Ratliff, who suffered his baptism of fire in The Hamlet, has by now achieved an ironic distancing which protects him. Chick Mallison, as the innocent, has not grown enough to be tortured by Eula or horrified by Flem. His is the indifference, one might almost say the callousness, of youth.

V.K. Ratliff, by contrast, possesses the tranquillity and serenity of old age. His crisis came in The Hamlet when, sounding much like the Gavin Stevens of The Town, he vehemently protested: "I never made them Snopeses

and I never made the folks that cant wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I wont. I wont, I tell you!" (Hamlet, 326) In the closing scenes of The Hamlet, Flem defeats Ratliff, using his victory to move to the more lucrative setting of Jefferson.

But the Ratliff we meet in The Town is a different person; he still believes in the necessity of opposing Snopesism wherever it appears, but he maintains an ironic distance which protects him from disastrous involvements of the kind Stevens suffers. His style, unlike Stevens', is laconic, ironic, and controlled. His description of I.O. Snopes' reactions to the arrival of his abandoned wife provides a good example:

but now they was needing a new professor too or anyhow they would as soon as I.O. could get around the first corner out of sight where he could cut across country. Which he evidently done; never anybody reported any dust-cloud travelling fast along a road nowhere. They said he even stopped talking, though I doubt that. You got to draw the line somewhere, aint you? (38)

Passages like this one have the quality of the country tall-tale with their matter-of-factness and understated comedy.

Ratliff seems to use his sense of irony as a protective weapon against being shaken too badly by the horror of the Snopes invasion of Jefferson. Indeed, it is obvious from his determination to indoctrinate Chick that he takes

the danger seriously. Chick describes Ratliff's warnings;

I dont know how Ratliff did it and of course I cant remember when because I wasn't even five yet. But he had put into her mind too, just like into Gowan's, that idea of Snopeses covering Jefferson like an influx of snakes or varmints from the woods and he and Uncle Gavin were the only ones to recognize the danger and the threat. (112)

Stevens seems aware of the purpose of Ratliff's comic exaggeration, when Ratliff tells him the story of Eula's honeymoon and Linda's birth:

Ratliff had told me how they departed for Texas immediately after the wedding and when they returned twelve months later, the child was already walking. Which (the walking at least) I did not believe, not because of the anguish, the jealousy, the despair, but simply because of Ratliff. In fact, it was Ratliff who gave me that ease of hope--or if you like ease from anguish . . . . Because even if the child had been only one day old, Ratliff would have invented the walking, being Ratliff. In fact, if there had been no child at all yet, Ratliff would have invented one, invented one already walking for the simple sake of his own paradox and humor. (134)

Ratliff himself admits that his approach to reality is more imaginative than factual; he says "between what did happen and what ought to happened, I dont never have trouble picking ought" (100). In light of this statement, it is difficult to accept the "truth" Michael Millgate claims for Ratliff as other than "poetic truth." Furthermore, it would be dangerous to attribute validity to all

of Ratliff's interpretations of Flem's behaviour. In The Hamlet, Ratliff demonstrated his fallibility only too well. Moreover, in the opening pages of The Town, Ratliff shows that he still doesn't know the true reason for Flem's successes in Frenchman's Bend; he attributes Flem's influence over the Varners to a discovery he, Flem, must have made on the farm he rented from them:

"Ab and Flem rented it and evidently . . . he or Flem or both of them together found it. . . . Whatever it was Uncle Billy and Jody had buried out there and thought was safe."

(5)

A reading of The Hamlet reveals that it is Ab Snopes' reputation as a barn-burner rather than anything buried which leads to Flem's influence. In The Town, Ratliff can only guess at the reason for Stevens' sudden change of heart the night before his case against Manfred de Spain is to be heard. The reader witnesses Stevens' encounter with Eula, but Ratliff as a character within the novel remains in ignorance about this crucial episode. Ratliff repeatedly admits his ignorance about Flem Snopes' motivation, saying: "I dont know . . . I jest dont know" (142). Gavin Stevens almost gloats about Ratliff's inability to understand Flem any better than he, Stevens, can. He claims: "Even Ratliff, whose Yoknapatawpha County reputation and good name demanded that he have an answer to everything, did not have

that one, Ratliff himself knowing no more than the rest of us did" (276-7).

But in spite of his limitations, Ratliff knows a great deal more than Stevens. The reason for this, he avers, is that he listens more than Stevens does: "You never listened to nobody because by that time you were already talking again" (229). Ratliff's listening is motivated by his insatiable curiosity about people, his desire to know everything. He claims: "all I ever needed was jest something to look at, watch, providing of course it had people in it" (351-2). A fine example of his impatience to learn occurs when Montgomery Ward Snopes establishes his photographic studio for reasons no one knows:

Uncle Gavin said . . . "The dark room aint open yet."

"Ought it to be?" Ratliff said.

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said. "So did we."

"Maybe I can find out," Ratliff said.

"Do you even hopeso?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Maybe I will hear about it," Ratliff said.

"Do you even hopeso?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Maybe somebody else will find out about it and maybe I will be standing where I can hear him," Ratliff said. (123)

Ratliff's desperation, his yearning to know what is going on, is finely comic. As Gavin Stevens says:

"After this many years of working to establish and maintain himself as what he uniquely was in Jefferson, Ratliff could not afford, he did not dare, to walk the streets and not have the answer to any and every situation which was not really any of his business." (141)

It is this need to know that is Ratliff's impelling motivation in the novel, the force which propels his narrative just as Stevens' narrative is sparked by his love for Eula and a strict sense of public morality.

The third narrative voice belongs to Chick Mallison, but the vision it reports springs as well from Gowan Stevens, his cousin. The opening sentence of the book tells how Gowan was Chick's precursor as youthful bystander for the story of Snopes; Chick says: "I wasn't born yet so it was Cousin Gowan who was there and big enough to see and remember and tell me afterward when I was big enough for it to make sense" (3). During Stevens' absence from Jefferson to attend Heidelberg, Chick succeeds Gowan as the youth, indicating the change in point of view with: "By 'we' I mean me now" (111). Immediately, Charles finds himself dubbed Chick by Ratliff and enrolled in a short course of anti-Snopesism. Gowan, in his turn, had been indoctrinated before this:

he couldn't even say just how it was or when that Ratliff put it into his mind and he even got interested in it like a game, a contest or even a battle, a war, that Snopeses had to be watched constantly like an invasion of snakes or wildcats and that Uncle Gavin and Ratliff were doing it or trying to because nobody else in Jefferson seemed to recognize the danger. (106)

Neither of the two boys is characterized as

fully as Gavin and Ratliff (nor, for that matter, to the extent that Chick is later characterized in The Mansion), and that they are virtually interchangeable indicates this fact. They are not so much individual youth as they are, combined, Youth. Their minds are the transparent medium of the legend of Snopes; they provide the freshness of an innocent, unformed perception through which not only the advent of Snopesism, but also the futile crusade of Stevens are viewed. In another sense, they are the inheritors of the tradition, and they frequently merge with the town as a choric voice. As Chick puts it in Chapter I, "when I say 'we' and 'we thought' what I mean is Jefferson and what Jefferson thought" (3).

Gowan's attitude is sympathetic, as is Chick's, but their sense of delicacy is conquered by their curiosity. When Manfred tortures Stevens day and night with the open cut-out, Gowan demonstrates considerable sensitivity.

Gowan said they all looked at Uncle Gavin, and that he himself was ashamed, not of Uncle Gavin: of us, the rest of them. He said it was like watching somebody's britches falling down while he's got to use both hands trying to hold up the roof: you are sorry it is funny, ashamed you had to be there watching.

(60)

But earlier, Gowan's curiosity has made him refuse his aunt's offer to excuse him from the table while they are discussing Eula and Manfred. Later, at the Cotillion Ball,



Gowan is present, again for the same reason: "He said he had already had to see too much by now; he had to be there if there was going to be anything else, any more to it, even if he couldn't imagine what else there could be" (72). The youth who begins as unwilling witness, pressed into the service by his elders, now shares their compulsion to find out what is happening.

Both youths are capable of sharing the general male reaction to Eula Varner. Chick reports:

I saw her too and I knew what it was too, even if she was grown and married and with a child older than I was and I only eleven and twelve and thirteen . . . she wasn't too big, heroic, what they call Junoesque. It was that there was just too much of what she was for any one human female package to contain, and hold: too much of white, too much of female, too much of maybe just glory, I don't know: so that at first sight of her you felt a kind of shock of gratitude just for being alive and being male at the same instant with her in space and time.  
(6)

In spite of this emotional reaction, however, neither of the two youths is touched strongly by the events they relate---their strongest reaction is curiosity. Therefore they are admirably suited to report the bulk of the story (Chick's narrative takes up well over half of the novel), able as they are to present a tale uncolored by the strong emotive tones of Gavin Stevens' involvement, or imaginatively shaped by the fine ironic sense, the prefer-

ence for "ought", which Ratliff exhibits in his narration. Sometimes, this uninvolved posture which Chick takes is much like callous disregard. His reaction to Eula's death, in spite of his earlier enthusiasm, is unfeeling and selfish:

Because I was just twelve; to me that great big crepe knot dangling from the front door of Mr. de Spain's bank signified only waste; another holiday when school was suspended for an indefinite time; another holiday piled on top of one we already had, when the best, the hardest holiday user in the world couldn't possibly use two of them at once. (337)

But this disregard is a valuable narrative commodity; it provides a viewer whose vision is unclouded by emotion, and whose interest leads to a presentation of fact unembellished by this particular narrator.

One must not, however, assume that in the narrations of Gowan and Chick we have the reality masked in the other sections by the idiosyncrasies of Gavin Stevens and V.K. Ratliff. Joseph J. Arpad, in "William Faulkner's Legendary Novels: The Snopes Trilogy", makes a distinction which is helpful in defining the nature of the youthful narrative; he says of Chick:

He thinks of himself as representing the community's point of view or a consensus of informed opinion and thus he tells his story in the first person plural, "we" instead of the singular "I." As a reporter, therefore, he is highly reliable;

but the material he reports is still factually unreliable, as Mallison himself would readily admit.<sup>15</sup>

Chick's narrative combines town legend and gossip with the speculations of Gavin Stevens and the ironic commentary of Ratliff. The resulting combination is an accurate portrayal of Jefferson opinion and gossip, but it comes no closer than the other narratives to revealing the "truth" about Flem Snopes. This emphasis in Chick's narration is fitting, as Mr. Arpad points out:

The facts of Flem's real character . . . appear irrelevant to the author's design for his novel. Relevant, instead, are the raw fictions the various characters create to explain and justify the unknowns of their world, the manner in which they perceive reality, and the way appearance motivate their behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the three narrator-bystanders, Gavin Stevens, V.K. Ratliff, and Chick-Gowan, another watching presence exerts great influence on the actions of the novel. The town itself, watching Flem Snopes' progress and watching the affair between Eula and Manfred, acts as collective bystander, influencing the course of events through the strength of its approval and disapproval. It has been suggested above that Flem's inscrutability and discretion combined with Eula's ignoring of social convention lead to the climax of the novel: Flem's acceptance by society and Eula's rejection.

Cleanth Brooks has suggested that a distinctive aspect of most of Faulkner's fiction is his sense of a coherent and established community which exerts a very real influence on its members.

In The Town,

There is a sense of community: no one entertains any doubt as to what the prescribed values are. The townspeople are human enough to enjoy scandal, to glory in the daring of those who will flaunt community opinion, and to applaud and perhaps envy De Spain's cuckolding of Flem Snopes; but there is no haziness about what is good and what is bad, what is proper and what is improper, and the sanctions against those who defy the community mores are still powerful enough to render respectability something above mere conformity.<sup>17</sup>

As Brooks points out, the town initially enjoys watching the cuckolding of Flem Snopes, even though it has no proof that anything at all has happened. Speaking of De Spain, Chick says: "We were his allies, his confederates; our whole town was accessory to that cuckolding---that cuckolding which for any proof we had, we had invented ourselves out of whole cloth" (15).

There is a sense of the town as audience watching the performance of a group of highly dramatic individuals on the stage of Jefferson; when Flem makes his move to expel De Spain from the bank, Chick says: "It was no more than we expected, since this was just another part of whatever it was time or circumstance or whatever it was had

cleared the stage and emptied the school so it could happen" (302). The actors are conscious of the watching eyes. Stevens and Linda, for instance, conduct involved performances to satisfy (or rather, disappoint) the watching community. When Stevens goes to his sister for help, he knows that she will be already well-informed about his relationship with Linda:

Uncle Gavin had lived in Jefferson or in little towns all his life, so he not only knew what Jefferson would be saying about him and Linda Snopes and those banana splits and ice-cream sodas and books of poetry by now, but that Mother had too many good friends to ever miss hearing about it. (181)

But the town's curiosity changes very quickly to moral outrage when confronted with Eula's flagrant indiscretion. As she dances at the Cotillion Ball with her lover, the town watches in horror: "Then all of a sudden Gowan said everybody else stopped dancing and kind of fell back and he said he saw Mrs. Snopes and Mr. de Spain dancing together alone in a kind of aghast circle of people" (74).

The impulses of female respectability and Baptist righteousness combine in an attack upon Manfred and Eula. Stevens is acutely aware of this audience; when he meets Linda he describes the two of them, "standing there in the middle of that quiet block in full view of at least

twenty discreet window-shades" (218). Even Manfred, with all his flamboyance, must take this watching audience into consideration, coming to town the day after Eula's death "exactly like nothing had happened . . . because that was exactly the way he had to come to town that morning to have to look" (338).

When Stevens learns what his sister Maggie thinks about his relationship with Linda Snopes, he launches into a condemnation of Jefferson:

"Well, well," he said, "if that's what a mind with no more aptitude for gossip and dirt than yours is inventing and thinking, just imagine what the rest of Jefferson, the experts, have made of it by now. . . . Thank you, Maggie . . . you have tried . . . always to deny that damned female instinct for uxorious and rigid respectability which is the backbone of any culture not yet decadent, which remains strong and undecadent only so long as it still produces an incorrigible unreconstructible with the temerity to assail and affront and deny it--like you---" (182)

Torn between Eula's disregard for convention and the town's insistence on convention and respectability, Stevens is helpless; his ludicrous behaviour at the Co-tillion Ball arises from his desire to protect Eula's good name, but Eula's very nature makes it impossible for her to act within the terms of the narrow conventions of Jefferson respectability.

Similarly, Stevens' relationship with Linda, which

is essentially sexless, is in danger of being defined in terms which neither Stevens nor Linda want, simply because the town insists on seeing it as sexual. Stevens considers cautioning Linda about the way the town interprets their relationship but realizes immediately that by considering the town's attitude they must to some extent accept it as valid:

You see? That was it: the very words reputation and good name. Merely to say them, speak them aloud, give their existence vocal recognition, would irrevocably soil and besmirch them, would destroy the immunity of the very things they represented, leaving them not just vulnerable but already doomed; from the inviolable and proud integrity of principles they would become, reduce to, the ephemeral and already doomed and damned fragility of human conditions. (203)

Qualities which Stevens considers good would, nevertheless, become merely the attributes of a fluctuating public opinion if they were to be defined in terms of what people think.

Michael Millgate generalizes about the novel:

"nothing happens in the novel which has not been conditioned by the social environment which Jefferson provides, and which does not reverberate in turn upon the sounding-board of Jefferson public opinion."<sup>18</sup> This is particularly true of Stevens' relationships with Eula and Linda because, more than any other character, he is aware of and concerned about what people might think. For that reason, his sister Maggie

determines to keep Stevens' sufferings as private as possible; Chick speculates about his mother's motives:

So maybe that was why: not that I wasn't old enough to accept biology, but that everyone should be, deserves to be, must be, defended and protected from the spectators of his own passion save in the most general and unspecific and impersonal terms of the literary and dramatic lay-figures of the protagonists of passion in their bloodless and griefless posturings of triumph or anguish. (305)

Recalling Faulkner's well-documented concern for individual privacy, one might see the title of the book as indicative of one its major themes, the impact of the town upon individuals.

Charles Mallison describes one aspect of the town's concern with morality as its Baptist heritage of righteousness. The founders of Jefferson have established:

a non-conformism defended and preserved by descendants whose ancestors hadn't quitted home and security for a wilderness in which to find freedom of thought as they claimed and oh yes, believed, but to find freedom in which to be incorrigible and unreconstructible Baptists and Methodists; not to escape from tyranny as they claimed and believed, but to establish one. (307)

It is this tyranny which destroys Manfred de Spain and Eula Varner Snopes. Chick Mallison sees the wreath on De Spain's bank's door as a wasted holiday. In retrospect, he realizes:

I would have to be a lot older than twelve before I realized that that wreath was not



the myrtle of grief, it was the laurel of victory; that in that dangling chunk of black tulle and artificial flowers and purple ribbons was the eternal and deathless public triumph of virtue itself proved once more supreme and invincible.  
(337)

Gavin Stevens realizes that "you simply cannot go against a community. You can stand singly against any temporary unanimity of even a city full of human behaviour, even a mob. But you cannot stand against the cold inflexible abstraction of a long-suffering community's moral point of view" (312). It is Flem Snopes' realization of this fact that paves the road to his success in The Town; his inscrutability and his respectability both make him an acceptable member of the community. Eula's disregard of respectability dooms her, in spite of Gavin Stevens' frantic but futile attempts.

Footnotes

- 1 Gold, p. 160
- 2 James L. Roberts, "Snopeslore: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion," University of Kansas City Review, 28 (October 1961), 71.
- 3 Howe, p. 286.
- 4 William Faulkner, The Town (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 4. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 5 Longley, p. 37.
- 6 Faulkner in the University, pp. 140-141.
- 7 Millgate, p. 238.
- 8 Beck, p. 59.
- 9 Beck, p. 130.
- 10 Beck, p. 79.
- 11 Beck, p. 160.
- 12 Vickery, p. 182.
- 13 Vickery, p. 184.
- 14 Millgate, p. 237.
- 15 Joseph J. Arpad, "William Faulkner's Legendary Novels: The Snopes Trilogy," Mississippi Quarterly, 22 (Summer 1969), 218.
- 16 Arpad, p. 219.
- 17 Brooks, p. 204.
- 18 Millgate, p. 235.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE MANSION

The Mansion develops Faulkner's use of the bystander along the lines begun in The Town: the romantic Gavin Stevens is defeated by his confrontation with a reality associated with a woman, and Flem Snopes remains the inscrutable personality he was in the earlier novel. Moreover, the structures of the two novels are remarkably similar, making use as they do of digressive episodes which counterpoint thematically the principal action. Both novels also involve a latent force which finds its expression at the conclusion: in The Town, Flem's temporary acceptance of the liaison between Manfred and Eula; in The Mansion, the delayed and frustrated revenge of Mink Snopes.

The Mansion is more, however, than a simple continuation of the themes and techniques first established in The Town. The consistent use of the trio of narrators in the earlier novel gives way partially to the use of the omniscient narrator as we, for the first time, enter the consciousness of one of the actors, as opposed to that of the narrator-bystanders. This change is closely linked to the novel's most surprising alteration, the development of Charles Mallison from an unbiased and uninvolved spectator, a mirror we could usually

trust, into an emotionally involved participant as unreliable as his uncle, Gavin Stevens.

It is necessary first to examine the principal similarities of the two novels before considering further their major differences. Once more, Gavin Stevens, as involved bystander, embroils himself in the action of the novel, and once more his idealistic visions are brutally shattered by reality. In both cases, Stevens is defeated by his inability to recognize or accept the reality of a woman's personality. Just as he was tortured in The Town by Eula Varner's blithe disregard for conventional morality (or at least decorum), so in The Mansion he is forced to realize that Linda Snopes has cold-bloodedly plotted the murder of Flem Snopes, her "father," using him, Stevens, as her unwilling accomplice.

At the beginning of The Mansion, Stevens seems to have recovered sufficiently from the shock associated with Eula Varner's death, and he has thrown himself into the business of tidying up the mess. Ratliff says:

He could keep busy now. Because he was contented and happy now, you see. He never had nothing to worry him now. Eula was safely gone now and now he could be safe forevermore from ever again having to chew his bitter poetic thumbs over the constant anticipation of who would turn up next named McCarron or De Spain.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, neither Ratliff nor Stevens can know the source

of a new danger, Linda Snopes herself, which The Mansion will reveal. For the moment, Stevens can retreat into his business and his hastily repaired moral view. Ratliff describes him sardonically as "Lawyer Stevens, so dedicated to civic improvement and moral advancement of folks that his purest notion of duty was browbeating twelve-year-old boys into running five-mile foot races when all they really wanted to do was jest to stay at home and set fire to the barn" (53). Ratliff suggests further what Montgomery Ward Snopes' attitude to Stevens might be, describing him as "a meal-mouthed sanctimonious Harvard - and Europe-educated lawyer that never even needed the excuse of his office and salaried job to meddle in any thing providing it wasn't none of his business and wasn't doing him no harm" (55). As uncharitable as these descriptions might be, they contain a grain of truth.

Gavin Stevens attempts to retire from the messiness of reality into an immaculate world of romantic idealism. Ratliff again describes him as:

Lawyer, a town-raised bachelor that was going to need a Master of Arts from Harvard and a Doctor of Philosophy from Heidelberg jest to stiffen him up to where he could cope with the natural normal Yoknapatawpha County folks that never wanted nothing except jest to break a few aggravating laws that was in their way or get a little free money outen the county treasury. (116)

Stevens' predilection for inhabiting the realm of abstraction and ideals explains his love of the Germans:

modern German culture since the revolutions of 1848 never had no concern with, and if anything a little contempt for, anything that happened to man on the outside, or through the eyes and touch, like sculpture and painting and civil laws for his social benefit, but jest with what happened to him through his ears, like music and philosophy and what was wrong inside of his mind . . . the mystical ideas, the glorious music. . . . (131-2)

But Stevens changes his opinions about Aryan splendour during the First World War; he decided instead that

The music and the ideas both come out of obscurity, darkness. Not out of shadow; out of obscurity, obfuscation, darkness. Man must have light. He must live in the fierce full constant glare of light, where all shadow will be defined and sharp and unique and personal. . . . All human evils have to come out of obscurity and darkness, where there is nothing to dog man constantly with the shape of his own deformity. (132-3)

Stevens' desire for the "fierce full constant glare of light" reflects his determination to live in the world of pure rationality, but this determination leads him into a blindness which prevents him from seeing Linda Snopes as she is. Ironically, Stevens identifies Eula, whom he calls Helen, with his beloved light: "Helen was light" (133); but Eula surely represented more the world of the dark passions which Stevens even now is

unable to confront.

The new danger to Stevens' equanimity will come from Linda and Mink Snopes, but it is reinforced by dangers from within himself. Stevens' need to dedicate himself to a cause, his Quixotic idealism, leads him constantly into difficulty. Ratliff talks of Stevens' "right and privilege and opportunity to dedicate forever his capacity for responsibility to something that wouldn't have no end to its appetite and that wouldn't never threaten to give him even a bone back in recompense" (163). When this Quixotic dedication is combined with Stevens' insatiable curiosity, his doom is imminent. He denies his crusading impulse, saying to Chick that curiosity has been his driving motive:

His Uncle Gavin always said he was not really interested in truth nor even in justice; that all he wanted was just to know, to find out, whether the answer was any of his business or not; and that all means to that end were valid, provided he left neither hostile witnesses nor incriminating evidence. Charles didn't believe him; some of his methods were not only too hard, they took too long; and there was some things you simply do not do even to find out. But his uncle said that Charles was wrong; that curiosity is another of the mistresses whose slaves decline no sacrifice. (343)

Obviously, Charles' scepticism is valid; Stevens is more than simply curious, but his profession of insatiable interest is true as far as it goes. Ratliff refers to

Stevens' "simple instinct or affinity for being where something was going to happen" (344). This intrusion into others' affairs in addition to his idealistic crusading makes inevitable his involvement in the action of the novel.

Stevens' interest in young girls, an interest which ironically dooms his agonizing involvement in The Mansion, is, in a sense, a reaction against mature femininity, a reaction which explains his seemingly perpetual bachelorhood. His interest in the young girl, like that of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, is limited by her transition into womanhood:

the only moment of motion which caught his attention, his eye, was that one at which they entered puberty like the swirl of a skirt or flow or turn of limb when entering, passing through a door, slowed down by the camera trick but still motion, still a moment, irrevocable.

That was really what saved him each time: that the motion had to be motion. They couldn't stop in the door, and once through it they didn't stop either; sometimes they didn't even pause long enough to close it behind them before going on to the next one and through it, which was into matrimony . . . . Uncle Gavin wouldn't be at that next door. He would still be watching the first one. And since life is not so much motion as an inventless repetition of motion, he would never be at that first door long before there would be another swirl, another unshaped vanishing adolescent leg. (197)

Ratliff teasingly echoes this sentiment when, at the end



of the novel, he tells Stevens: "I dont know if she's [Linda] already got a daughter stashed out somewhere, or if she jest aint got around to one yet. But when she does I jest hope for Old Lang Zyne's sake she dont never bring it back to Jefferson. You done already been through two Eula Varners and I dont think you can stand another one" (434). Stevens' interest in Linda remains avuncular throughout the novel; when Linda proposes sexual union, he tells her "we are the 2 in all the world who can love each other without having to" (239). Indeed, Linda encourages him to marry another woman so that he may have what she has had with Barton Kohl. When Stevens finally does marry, it is to a sweetheart of his youth, Melisandre Backus Harriss, now a widow with two grown children.

Stevens feels he is safe now; he can dabble in other people's affairs and his own marriage has already been created, complete with children, by another man. He tells Linda Snopes: "I am happy I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other peoples (sic) affairs without really doing any harm" (363). But in this belief, Stevens is sadly mistaken; through his involvement with Linda he arranges Mink's release and, subsequently, Flem's assassination. When Stevens first realizes that Linda is determined to have Mink paroled from the peni-

tentiary, he helps her, but he also attempts to prevent Mink's return to Jefferson by making his release conditional on his leaving Mississippi forever. Stevens thinks bitterly: "So I am a coward after all. When it happens two years from now, at least none of it will spatter on me" (376). By this ruse, Stevens hopes to avoid responsibility for Flem's death, but Mink evades the conditions and begins his journey to Jefferson.

Even after Mink successfully reaches Flem's house and murders him, Stevens believes that Linda's motives in requesting parole were good; he says to Ratliff: "not you nor any body else that wears hair is going to tell her that her act of pity and compassion and simple generosity murdered the man who passes as her father whether he is or not or a son of a bitch or not" (391). Ratliff prods him gradually into realization:

"You reckon she really never knowed what that durn little rattlesnake was going to do the minute they turned him loose?"

Ratliff said.

"Certainly not," Stevens said, quickly, too quickly, too late. (419)

Finally, Ratliff confronts him bluntly with the truth:

"--she knowed all the time what was going to happen when he got out, that not only she knowed but Flem did too --"

"I wont believe it!" Stevens said. "I wont! I cant believe it," he said. "Dont you see I cannot?" (431)

Stevens protests Ratliff's interpretation even though he himself has irrefutable proof that Linda has known all along what would happen. The new car she leaves Jefferson in has been ordered for weeks before Flem's death in anticipation of the day when Mink would reach Jefferson. He realizes: "So she knew she was going to leave after last Thursday: she just didn't know until Tuesday night exactly what day that would be" (423). Just as Stevens is shattered by Eula's suicide at the end of The Town, so his realization at the end of The Mansion that Linda has been implicated in Flem's murder and, moreover, has used Stevens himself as a tool to achieve her ends, leaves him shaken and distraught. As Cleanth Brooks says, "one can say of Gavin Stevens, the optimist, the romanticist, the believer in the tidy decencies of life, that his function in this novel is to be shaken by forces which he always manages to underestimate and to misunderstand."<sup>2</sup>

James F. Farnham, in "Faulkner's Unsung Hero: Gavin Stevens"<sup>3</sup> suggests that at the end of The Mansion, Stevens has become a "Realist" in that he finally shares Ratliff's tragic vision of life: "The poor sons of bitches that have to cause all the grief and anguish they have to cause!" (430) But in light of his continued refusal to admit Linda's part in Flem's murder, it is

difficult to see how this interpretation holds. Stevens is perfectly able to accept the violence associated with Mink; he is even capable of feeling a degree of sympathy for Flem Snopes. But his constant failure of vision is connected with his attitude to two women, Eula Varner and her daughter Linda. Faulkner leaves him at the end of The Mansion as shaken as he is at the end of The Town.

V.K. Ratliff, on the contrary, remains emotionally undisturbed by the events that shake Stevens. As in The Town, he has served his apprenticeship to outrage and has achieved a distance he did not possess in The Hamlet "back there when I never had no more sense neither than to believe I could tangle with Flem" (57). Symbolic of Ratliff's immunity is his serene and capable bachelorhood. Chick says: "Ratliff was a damned good cook, living alone in the cleanest little house you ever saw, doing his own housework and he even made the blue shirts he always wore" (206). In contrast, Stevens' bachelorhood is constantly threatened and inevitably doomed by his penchant for involvement, while Ratliff's tranquility is never disturbed by his interest in the events which shatter Stevens' equanimity.

Ratliff is as curious as Stevens, but he uses his ironic and speculative imagination to distance the

events he views. As a result, Ratliff perceives much that Stevens does not; long before the event, he tries to warn both Stevens and Chick about Linda's pending involvement in Flem's destruction, but neither understands:

you would have to remember what Ratliff said that time: "No, she aint going to marry him. It's going to be worse than that," and you would wonder what in the world Helen or her inheritance could or would want with that emptied sac or flattened hull, and so what in the hell could Ratliff have meant? Or anyway thought he meant? Or at least was afraid he might have meant or mean? (360)

Stevens describes Ratliff as "Cincinnatus," the Roman citizen who dropped his plow to save his city and then relinquished the reins of government to return to his farming. Indeed, Ratliff achieves a limited success, at least when he drives Clarence Snopes from politics through his judicious use of the "dog-thicket."

But if Stevens' failure involves his inability to distance himself from the events he watches, Ratliff's determination to remain aloof prevents him from tackling the problems which defeat his friend. His stance is that of the interested spectator watching a spectacle which he half creates. Ratliff's narrative is studded with words like "Maybe" or "Likely" (e.g. 56), words which indicate the speculative, perhaps even fictional, nature of his descriptions. He doesn't know everything, and, therefore,

he must fall back on his sense of what should have happened: he says "we got to presume on a little more than jest evidence" (139).

The best example of Ratliff's approach to reality is his description of Eula Varner's wooing by Horke McCarron. He interrupts his speculations about what must have happened with the following statement: "Except I dont think that was exactly it. I think I prefer it to happened that way. I think I prefer it to happened all at once" (119). Several pages later, he explains the grounds for his choice of details: "I mean, I prefer that even that citadel was still maiden right up to this moment. No! what I mean is, I wont have nothing else for the simple dramatic verities except that ever thing happened right there that night and all at once" (122). This emphasis upon the "dramatic verities" makes for finely structured, ironically brilliant tales, as all Ratliff's stories are, but it, of course, introduces an element of doubt about their factual truthfulness. What the reader receives is not a reporter's unbiased vision, but a consciously artistic and embellished fiction. Ratliff sums up the validity of his approach, saying:

Naturally they never brought no bystanders with them and after the first two or three

minutes there wasn't no witness a-tall left, since he was already laying out cold in the ditch. So my conjecture is jest as good as yourn, maybe better since I'm a interested party, being as I got what the feller calls a theorem to prove. . . . I dont even insist or argue that it happened that way. I jest simple decline to have it any other way except that one because there aint no acceptable degrees between what has got to be right and what jest can possibly be. (122-4 passim)

Ratliff's determination to prove his theorem makes him, in a sense, as unreliable a reporter as Stevens. Stevens must believe according to his idealistic vision of the world; Ratliff prefers to arrange his available facts into an ironic fiction which relates a verity higher than factual truth. For this reason, Chick refers to him as "Ratliff, who would be an interested bystander even if you couldn't call that much curiosity about other people's affairs which he possessed merely innocent" (205).

Both Ratliff and Stevens fulfill the same functions as they did in The Town; Charles Mallison, as we shall see later, changes significantly. But what of the people they watch? Flem Snopes remains in The Mansion the same inscrutable and apparently heartless creature he was in the earlier novel. All Jefferson watches him and speculates about what he is doing and feeling, but,

as before, Flem remains essentially unknowable. The facts of his existence become part of an extensive "Snopeslore" created by the community. The footrest Flem has built for his mantelpiece is representative of how knowledge about him is transmitted:

That little additional mantelpiece footrest was up now that hadn't nobody ever seen except that Negro yardman -- a Jefferson legend after he mentioned it to me and him (likely) and me both happened to mention it in turn to some of our close intimates. (164)

Flem's natural inscrutability is compounded, moreover, by his desire for respectability, as was the case in The Town. In other words, his need to present a certain image to the community leads him to mask and obscure facts that would not support it.

What we know of Flem we learn from our apprehension of a number of leit motifs repeatedly associated with him. These details of physical appearance suggest characteristics hidden beneath the bland and implacable exterior of the face he presents to the town. Ratliff describes Flem

with his feet propped against the side of the fireplace; not reading, not doing nothing; jest setting with his hat on, chewing that same little mouth-sized chunk of air he had been chewing ever since he quit tobacco when he finally got to Jefferson and heard about chewing gum and then quit chewing gum too when he found out folks considered the vice-



president of a bank rich enough not  
to have to chew anything. (155-6)

This progression from tobacco to chewing gum to air is indicative of Flem's joyless progress into financial success; the more money he has, the less he deems it necessary to use. Even more, this often repeated description emphasizes the pointlessness of Flem's acquisitiveness. Perhaps the best example of this use of leit motif comes in Montgomery Ward Snopes' description of Flem: Montgomery Ward mentions "that damn little ten-cent snap-on bow tie; they said the same one he had worn in from Frenchman's Bend sixteen years ago" and "the black felt hat . . . even after day and night for three years, not even sweated" (65). Finally, he describes the progression of Flem's chewing habits:

When he had nothing, he could afford  
to chew tobacco; when he had a little,  
he could afford to chew gum; when he  
found out he could be rich provided  
he just didn't die before hand, he  
couldn't afford to chew anything. (66)

All these details are descriptions of Flem's surface characteristics, but they are all anybody gets.

In The Mansion, however, there is a significant change in the way in which we see Flem. The progression of chewing is one indication of this change. The picture we most frequently have of him in this novel shows him

sitting, staring into space, chewing his "mouthful of nothing"; he is shown as a totally isolated man, having nothing to do now that his rapacious odyssey has reached its goal of financial success... Montgomery Ward Snopes is the first to hint at the futility of Flem's existence, saying to Flem:

"You never had a lay in your life, did you? You even waited to get married until you found a woman who not only was already knocked up, she wouldn't even have let you run your hand up her dress. Jesus, you do want to stay alive, don't you? Only, why?" (70)

Gavin Stevens echoes this statement in the novel's closing pages when he tells Ratliff:

"He was impotent. . . . When he got in bed with a woman all he could do was go to sleep. -- Yes!" Stevens said. "The poor sons of bitches that have to cause all the grief and anguish they have to cause!" (430)

If this re-evaluation of Flem's position were limited simply to the opinions of the other characters, it would be meaningless, but one of Faulkner's major achievements in The Mansion is to make the reader share this sense of Flem's ultimate sense of futility and despair, as he sits alone in his empty mansion, staring into space, chewing on air. Warren Beck has said: "Flem of The Town and The Mansion as viewed by the several thoughtful witnesses of his later career, repeatedly

seems about to require a more charitable interpretation than The Hamlet allowed, and then as often forces recognition of his invariable meanness, in accumulations of increasingly damning evidence which nevertheless does not rule out possible reappraisal."<sup>4</sup> Faulkner achieves a balance between the awareness of Flem's continuing rapacity and heartlessness and a suggestion of the terrible desolation of evil.

A new character shares the mystery of character which puzzles Stevens and Ratliff in The Mansion. Linda Snopes similarly becomes the subject of the narrator's speculation, living a life almost as isolated and pointless as Flem's. The symbol of her isolation from society is her deafness. Deafened by an explosion during the Spanish Civil War, she returns to Jefferson as "the inviolate bride of silence," cut off from society's demands and concerns. Like the Grecian Urn of Keats' poem, she seems to inhabit a realm where she can stay undisturbed by ordinary society's tribulations:

She was free, absolved of mundanity; who knows, who is not likewise castrate of sound, circumcised from having to hear, of need too. She had the silence: that thunderclap instant to fix her forever inviolate and private solitude; let the rest of the world blunder in all the loud directions over its own feet. (211)

Linda's deafness is more than a physical disability; it is also her refusal to listen to the protestations and persuasions and threats of the corrupt society she wishes to reform. When that society attempts to force her out of her crusade to improve the Negro schools of the district, it is incapable of communicating with her:

So how could Uncle Gavin tell her either. Or anybody else tell her, everybody else tell her, white and black both. Since it wasn't that she couldn't hear: she wouldn't listen, not even to the unified solidarity of No in the Negro school itself. (225)

In spite of the hostility of the town to her communist and reforming ideas, she can walk the streets of Jefferson, "the bride of quietude and silence striding inviolate in the isolation of unhearing, immune" (230).

Linda's isolation obscures her motives from the town as well, particularly from Gavin Stevens. Chick sees Linda returned from the Second World War and wonders why she is in Jefferson at all:

And now she had a fine, a really splendid dramatic white streak in her hair running along the top of her skull like a plume. A collapsed plume; in fact, maybe that was what it was, he thought: a collapsed plume lying flat athwart her skull instead of cresting upward first then back and over; it was the fall of 1945 now and the knight had run out of tourneys and dragons, the war itself had slain them, used them up, made them obsolete. (350)

The image is revealing; one dragon remains -- Flem Snopes himself. Linda, as we learn later, has returned to aid in the destruction of the man who has destroyed her mother. Chick speculates about why she is in Jefferson:

So in fact you would almost have to wonder why she stayed in Jefferson at all now, with nothing to do all day long but wait, pass the time somehow until night and sleep came, in that Snopes-colonial mausoleum with that old son of a bitch that needed a daughter or anybody else about as much as he needed a spare bow tie or another hat.  
(351)

It is clear to the reader that Linda's motive is revenge. It is the revelation of this fact that shatters Gavin Stevens at the end of the novel. Linda, like Flem, remains inscrutable behind a curtain of deafness.

These aspects of The Town -- the inscrutable actor, the biased and participating bystander -- continue to be important in The Mansion, but the final book of the Snopes trilogy makes a number of important changes in technique and rendering of the theme. The use of the narrative voices (Stevens, Charles, Ratliff) gives way to the use of an omniscient narrator, capable of moving from an external point of view to a view of the consciousness of a character like Mink Snopes. **Indeed, well over** half of the novel uses this narrative technique, while the narrators we met in The Town (plus Montgomery Ward

Snopes) relate only one hundred and eighty of the novel's four hundred thirty-six pages. Faulkner seems determined particularly to render the final section of the book, "Flem," completely in the omniscient voice. This sudden dwindling of the narrator-bystanders allows a final view of the Snopes saga from an objective and distanced stance. As he did in The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner steps beyond the subjectivity of his characters' visions to create a sort of coda or summation of the trilogy's themes and concerns. Actually, although the final chapters of the book eschew the narrative voice, they are, nevertheless, studded with expressions like "Gavin said" or "Ratliff said" which indicate that these sections have become an amalgam of points of view rather than a rejection of the narrators' opinions. Chapter Fifteen, for instance, though narrated by the omniscient narrator, adopts a "Charlesian" point of view in its discussion of Linda Snopes. Faulkner now feels it necessary to render action simultaneously from above and from within a character's limited perceptions, much in the manner of Henry James. Having shown in The Town the relationship between action and perception, he now wishes to plunge more deeply into the consciousness of a single character.

The most important character in The Mansion is

not Gavin Stevens; he is given only twenty pages of narration. Rather the figure who dominates the novel is Mink Snopes. In these two books of the trilogy, the omniscient narrator enters, for the first time, the consciousness of an actor rather than that of a bystander. Edmond L. Volpe suggests why Faulkner chose to do this:

What Faulkner suggests in his prefatory note that he has learned in thirty-four years about "the human heart and its dilemma" is what Gavin and the reader learn in the course of the novel. The process of preparing us for that knowledge consists of engaging our sympathies for Mink. For this reason, Faulkner uses the omniscient-author technique in the first and last section of the novel. The multiple-narrator technique of the middle section would have been fatal to his design because reader involvement in the narrator's search for the truth tends to make attitudes equivocal. Faulkner could not permit Mink to be viewed through eyes that the reader could not completely trust; the slightest doubt that our sympathies for Mink are justified would be fatal to the work.<sup>5</sup>

This is rather overstated. The reader, I believe, constantly fluctuates between a sympathy for Mink's point of view and a revulsion at his motivations. Volpe has, however, pointed to an important justification for the novel's structure.

It is hard to deny that Mink is, in some ways, a frightening character. The very intensity of his

monomania, his determination to kill Flem Snopes, is disturbing. Moreover, the crudeness of his style, of his vision of life, tends to alienate the reader. For instance, he refers to "the hurrah and hullabaloo that Varner girl had been causing ever since she (or whoever else it was) found the first hair on her bump" (4); he speaks of the preacher's custom of cuckolding all the local husbands and eating their wives' cooking, exchanging "the job of filling his hole in payment for getting theirs plugged the first time the husband went to the field and she could slip off to the bushes where the preacher was waiting" (5).

We frequently find it difficult to accept Mink's interpretation of events. For instance, when the narrator reports Mink's opinion of his own nature, the reader must surely disagree:

he, Mink, was not a contentious man. He had never been. It was simply that his own bad luck had all his life continually harassed and harried him into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights. (7)

Indeed, we are aware at the beginning of the novel how limited is Mink's vision of reality when we see him actually expecting assistance from Flem Snopes in beating the murder charge for Houston's death.

Nevertheless, our sympathy for Mink grows



gradually through the novel as we see him confront and endure one indignity after another. It is possible to concur with Mink in his outrage over Houston's highhanded treatment of him. The episode concerning Mink's cow, when seen from Mink's point of view in The Mansion, rather than from Houston's point of view in The Hamlet, takes on a completely different coloration. Irving Howe has suggested that what Faulkner "is really showing here is the way events shift in meaning as they are regarded through new eyes and how a consequence of a growing humaneness can be a relativism of judgment."<sup>6</sup> Just as the lengthy flashback in Light in August involves us sympathetically with the murderer, Joe Christmas, so The Mansion acts as a retrospective to the trilogy, altering our opinion of events which earlier we have seen in a different light.

A brief description of Mink Snopes early in The Mansion suggests the duality of vision involved in understanding him:

He stood there, his raw-red wrists which the slicker did not cover lying quiet on the top rail of the fence, his eyes quite blind again and his ears ringing again as though somebody had fired a shotgun just over his head, and on his face that expression faint and gentle and almost like smiling. (117)

This contrast between exterior appearance and inner

reality underlies the structure of The Mansion. The bystander can see one aspect of the character; the reader is allowed, through Faulkner's artistry, to see simultaneously both aspects of Mink, as though in a Picasso cubist portrait.

A new dimension is added to this construction, moreover, when we realize that Mink is conscious throughout the novel of being watched. While he plans his strategy in the business with Houston and his cow, he is disturbed by his awareness of the watching community:

Naturally he would have to be prepared for the resulting inevitable questions:  
Frenchman's Bend was too little, too damn little for a man to have any privacy about what he did, let alone about what he owned or lacked. (10)

This bitter sense of an interested though hostile audience finds its fullest expression in Mink's concept of them, his belief in a unified order that watches his actions and reacts in a predictable fashion:

They could harass and worry him, or they could even just sit back and watch everything go against him right **along without** missing a lick, almost like there was a pattern to it; just sit back and watch and . . . enjoy it too; maybe in fact They were even testing him, to see if he was a man or not, man enough to take a little harassment and worry and so deserve his own licks back when his turn came. (6)

Thus, Mink turns his sense of being watched into an almost theological statement; the bystander has become a metaphor

for the implacable hostility of the universe.

During his trip from Parchman to Jefferson, Mink is desperately aware of his need to escape this watching presence, but it seems impossible to avoid being seen:

it would be impossible to disguise his appearance---change his face, his expression, alter his familiar regional clothes or the way he walked; he entertained for a desperate and bizarre moment then dismissed it the idea of perhaps walking backward, at least whenever he heard a car or truck approaching, to give the impression he was going the other way. (397)

Of course, the need for privacy is, at this point, largely tactical. If Mink is found, he will be prevented from carrying out his revenge on Flem Snopes. But his need to escape the eyes of the bystander is more than this. As Mink proceeds to test his ancient pistol, the narrator says:

Out of sight of the road would be far enough. Only, if possible, nobody must even hear the sound of the trial shot. He didn't know why; he could not have said that, having had to do without privacy for thirty-eight years, he now wanted, intended to savor, every minuscule of it which freedom entitled him to. (404)

The terms of Mink's desire are reminiscent of Faulkner's own protestations in his essay, "On Privacy," and elsewhere. The need to escape the intrusive vision dominates

many of Faulkner's characters from Bayard Sartoris to Joe Christmas to Gavin Stevens himself. Like Hawthorne, Faulkner seems to be concerned with the evil of violating the sanctity of the human heart.

This movement into the secrecy of one character's mind and heart justifies the surprising appearance of the omniscient narrator in much of The Mansion. A second development in the trilogy, however, bears an equal burden of responsibility for this appearance. In this last novel of the trilogy, Charles Mallison develops from the innocent and uninvolved child of The Town into a personality whose biases and attitudes preclude his use as an essentially reliable reporter. For instance, in discussing the name, Eula Acres, given to Flem's new housing development, the narrator says:

And Charles didn't know whether old Flem Snopes had named it that himself or not but he would remember his uncle's face while Ratliff was telling them. But even without that he, Charles, would still prefer to believe it was not really Flem but his builder and (the town assumed) partner Wat Snopes who thought of it, maybe because Charles still wanted to believe that there are some things, at least one thing, that even Flem Snopes wouldn't do. (332-3)

These interpretations, references, and opinions are hardly typical of the Chick Mallison who, in The Town, simply reported the facts of the story which Stevens and Ratliff interpreted.

When Faulkner was asked at the University of Virginia why he used Charles Mallison as one of his narrators in The Town, he replied:

I thought it would be more amusing as told through the innocence of a child that knew what he was seeing but had no particular judgment about it. That something told by someone that don't know he is telling something funny is sometimes much more amusing than when it's told by a professional wit who is hunting around for laughs.<sup>7</sup>

The Charles Mallison who appears in The Mansion, however, is no longer this faithful reporter. Rather, he has developed a specific and idiosyncratic personality which distorts and colours his vision of reality. As a result, Faulkner is forced to rely more heavily on an authorial voice. Whereas Charles narrates fully over half of The Town, his narration comprises less than twelve percent of The Mansion.

Charles, returned from the Second World War, has become a sophomoric poseur, possessed of much of his uncle's long-winded loquaciousness. He rants on to his uncle and Ratliff about Linda Snopes Kohl, making anti-Semitic comments about her dead husband until **Stevens** stops him:

"All right," Chick says. "I'm sorry."  
But Lawyer just sat there easy in the chair, looking at him. "Damn it," Chick says, "I said I'm sorry."  
"Only you're not sorry yet," Lawyer says. "You're just ashamed."

"Aint it the same thing?" Chick says.

"No," Lawyer says. "When you are just ashamed of something, you dont hate it. You just hate getting caught." (110)

This is an excellent illustration of the dichotomy The Mansion constantly constructs. Being sorry is a feeling involving the individual's attitude to himself; being ashamed involves a concern with the opinions of others, the bystanders.

What is most significant about the passage, however, is that Chick has now become the one worried about the attitude of the bystander. He is no longer an uninvolved witness; he has become an involved participant in the action. Ratliff, who watches this interchange, comments that "a stranger that never happened to be living in Jefferson or Yoknapatawpha County ten or twelve years ago might have thought it was Chick that was the interested party" (111). Chick is now disturbed by and interested in Linda and he seems jealous of his uncle's involvement. Ratliff continues: "This time he wouldn't be no innocent infantile bystanding victim of that loop because this time he would be in there fighting for the right and privilege of being lassoed; fighting not jest for the right and privilege of being strangled too, but of being strangled first" (112). Stevens realizes that Chick now seems to have taken his old position

in the relationship with Linda; he says: "I suddenly realized--discovered. . . that it was apparently Chick now who was our family's representative in her social pattern" (244).

But Ratliff carries his analysis of Chick's reaction to Linda one step further; he says "it wasn't his uncle he was jealous of over Linda Snopes: he was jealous of Linda over his uncle" (113). Chick wishes to have the intimacy of the relationship Stevens and Linda have; as strong as his sexual interest in Linda is his need for communion with his uncle and Ratliff.

Chick's sexual interest in Linda is easy to document from The Mansion; he is almost obsessed by her mystery. He thinks of her as "the same tall girl too tall to have a shape but then I dont know: women like that and once you get their clothes off they surprise you even if she was twenty-nine years old now" (198). Or again:

Well that's one anyway that wont have to take her clothes off on my account and then almost before he could get it out, something else was already saying Okay, buster, who suggested she was going to? And he had been right: not her for him, but rather not him for her. (352)

This concern reaches its culmination when Charles asks his uncle: "Is it all right with you if I try to lay her?" (353). Stevens can see beneath the crudeness of

this suggestion the emotion as strong as the one he himself felt when he first saw Eula Varner, but he realizes that Chick must learn on his own the futility of this passion.

Chick's sexual interest distorts his vision in a way never possible in The Town. He repeatedly characterizes the relationship between Stevens and Linda in his own sexual terms, terms which the reader, familiar with Stevens' feelings, sees as obviously fallacious. Indeed, as was suggested above, part of the attraction Linda holds for Stevens is the fact that sex need have no part in their relationship. But Chick asks his uncle: "I'm a big boy now; I'm a Harvard A.M. too even if I wont have Heidelberg. Tell me. Is that really all you do when you are all cosy together: practise talking?" (207). He describes the impossibility of Linda and Stevens finding a place to make love:

So that left only his automobile, concealed desperately and frantically behind a bush--Gavin Stevens, aged fifty, M. A. Harvard, Ph.D. Heidelberg, LI.B. Mississippi, American Field Service and Y.M.C.A., France, 1915-1918, County Attorney; and Linda Kohl, thirty, widow, wounded in action with the communist forces in Spain, fumbling and panting in a parked automobile like they were seventeen years old. (213)

This scene exists, of course, only in Chick's fevered imagination; it has nothing to do with the reality of



Gavin's and Linda's love. Later, after Gavin's marriage, he describes Linda walking every day to control "the sleepless frustrated rage at his Uncle Gavin for having jilted her while she was away riveting ships to save Democracy, to marry Melisandre Harriss Backus" (356).

Again, the reader, who has seen Linda's active encouragement of Stevens' marriage, is fully aware of the inappropriateness of Chick's observations. It seems almost as if Faulkner, anticipating the obvious interpretations of the Stevens-Linda affair, has deliberately put them into the mouth of one of his characters in order to dispel them.

But, as Ratliff has pointed out, Chick's sexual imagination is surpassed by his love for his Uncle Gavin, a love which partially motivates his ranting. In one of his last narrative sections, Chick makes the following beautiful statement about his relationship with Stevens:

he is a good man, wise too except for the occasions when he would aberrate, go momentarily haywire and take a wrong turn that even I could see was wrong, and then go hell-for-leather, with absolutely no deviation from logic and rationality from there on, until he wound us up in a mess of trouble or embarrassment that even I would have had sense enough to dodge. But he is a good man. Maybe I was wrong sometimes to trust and follow him but I never was wrong to love him. (230)

Ultimately, the sense of communion and fellowship

achieved in this passage is one of the supreme accomplishments of both The Town and The Mansion. In both novels, the easy fellowship of the three bystanders, Stevens, Ratliff, and Mallison, a relaxed and honest camaraderie, functions as a strong counterpoint to a series of isolated and uncommunicative individuals: Flem Snopes, Mink Snopes, Linda Snopes Kohl. These brooding and inscrutable isolatoes (to use Melville's term) are seen through the eyes of a trio whose friendship is one of Faulkner's most convincing creations. At the end, we are left with the juxtaposition of Chick's statement and Flem's lonely and mysterious figure, sitting in his empty mansion, chewing on air, staring into space.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner, The Mansion (1959; rpt. New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 147-148. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> James F. Farnham, "Faulkner's Unsung Hero: Gavin Stevens," Arizona Quarterly, 21 (Summer, 1965), 126.

<sup>4</sup> Beck, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Volpe, pp. 336-337.

<sup>6</sup> Howe, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Faulkner in the University, p. 116.

## CONCLUSION

In both The Town and The Mansion the bystanders achieve a communion which counterpoints the isolation of the novels' protagonists. Gavin Stevens, V.K. Ratliff, and Charles Mallison form a representative community whose values are threatened by the depredations of Flem Snopes. The principles that the three bystanders implicitly affirm are laudable ones, worthy of defense against Flem's amoral violations of them, but the bystanders are ultimately unable to translate their principles into actions. Flem Snopes' pragmatism is much stronger than Gavin Stevens' idealism. Indeed, even the limited successes of Stevens, Ratliff, and Chick represent at best a holding action. Furthermore, they are doomed to defeat by their predilection for assuming the role of bystander rather than that of participant. Although the passivity inherent in the position of a witness does increase the characters' value as perceiving intelligence, at the same time, it severely limits their capacity for action.

Faulkner's ambivalent rendering of the bystander arises partly from an awareness of this limitation. Gavin Stevens, Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson, the Reporter, V.K. Ratliff: all these characters witness the actions of protagonists whose vitality contrasts vividly with the incapacity for action of the bystanders.

Indeed, it would seem that Faulkner implies the incompatibility of moral awareness and effective action. The protagonist in Faulkner's fiction, be he Flem Snopes or Thomas Sutpen, perceives his goal in narrowly defined terms and pursues it with the energy associated with obsession. The bystander, however, loses himself amid the complexity of his perceptions, and finally is unable to act effectively.

It is surprising, nevertheless, to see the impact that the bystander may have upon the action he views, not through any concerted action on his part, but through the very fact of his watching. The obsessions of Faulkner's protagonists are frequently moulded by their awareness of a watching consciousness which the bystander represents. Thomas Sutpen creates his plantation and his dynasty to impress the bystanders, particularly those in posterity, represented in the novel by Quentin Compson and his fellow narrators. Even Flem Snopes, who seems to care about no one, recognizes the importance of respectability and goes to great lengths to satisfy the demands of public propriety in Jefferson.

This power of the watching bystander, is, of course, strongest when it is the community as a whole that watches. In Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris the choric

voice of the community comments upon and, to some extent, controls the action. The title of The Town reveals the community's importance. In this form, the watching consciousness is most dangerous. Faulkner's comments in his essay, "On Privacy", express his personal resentment about the intrusion of society upon the individual's solitude. In the novels mentioned, the pernicious effect of the community's intrusion is all too clear.

To some extent the same criticism can be levelled against the individual bystander. Particularly in the case of Gavin Stevens, Faulkner suggests that moral awareness and concern can frequently degenerate into mere "nosiness." In Requiem for a Nun and Knight's Gambit, Faulkner shows Gavin Stevens involving himself in matters which are, as Chick Mallison says, none of his business. The bystander may represent a superego or moral conscience directed upon the amoral actions of the protagonist, or he may be merely a voyeur. Insofar as Faulkner's habitual stance as an author, even when he writes as omniscient narrator, is that of a bystander, this problem may be of particular concern to him. The bystander who creates in part the reality he views is a type of artist, and like Hawthorne, Faulkner was concerned about the violation of the individual's sanctity

and privacy, whether it come from the artist or society at large.

The individual bystander and the community have more in common, however, than this tendency to interfere. It is interesting to find Faulkner creating in the three narrators of The Town and The Mansion a microcosm of the community at large; their communion represents, perhaps, the community at its best. The individual bystander fluctuates throughout Faulkner's fiction between acting as representative of his community and acting as opponent to its demands. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Gavin Stevens, whose ambivalent relationship to the community of Jefferson appears as a recurring element of his personality. As district attorney he is the enforcer of his society's laws and sometimes its moral Pharisee. On the other hand, he frequently identifies with the persecuted outcast and does his best to defend him (or her) against the town's attacks.

The bystander's imaginative identification with the protagonist is, in fact, a powerful unifying force in much of Faulkner's fiction. Bystanders like Quentin Compson, the Reporter, and Horace Benbow at moments become imaginatively the protagonists they view. Their sympathy transcends time, personality, and sex so that

they achieve visions in which they live briefly the experiences they previously only watched. This leap of the imagination functions as a surrogate for the bystander; his perceptions become his life in that they are its most vital element.

Indeed, Faulkner's preference for the bystander character seems to originate with his investigation of the nature of perception. Because so few of his protagonists are finally understandable, the focus of attention shifts from understanding to a consideration of the processes of understanding. The act of viewing itself becomes the subject of many novels, and the bystander therefore supplants the protagonist as the central figure of Faulkner's fiction.

Seen in these terms, the bystander can hardly be regarded as an authorial spokesman or mouthpiece. On the contrary, the bystander stands as an objective lesson on the inability of finally perceiving truth. His perceptions are consistently viewed with irony; they are limited, biased, and incomplete. This is particularly true of Gavin Stevens, who functions not as the expresser of Faulkner's opinions about life but as an illustration of Faulkner's belief that absolute truth is unattainable. One of Faulkner's earliest critics,



Jean-Paul Sartre, described this aspect of Faulkner's fiction most tellingly; I would, therefore, like to conclude by repeating one of his statements quoted earlier in this dissertation: "Faulkner's man is undiscoverable. . . . And yet, beyond behaviour and beyond words, beyond empty consciousness, Man exists. We have an inkling of a genuine drama, a kind of intelligible nature that might explain everything. But just what is this nature?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sartre, Literary and Philosophical Essays, p. 76.

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