WILLIAM FAULKNER AND GEORGE WASHINGTON HARRIS: FRONTIER HUMOR IN THE SNOPE'S TRILOGY

by

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The influence of the pre-Civil War Southwestern humorists on the work of William Faulkner has long been hypothesized. But it has received scant critical attention, much of it erroneous or so general as to be almost meaningless. While Faulkner's total vision is more than merely humorous, humor is a significant part of that vision. And the importance of frontier humor to Faulkner's art is further substantiated by the fact that many of his grotesque passages derive from elements of this humor.

Frontier humor flourished from 1830 to 1860, and while a large group of men then flooded American newspapers with contributions, it now survives in anthologies and the book-length collections of its most prominent writers -- Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Johnson Jones Hooper, William Tappan Thompson, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris. Their writings illustrate the genre's growth from mere regionalism in eighteenth century diction to the robust and masculine humor in the frontiersman's own language.

Harris is the best of these humorists because he has a better sense of incongruity and consistently tells his stories in the earthy vernacular of the frontiersman; and Faulkner himself admires Sut Lovingood, principle character-cum-raconteur of Harris's best work. Therefore, in this thesis I focus on
Harris's *Sut Lovingood* in relation to the Snopes trilogy of Faulkner -- his longest unified work and a "chronicle" of Yoknapatawpha County with much frontier humor in it.

A major parallel between Faulkner and Harris is their similar use of the story-within-a-story device and their similar technical rendering of the highly figurative and even in Harris's time somewhat stylized language of the frontier. Their common Southern heritage and the lack of change in the post-bellum Southern backwoodsman conduces to a similar milieu. Harris's and Faulkner's recurrent theme of retribution derives from the frontiersman's individualism and from his concern for at least the rudiments of society. Both authors create a large number of frontier characters; and their principle frontier characters are at once superb story tellers and epitomize the best ideals of the American frontier.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to examine the ways in which Faulkner parallels Harris's frontier humor. Having established Harris as the best writer in his group, I discuss the two authors' structures and techniques, their milieus and themes, and their characters. The trilogy's similarities with and deviations from Harris's *Sut Lovingood* help to illuminate Faulkner's artistry as well as to suggest the strength of Harris's influence on Faulkner.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Southwestern Humor</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Structure and Technique</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Milieu and Theme</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Character</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Introduction

In his novels there is ample evidence that Faulkner is well-acquainted with Southwestern humor in general. As early as 1927, in *Mosquitoes*, his admiration for this humor is at least theoretically revealed in the words of Fairchild, who, having told a story about swamp-bred 'half-horse half-alligators,' explains to a foreigner:

We're a simple people, we Americans, kind of child-like and hearty. And you've got to be both to cross a horse and an alligator and then find some use for him. That's part of our national temperament.¹

Faulkner's later reply to an interviewer, "I was born in 1826 of a Negro slave and an alligator..."² may indicate an even closer knowledge of the tall-tale species (for example, the legends of Mike Fink and Davy Crockett), a branch of the larger genre, frontier or Southwestern humor.

That Faulkner has been influenced by the earlier humor is obvious. But to what extent this is a "literary influence" per se is almost impossible to determine. The humorists of the old Southwest depended on the oral tradition as well as on their keen perception of frontier events for their material. The similarity of their frontier and Faulkner's is attested by Cecil D. Eby:

[The] conditions and scenes described by the humorists persist still, and the up-country domain of the piny-woods and the red-neck in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* would
still be recognizable to a resurrected Joseph B. Baldwin or a Johnson Hooper.

And John Cullen notes the persistence of the oral tradition in Northern Mississippi:

In this country there is a kind of salty, down-to-earth folk humor based on tall tales and understatement and old frontier southern character. Because Lafayette County has remained so rural as it has, the elemental frontier American character has been preserved more than in most other sections of the country and the South....

Further, he comments on Faulkner's remarkable sensitivity to local events:

[Faulkner] seems to have remembered every old wartime story, every notorious and unusual character in Lafayette County, every casual remark, and all the gossip of a community. He has had the ability and the keen mind to look and listen, and to use the most unusual and interesting events in Lafayette County history and life.

Faulkner's material, then, is similar to that of the Southwestern humorists, and he is equally sensitive to it. These similarities, plus the stasis of the South in general, and Northern Mississippi in particular, might, then contribute to the writing of similar stories. Thus, a common heritage partly qualifies the "literary influence."

The similarity of much of Faulkner's humor to Southwestern humor in general is often noted, but rarely examined. In fact, few critics attempt more than a lip-tribute to Faulkner as a humorist. Those who do deal with his humor generally prefer to examine Faulkner's more grotesque incidents in conjunction with their own predilections for some 'ism' or another. While
these rather esoteric treatments may conform to the tone of much Faulkner criticism, a more basic point has been glossed over — Faulkner's debt to Southern regionalism is at least one basis for his humor. This is not to say that he, like many of his predecessors in the South, is a mere chronicler. In fact it is Faulkner's range of humor that often leads critics astray. By devoting their energies to the extremes of Faulkner's humor and by partially or wholly ignoring the more domestic, the more American roots of Faulkner's humor, critics have often enlarged rather than diminished the popular misconception of Faulkner's perverse abstruseness. In a recent critic's opinion:

One problem to be faced in dealing with the extensive and varied writings of the author [Faulkner] is the mass of commentary from the past, much of it obsessively wrong-headed; ... one of the most persistent forms of carping has been the assertion that the work is obscure, difficult, prolix, extravagant, or needlessly redundant. Worst of all is the suspicion that he did it all on purpose. ...Part of Faulkner's prolixity can be put down to temperament, and this does him no discredit. Temperament is one aspect of genius. Another aspect of such genius strongly aware of complexity is that it creates and uses ways of seeing and knowing which pedantry has not yet classified.6

And "pedantry," in its zeal to classify Faulkner's humor, largely overlooks the extent to which it can be related to frontier humor -- a comparison not as esoteric as that to surrealism, but one perhaps more germane to Faulkner's background.
Of the critics who have written book-length studies of Faulkner, Mary Cooper Robb and Lawrence Thompson are two who most consistently mislead in their comments on Faulkner's humor in general and more specifically, on *The Hamlet*, perhaps Faulkner's greatest extended work in the tradition of regional humor. Miss Robb, for instance, has difficulty recognizing the inter-relationship of the elements of frontier humor -- land, language, and people: "The humor [in Faulkner's stories] does not lie in the words themselves, but in the characters and the situations in which they are involved." Similarly, in asserting Faulkner's ability to delineate character and forgetting such type characters as Mrs. Tull in *The Hamlet* and old Het in *The Town*, she again generalizes: "there is no character who is present in a book just to supply a laugh. None is a caricature." 

Mr. Thompson writes with more assurance than critical acumen or appreciation of Southwestern humor. Indeed, he finds that "the entire action of *The Mansion* is boring," and that "throughout most of *The Hamlet*, Faulkner deliberately descends to low comedy." In a rather obvious attempt to be more colorful than judicious, Thompson pronounces that Faulkner's "revisions [of the short stories incorporated in *The Hamlet*] would seem to have been performed with a cavalier laziness...." These critical remarks, chosen for their very ineptitude, reveal the uneven results of critics who examine the whole of the Faulkner canon.
More accomplished critics tend towards greater caution. Neither Irving Howe nor Cleanth Brooks neglects anything of major importance and both show genuine insight into those aspects of Faulkner they especially admire. Otherwise, they describe rather than examine Faulkner's work. Howe, for instance, says: "The talk [of The Hamlet] is superb — richly idiomatic, virile, brimming with high humor," and the book itself is "distinctly American in idiom and observation, heavily sprinkled with the salt of folk humor...." But he does not draw any specific parallel to the language of folk humor, certainly a major element of that genre. That is, he reveals his appreciation of the regional humor in The Hamlet, but almost ignores the specific elements of this humor. And in concluding his chapter on this novel, he confesses the hardships of any critical examination of humor:

Of all the literary modes, humor is notoriously the most indifferent to critical inspection, and in the end there is little to do but point and appreciate. Confronted with Faulkner's marvels the critic must feel that his task, though not irrelevant, is all but hopeless; and may wish to cry out with the judge in the novel, "I can't stand no more. I won't! This court's adjourned. Adjourned!"

Cleanth Brooks also notes the presence of frontier humor:

"...the tone of The Hamlet is a compound of irony and wonder... The ironic element frequently takes the form of a kind of folk humor, and the wonder tends towards the mythic extravagance of the tall-tale tradition." But he prefers to discuss the elements of this humor in terms of parallels in English
literature, rather than those of American origin. Faulkner's emphasis on the people, the land, and the things in this land, all common to Southern regional humor, are discussed thus:

Faulkner's pastoral mode is, of course, more earthy and violent than Wordsworth's, and Faulkner's pastoral scene is, much more than Wordsworth's, consciously set off from the dominant urban culture of its time. ...Faulkner has stylized and formalized his world of Frenchman's Bend almost as much as Jonathan Swift stylized and formalized the country of Lilliput, but again like Swift, he has rendered it in almost microscopic detail.15

And however much more insightful it may seem to compare Faulkner's "pastoral mode" and "microscopic detail" with the writings of Wordsworth and Swift than with the writings of Faulkner's Southern predecessors -- say, those of George Washington Harris, for example -- Brooks' comparison connotes an influence for which there is little evidence. This is not to say that Faulkner could not have been influenced by the romantic poets or by Swift; rather, that in these specific aspects of Faulkner's work, it is far more likely that he was influenced by the regional humorists of his own background.

Certainly, as a Southern writer, Faulkner could be expected to have read Southern works with special attention. And however much he might have known other writers in the genre of Southwestern humor, he does comment favorably on one writer in particular -- George Washington Harris. Faulkner said:
And then I like Sut Lovingood from a book written by George Harris about 1840 or '50 in the Tennessee Mountains. He had no illusions about himself, did the best he could; at certain times he was a coward and knew it and wasn't ashamed; he never blamed his misfortunes on anyone and never cursed God for them.16

Here, as elsewhere, Faulkner reduces the analytical criteria of literature to what was most important to him -- the appraisal of character. And, while perhaps it is in terms of character that Faulkner was most influenced, there are other reasons than the character of Sut Lovingood for Faulkner to have admired Harris, just as there are other similarities in their works.

Further, it is not unlikely that Faulkner knew some of the lesser writers in this tradition. The inadequacy of the scholarship which examines Faulkner's humor in relation to that of the regional humorists of the South indicates at least two things: Faulkner's stature as a literary artist, and his range as a humorist. This same inadequacy may also indicate the tendency of Faulknerian criticism to emphasize the esoteric. Still, Faulkner's humor is but a small part of his entire vision, and his Southwestern humor is an even more minute part of that vision; but the humor of the regional tradition sets the tone for some of Faulkner's major works.

To be sure, Faulkner is a figure of far greater literary significance than the Southwestern humorists, and he would be acclaimed as a genius had he never written a line of humor. However, his humor does enlarge his immense stature as an
artist; and his acknowledgment of his close acquaintance with *Sut Lovingood*, the culminating work of the ante-bellum Southern humorists, is noteworthy because much of Faulkner's best humor derives from the early American tradition of frontier humor.

In this thesis, for the purposes of examining Faulkner's connection with Southwestern humor, I focus on Faulkner's Snopes trilogy and Harris's *Sut Lovingood*. While Faulkner uses frontier humor sporadically throughout his canon (from *Mosquitoes* to *The Reivers*), the Snopes trilogy contains some of Faulkner's best frontier humor. Because it is a work unified by character and event, the trilogy itself helps to unify and limit the study. And, as a lengthy work, written over a period of years, the trilogy, for range of vision and expression, is unrivalled by any of Faulkner's single novels. The work contains both tragic and humorous events; and the humor in it is of similarly wide range. Indeed, wit, satire, irony, and both modern and frontier humor exist side by side. Moreover, many grotesque passages in the work derive from Faulkner's emphasis on single aspects of frontier humor. And besides containing Faulkner's most lengthy and intimate study of the Southern backwoodsman, the trilogy affords a good cross-section of Faulkner's generic range because each novel contains revised short stories. Thus, the trilogy, itself a unified work of art, excels Faulkner's other works in range of humor, range of tone, and range of genre.
Sut Lovingood deserves our attention for at least two reasons: Faulkner himself admires Harris's central character, and the book is the best and the culminating work of ante-bellum Southwestern humor. This is not to say that Faulkner was influenced only by Harris's *Sut Lovingood*; rather, the connection between Faulkner's trilogy and the genre of Southwestern humor is most vividly illustrated by reference to parallels in Harris's work. Still, while Faulkner's statement perhaps substantiates this particular influence, an understanding of the genre and the relation of *Sut Lovingood* to that genre will serve to point out the elements of frontier humor, to indicate why Harris was the most successful of this group, and to suggest the scope of possible sources for Faulkner's frontier humor. This background material, then, will provide the knowledge necessary for an analysis of Faulkner's relationship to these frontier humorists -- an analysis that illuminates many parallels between Harris's and Faulkner's works. Although Faulkner is Harris's superior in all artistic matters, their similarities in matters of structure, technique, theme, milieu, and characterization points towards Harris's influence on Faulkner. As Faulkner is artistically superior to Harris, Harris's work, in terms of frontier humor, is artistically superior to those of the other Southwestern humorists.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I.


5 Ibid., p. 62.


8 Ibid., p. 32.


10 Ibid., p. 135. My italics.

11 Ibid.


13 Ibid., p. 252.


15 Ibid., p. 176.

II. Southwestern Humor

Southern regional humor and "Down East" humor became distinct from one another in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Together, they comprise an American humor, and their simultaneous birth in print attests Americans' growing awareness of their peculiarities both as Americans (in contrast to Europeans) and as members of specific regions (in contrast to other regions of America). This is not to say that Americans were not humorous in the preceding centuries, nor is it to assert that regional differences were not noted in the earlier eras. In fact, exaggerating and emphasizing the peculiarities of life, speech, and character in the new world was a salient aspect of a self-conscious eighteenth century America. A striking example, though not the first, is the song, "Yankee Doodle."

The Revolutionary War, it appears, first made Americans in general acquainted with their national peculiarities, and the British invaders evidently deserve credit for the discovery. The term, "Yankee," in widespread use to denote an American dates back to about 1775, when it was employed by invaders as a term of derision. "Yankee Doodle," a rollicking song which mysteriously emerged from the conflict and became less of derisive portrayal as the Yankees themselves perversely adopted it, caught several qualities of the rustic New Englander.... [The] details of a sketchy portrait are made believable partly because it is presented by the Yankee himself with a number of lapses into homely dialect.2

Americans' perception and literary representation of the details of their life continued into the nineteenth century;
the accretion of these distinguishing, individualizing
details finally resulted in an American humor, a humor
indigenous to America.

When the individual uses common or traditional
materials and does something indubitably his
own with them, we call this genius. When the
achievement is that of a people we are justi-
ﬁed...in using the same word with the implica-
tion of fresh creative energy which it carries.
Whatever the common base, something incontestibly
our own has been expressed in that highly mixed
aggregation which we call American humor. Twists
have been given, strong colors added....

In part, American humor arises from attempts to deﬁne America
and Americans, ﬁrst for the parent countries of Europe and,
later, for Americans themselves. And perhaps regional humor
in the largest sense demands a foreign audience, an audience
which is not familiar with the intricacies of life in the
region. Should this audience be unsympathetic to the region,
the native’s assertion of a perverse pride in the peculiarities
of his region can transform haughty scorn to an embarrassed
incredulity and magnify the importance of the area by asserting
the superiority of its values over those of the would-be critics.
This conﬂict of values is one incongruity at the heart of
American humor. It is manifested in the cases of Americans
in contrast to the British and of Southerners in contrast to
Northerners. And as the Southwestern frontier was itself
comprised of microcosmic societies, often antagonistic to
one another, a similar contrast must have existed on the
frontier itself.
From this isolated and sparsely settled country emerged a group of Southwestern humorists. Among those who have achieved literary significance are Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Johnson Jones Hooper, William Tappan Thompson, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris. To some extent, the growth of Southern humor is revealed in their works. However, chronological arrangement cannot be considered very precise because much of these humorists' material originally derived from the pervasive oral tradition and appeared in newspapers before it was collected. Still, a pattern of growth can be detected. Not without exception, then, this literature through the pre-war decades moves towards greater individuality in character, more precise descriptions, and more and faster action in the stories. An apparent acceptance by later authors of frontier values, such as speed, strength and cunning results in fewer squeamish apologies and tiresome moralizing. That is, where Harris asserts his region's values, Longstreet apologizes for them, but both authors recognize them. Perhaps the most important tendencies of the genre's development are the increasing amount and quality of humorous backwoods figurative speech and more and more emphasis on violence as an integral part of frontier life. The tradition is not devoid of these elements at its inception; rather, the later authors become increasingly confident in the humorous possibilities of these elements. The tradition grows, then, from what might be loosely characterized as an essay tone towards one more highly fictional, more highly anecdotal and oral.
As might be expected, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835), a seminal book in the tradition, reflects a connection between the eighteenth century essay and the humor that was yet to come. Perhaps the most widely reprinted of the episodes in this work is "The Horse Swap," which is notable among his episodes for its lack of polished diction. But at the height of this tale, when the two horse traders discover the faults of the horses they acquired in the trade, Longstreet describes the situation in the abstract rather than in concrete detail. "The prevailing feeling... was that of mirth. The laugh became loud and general at the old man's expense and rustic witticisms were liberally bestowed upon him and his late purchase." This is the prevailing tone of the language in Longstreet's work. His interpretation of frontier language often incorporates the ungrammatical dialect, but lacks the figurative language of the later humorists. The juxtaposition of the literary language and that of the frontier is incongruous, and this incongruity can be used to humorous ends; but Longstreet's predilection to comment on the action of the story is usually a tiresome hindrance to the progress of events. The old man's son tells Blossom, the fleecer, that the horse he now owns is both blind and deaf. The boy continues:

"Yes, dod drot my soul if he eim't! You walk him and see if he eim't. His eyes don't look like it; but he'd jist as leve go agin the house with you...." The laugh was now turned on Blossom, and many rushed to test
the fidelity of the little boy's report. A few experiments established its truth beyond controversy.8

Whether consciously or unconsciously, in "An Interesting Interview," Longstreet does achieve a humorous effect from the incongruity of these two languages. The opening paragraph of a story of two drunken farmers contains his thoughts on drunkenness in such a sober tone that the reader may question Longstreet's intent.

I hope the day is not far distant when drunkenness will be unknown in our highly favored country. The moral world is rising in its strength against the all-destroying vice...9

He proceeds to describe the two farmers:

Tobias was just clearly on the wrong side of the line which divides drunk from sober, but Hardy was "royally corned" (but not falling) ...

This is far more humorous than the use of rustic language above because the tones, the prevailing emotions of the juxtaposed languages, are diametrically opposed, while the little boy's speech is merely ungrammatical and is included more in the spirit of a factual report than that of the best frontier humor, in which frontier speech is exaggerated into a homely sort of poetry. But as an early humorist of the frontier, Longstreet catches as much of the flavor of the expanding west as his style permits. He tells of a violent fight between the "two best men in the county which in the Georgia vocabulary means they could flog any other two men in the county." But at the end of this episode he apologetically
moralizes thus: "Thanks be to the Christian religion, to schools, ...such scenes of barbarism and cruelty...are now of rare occurrence...Wherever they prevail they are a disgrace to that community...."\(^12\)

At his worst as a frontier humorist, Longstreet descends to the depths of eighteenth century moralizing.\(^13\) But at his best, Longstreet is a faithful reporter of the real language of the frontiersman, albeit sometimes a rather squeamish one,\(^14\) and a writer keenly aware of the ironies of comic reversal. His historical value lies in the fact that he was one of the earliest frontier humorists, and his best stories -- admirable for their comedy, if not comprised of the best elements of frontier humor -- are among the best in the genre.

But Joseph Glover Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama*\(^15\) (1854), a much later work, while entertaining as a sketch of the times, contains very little frontier humor. In fact, one critic finds Baldwin's work to be even more that of an essayist than Longstreet in *Georgia Scenes*.\(^16\) Baldwin's humor is often more intellectual and sophisticated than that of his predecessors'. For instance, Baldwin says of Cave Burton's favorite story:

No mortal man had ever heard the end of this story: like Coleridge's soliloquies, it branched out with innumerable suggestions, each in its turn the parent of others, and these again breeding a new spawn, so that the further he travelled the less he went on.\(^17\)
But Baldwin was capable of writing frontier humor, even of the quality that was published in *The Spirit of the Times*. In *Flush Times*, more nearly a chronicle than the other works in the genre, Baldwin occasionally writes of the frontier in a comic mixture of frontier language and plain prose. When he relates the threat of a verbal bully to his lesser rival, Baldwin describes the bully as:

...regretting that he did not have the chance of blowing a hole through his carcass with his 'Derringer!' that 'a bull-bat could fly through without tetching airy wing,' and giving him his solemn word of honor that if he, (Sam) would only fight him, (Jonas), he, (Jonas) wouldn't hit him, (Sam), an inch above his hip bone -- which was certainly encouraging.18

But the prevalent tone in his book is far too intellectual to be classed in any but the broadest definition of frontier humor -- a humor which becomes more pure as it approaches the oral humor of the frontiersman himself. Although the frontiersmen of the South would enjoy the hyperboles, particularly the understatement, he certainly would not consciously toy with figures in this manner:

This distinguished lawyer, unlike the majority of those favored subjects of the biographical muse, whom a patriotic ambition to add to the moral treasures of the country, has prevailed on, over the instincts of a native and professional modesty, to supply subjects for the pens and pencils of their friends, was not quite, either in a literal or metaphorical sense, a self-made man. He had ancestors.19

Much of Baldwin's *Flush Times* falls into the classification of frontier humor, then, only because it is about the frontier, and not because it is the frontier.
And the most pristine frontier humor is the South. That is, the elements of the frontier are ubiquitous within the stories. To compare Longstreet and Baldwin with Johnson Jones Hooper is to find a pattern of development towards a literary realism that tends to fuse the frontiersman and his speech with the things he knows into a humor which he himself would accept. Partially derived from an oral tradition fostered by the men on the frontier, the essence of frontier humor seems to be within the characters’ speech. Three, if not more, developments to be seen in Hooper’s masterpiece, Simon Suggs (1845), apparently conduced to increase the amount of this language. These developments are: Hooper’s intensive treatment of one class, the southern poor white; his invention of a strong central character, Simon Suggs; and the author’s strict adherence to a theme of economic activity, implying, even necessitating the interaction of characters, and this verbally, if not in other ways. Hooper consistently excels Longstreet and Baldwin in comic plot and detailed descriptions of frontier life, or perhaps more accurately, what became the details of the stereotyped frontier life.

Hooper, unlike Longstreet, whose stated desire was to write about “the manners, customs, amusements, wit, dialect, as they appear in all grades of society to an ear and eye witness to them,” sensed that it was the middle group, not the planter or slave, but the poor white which would provide the best material for humor. An oddity in himself, fettered by poverty and freed by his color, this frontiersman became
the staple of successive frontier humorists. Further, Hooper's characters speak more and speak more typically the speech of frontier humor than those of Longstreet or Baldwin. Finally, while those humorists have no strong central character in their episodes, Hooper has a very strong, although not necessarily consistent character, Simon Suggs -- a scoundrel of the first order.

Having cheated his father at cards for a horse and concealing with tobacco the pinch of gun powder he left in his mother's pipe bowl, Simon leaves home to make his way to Atlanta. He lives up to his motto, "It is good to be shifty in a new country," by actually disappearing for twenty years during which time he perfects himself in the art of living "as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others...." Thus, Simon is a mature and experienced scoundrel for most of the book. His talents are chiefly those of preying on those weaknesses of human nature which are heightened by the abnormalities of frontier life, and he would more than likely perish in any other society. That is, Simon's exploits are those of frontier scoundrels. He is "shifty" in both senses of the word. He is a dishonest wanderer, a fortune-seeking picaro, a figure common to much frontier humor.

To find the American picaro we must follow the American pioneer; the frontier is the natural habitat of the adventurer. The qualities fostered by the frontier were the qualities indispensable to the picaro: nomadism, insensibility to danger, shrewdness, nonchalance, gaiety.
While Davy Crockett or Mike Fink might have all of these qualities, Simon most decidedly does not. Rather, his inordinate shrewdness and self-concern leads him to be extremely sensitive to the remotest possibility of danger. His nomadism is therefore not that of the adventurer but that of a man fleeing pursuit. And his gaiety is short-lived and without depth. He is reported to be a reveller, but the reader rarely sees this aspect of him. What Simon's fellows might take for nonchalance is usually the detachment of a man following the machinations of his scheming mind.

As Hooper's characterization of Simon serves to further the development of the humorous frontier picaro in literature, so does his use of language reveal his skillful comic technique. Here, as in other aspects of frontier humor per se, Hooper proves to have far more genius than either Longstreet or Baldwin. Like those humorists, Hooper uses a third person point of view, but he can mix standard English and the frontiersman's language for comic effect. For instance, when he explains Simon's reasoning about financial matters, Hooper says, "As for those branches of the business [of land speculation], he [Simon] regarded them as only fit for purse-proud clod-heads. Any fool, he reasoned, could speculate if he had money." But even more successful as frontier humor (and less frequent) is Simon's own speech. At his best, Hooper's manifest sensitivity to the incongruities of frontier figural language is almost unrivalled by his contemporaries.
For example, calling for people to pray at a camp meeting which he later bilks, Simon says, "Ante up! ...don't back out! Here am I, the wickedest...of sinners...now come in on narry pair and won a pile! ...the bluff game ain't played here! ...Everybody holds four aces, and when you bet you win! Even more characteristic of what becomes the stylized figurative language of the best frontier humor are references to frontier objects and animals. Simon, describing his bravery as he gives his qualifications for leadership of the motley "Tallapoosy Volluntares," uses just such an incongruous but effective simile: "Let who run [away from danger], gentlemen, Simon Suggs will allers be found thar sticking thar, like a tick onder a cow's belly." The incongruity of describing bravery in terms of the stubborn tenacity of a tick provides the humor -- the juxtaposition of heroism and a blood-sucking parasite may, indeed, serve to comment on Simon's character as well.

Further, Hooper, like Longstreet and Baldwin, often juxtaposes Latinate language and frontier terminology for humorous effect. Thus, Hooper writes, "It was...an early hour; in fact -- speaking according to the chronometrical standard in use at Fort Suggs -- not more than 'fust-drink time....' More often, however, Hooper achieves a less masculine, less racy humor by going in the opposite direction, from plain prose to euphemised terms. "The widow Haycock desired...a certain 'plug' of tobacco...to supply her pipe."
But, having gotten this "plug" she returns to Fort Suggs "with the weed of comfort in her hand." As these examples might indicate, Hooper often uses the incongruities of language to effect frontier humor and this more purposefully than Longstreet or Baldwin.

Hooper's repetitious theme of embezzlement enables him to gain concrete and sometimes humorous examples of the poor whites' independence and poverty. The frontiersman's self-reliance (specifically, his code's article which virtually prohibited him from interfering with another man's business) lends credibility to Simon's fraudulent escapades -- escapades which indicate the fast tempo of frontier life. Certainly, the speed with which Simon turns any situation to his advantage and the rapid transference of money in his deals tend to give Hooper's stories the tone of more and faster action that the stories of Longstreet and Baldwin.

In *Simon Suggs*, Hooper, through the creation of his picaresque hero, his regionalism, and his stories of action, combines many elements of the best frontier humor. His work lacks but one element of the best frontier humor -- the frontiersman's narration. Perhaps Hooper intuitively recognizes the real source of the autocthonic American and the most laughable humor in his book, when he laments the inadequacy of his own pen for the task of recording such a memorable event as Simon's military career. Hooper decides that ultimately Simon would be his own best biographer: "Would that,
like Caesar, he [Simon] could write himself! Then, indeed, should Harvard yield him honors, and his country -- justice!

Indeed, the best and most pristine frontier humor is, like the real "orature," told by the frontiersman in his inimitable speech. William Tappan Thompson, in *Major Jones's Courtship* (1843), thus uses the epistolary form. In this form -- popularized by Seba Smith, the Northerner who created Jack Downing in the 1830's -- the central character unwittingly characterizes himself. While Major Jones is a believable character and uses frontier figures as a means of expression, these letters are about the domestic affairs in settled areas and consequently lack the furious action common to the best frontier humor. In fact, Blair finds that "their greatest merit may be...in their limning of Pineville,...[the] depiction of community and domestic existence." Thus, although Jones's letters perhaps describe life in a Southern town more than on the Southern frontier, they may represent the humorists' growing awareness of the comic value of the frontiersman's character and language.

Certainly Thomas Bangs Thorpe, in his "The Big Bear of Arkansas" (1841), focuses on the "Big Bar," a frontiersman of the first order. In the story, a literate and interested narrator reports his experience aboard a Mississippi steamboat. This narration includes a verbatim story told by the "Big Bar" himself. At least as old as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, this narrative device, the mock oral tale (known also
as the framework narrative, story-within-a-story, and the box-like structure), is of immense value to the frontier humorists. Through its use they developed multifarious levels of incongruity, long known to be the *sine qua non* of comedy. But whatever humor arises from these incongruities, the most important value of the mock oral tale in relation to frontier humor is that it provides for an abundant quantity of humorous frontier speech.

In Thorpe's story, the narrator describes the "Big Bar," who walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his feet on the stove, [and proceeded to extol the glories of Arkansas] ... the creation state,...a state where the *sile* runs down to the centre of the *arth*...It's a state without fault, it is. [And one passenger's retort] "Excepting mosquitoes," predicates the "Big Bar's" rambling comments on Arkansas mosquitoes. Thus, the raconteur figure, the "Big Bar," continues to relate short anecdotes about his home state. The culminating yarn is about a mysterious, giant bear who, after successfully eluding the "Big Bar" and his dogs for three years, submits to his end by walking into the "Big Bar's" fields the day before the "Big Bar" had vowed to hunt him. With the "Big Bar's" reverent opinion (that this particular bear "was an unhuntable bar, and died when his time come," ) ringing in their ears, the whole group is depicted by the original narrator. They sit, silently contemplating the mysteries of the story for a few moments before the "Big Bar" asked all
present to 'liquor,' [and] long before day, I [the original narrator] was put ashore and...can only follow...in imagination our Arkansas friend...."³⁷

Indeed, the "Big Bar" is a memorable character. His language, his manner, the attention of his auditors, and his mysterious story reflect this boisterous, fun-loving, superstitious braggart's character. Thorpe also sketches a scene indigenous to the American frontier -- a cabin full of men who proudly distort in their own language the merits of life in their regions. Thorpe portrays both character and scene through the framework narrative. But "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is Thorpe at his best. In fact, Blair says, "Unfortunately the tale is not typical of him. More often, he wrote passably good but essentially dull essays about various aspects of the frontier...."³⁸

George Washington Harris, however, uses the box-like structure consistently; and this was at least a partial reason for his success. "He learned to employ the best method for telling a story..., making the most of the framework technique for setting forth a mock oral tale."³⁹ In the "Preface" to Sut Lovingood, the typical format of the best tales in the book is established:

'You must have a preface, Sut; your book will then be ready. What shall I write:'
'Well, if I must, I must... Sometimes, George I wished I could read and write just a little... If I could write myself, it would then really been my book.'⁴⁰
Thus, George, the writer, will record Sut's tales as he tells them. Through the use of this device, Harris consistently bridges the gap between the printed page and the illiterate, hell-raising backwoodsman.

Sut Lovingood differs from the other figures examined in this chapter. His love of sheer deviltry and his very human foibles separate him from Simon Suggs and the "Big Bar." Sut's youth and illiteracy separate him from Major Jones; and no character in Longstreet's or Baldwin's works approaches the stature of Harris's raconteur. Sut's down-to-earth practicality is pervasive; and the subjects of his thoughts range extensively -- from sex (a topic almost foreign to the other humorists) to writing a preface to a book. Sut finds the latter to be:

...a little like cuttin of the Ten Commandments into the rind of a watermelon: it's just slashed open and the inside et outen it, the rind and the Commandments broke all to pieces and flung to the hogs and never thought of once't -- them nor the tarnal fool what cut 'em there. (SL xxxi)

His human spitefulness and frontier prejudices are revealed in one critic's long list of Sut's antipathies. These are: "Yankee peddlars, Yankee lawyers, Yankee scissor-grinders, any kind of Yankee, sheriffs, most preachers, learned men who use big words, tavern keepers who serve bad food and reformers." Himself a reformer, Sut is also a hick philosopher and an ardent Southerner. Through his independence, he becomes perhaps the epitome of Jacksonian democracy; and through his insights, a vehicle for his creator's ideas. As a prankster,
Sut is often the catalyst that starts the riotous confusion of his stories; and beyond whatever appeal his actions may give him, Sut's language makes him more lively, more humanly masculine, and more humorous than any other character in the genre.

The staple of humorous frontier language is the incongruity of hyperbolic figures; and generally, the humor of these distortions is proportionate to the contrast between the object and the image. Harris's mastery of these incongruities in this speech is perhaps the best in the genre. Indeed, one critic finds, "If his [Harris's] writings were better than the rest [of the frontier humorists'], they were better because he had more sense of incongruities, more exuberance, more imagination...." In terms of incongruity per se and the large number of frontier figures in his speech, Sut Lovingood is unrivaled. His description of Sicily Burns's bosom substantiates Harris's "sense of incongruities." Sut says, "Such a bosom! Just think of two snow balls with a strawberry stuck butt-ended into both on 'em." (SL 35) And in describing Bake Boyd's suggestion that the Yankee razor-grinder give public lectures, Sut uses an unusually large number of frontier figures -- more than one is likely to find in a whole story by Baldwin or Longstreet.

Bake dwelt long onto the crop of dimes to be gathered from the field [lecturing]; that he'd [the razor-grinder] make more than there were spots onto forty fawns in July, not to speak of the big gobs of
reputation he'd tote away — a-shinin all over his clothes like lightnin bugs onto a dog fennel top. (SL 28)

In this story, as in almost all of his stories, Sut plays a prank on a deserving person. Here, Sut and Blake arrange the lecture for the avaricious Yankee razor-grinder, clownishly prompt him too quietly and then too loudly (in a language that sounds like Cherokee), and, at the height of the lecturer's embarrassed confusion, they shoot a cannon and douse him with a "half barrelful of water outen a puddle where a misfortunate dead sow had been floatin for ten days." (SL 29) The movie-house cartoon is made of just such stuff. What is humorous is the utter chaos, the confusion of things, and the pain of the villain who is never permanently disabled. Sut's pranks involve all of these elements; and the frontier dialect in which they are told might be seen as a parallel to the strange scene created by the animator's pen, for both help to remove the action from reality. Yet Sut's own realistic thoughts and emotions render his stories something more than simple parables. Frontier humor is at its most humorous when speedy action is being related by a capable and witty raconteur. Detailed and figurative descriptions of confusion, breakage, and humorously painful and dangerous circumstances are the raconteur's stock-in-trade. His incongruous language heightens the incongruous chaos into the unreal but altogether justified logic of comedy in the world of fantasy.

In Sut Lovingood, Harris combines the best elements of frontier humor to produce a wealth of anecdotal farce. He
draws his characters quickly and makes essentially trite themes and dull plots interesting. To a large extent Harris's unquestionable superiority derives from his consistent use of the framework narrative. Through it, Sut speaks, and through Harris's vivid imagination, Sut becomes far more than an untutored bumpkin. In fact, Sut's diverse and innumerable bucolic figures make him the best story-teller of a book-length work and his quick and retributive mind make him the strongest character in the works examined in this chapter. At once he is precise and poetic; simultaneously, he is insightful and active. In him the growth from genus American to an individual, a Southern, devil-may-care mountaineer of immense proportions, culminates. His values are those of the frontier and in his presentation, the reader accepts them. As a first-rate raconteur, Sut has at least one quality of the Southern orator -- "What orator," said a Kentuckian, "can deign to restrain his imagination within a vulgar and sterile state of facts?"45

The growth from an essay to an oral humor culminates in *Sut Lovingood*. Indeed, Walter Blair finds that "in *Sut Lovingood* the antebellum humor of the South reaches its highest level of achievement before Mark Twain."46

And Faulkner is, I think, the best frontier humorist since Mark Twain.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II.

1 F. O. Matthiessen finds that "frozen-faced exaggeration had been a part of our tradition at least as far back as Franklin. When confronted in London (1765) with a mass of misinformation and falsehood about America, instead of denying them he ironically vouched for their truth by capping them with others of his own invention. In a letter to a newspaper he spoke of the cod and whale fishing in the upper Lakes, and added: 'Ignorant people may object that the upper Lakes are fresh, and that Cod and Whale are Salt Water Fish: but let them know, Sir, that Cod, like other Fish when attack'd by their Enemies, fly into any Water where they can be safest; that Whales, when they have a mind to eat Cod, pursue them wherever they fly; and that the grand Leap of the Whale in the Chase up the Fall of Niagara is esteemed, by all who have seen it, as one of the finest Spectacles in Nature.' (F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York, 1941), p. 639.


4 Eby comments: "in the Southwest a man from the next county was a stranger, one from the next state a foreigner, and one from north of the Ohio was an inhabitant of a different celestial world." (Eby, p. 14.)

5 Others who are significant figures in this genre are: Madison Tensas, M.D. (pseudonym), Sol Smith, Joseph M. Field, and John S. Robb. The quantity and popularity of their material warranted the publication of collections of their work. There is an immense number of men within the peripheries of this field, through their contributions of single letters or stories to the backwoods newspapers and The Spirit of the Times, the most widely read and largest single source for regional humor. In this chapter I present a simplified history of the genre's growth; my major conclusions, however, are substantiated by such eminent critics in this field as Walter Blair, Franklin J. Meine, and Bernard De Voto.

6 John J. Heflin says, "A rather vast oral literature, an 'orature,' must be recognized as having existed on the frontier. ...Yarn spinning and the relation of anecdotes found their way into preaching; the ability to tell a good story was a prime requisite in ecclesiastical promotion. Political orators delighted in letting their imaginations soar, pouring forth thundering metaphors in highly inflected
language. Corollary oral arts which must be mentioned are
the ballad and song in which the frontier folk literature
abounded. (John J. Heflin, Jr., George Washington Harris
("Sut Lovingood"): A Biographical and Critical Study,
56. Franklin J. Meine finds that the growth of American
humor, particularly in the Southwest, parallels the growth
of the newspaper. "American humor has always been a spon­
taneous part of everyday American life; and so the newspaper,
chronicler of daily doings and local life, has offered a
quick and easy vehicle for all manner of humorous anecdotes,
stories and tall tales. The American newspaper as we know
it today -- the 'penny press' -- began gathering momentum
shortly after 1830; and during the period 1830-60, especially
in the South and Southwest, its growth was notably rapid." (Franklin J. Meine, ed., Tall Tales of the Southwest (New
York, 1930), xxvii.)

7[Augustus Baldwin Longstreet], Georgia Scenes (New
York, 1897), p. 32.

8Ibid., p. 33. Many of the frontier humorists use
italics, misspellings and emphatic punctuation to represent
the oral humor of untutored frontiersmen.

9Ibid., p. 220.

10Ibid., p. 221.

11Ibid., p. 65.

12Ibid., p. 81.

13In "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife," a young Georgian
lawyer receives a letter from his industrious mother in the
country, not unlike those Richardson's Pamela received from
her parents at Squire B...'s. The opening lines of this letter
will give clear indication of Longstreet's capabilities in
this vein. "We all admit...the value of industry, economy --
in short, of all the domestic and social virtues; but how
small the number who practice them! Golden sentiments are
to be picked up anywhere." (Ibid., p. 121.)

14He footnotes Ned Brace's expletive, "d--n the man,"
with this apology: "I should certainly omit such expressions
as this, could I so do with historic fidelity; but the
peculiarities of the times of which I am writing cannot be
faithfully represented without them. In recording things as
they are, truth requires me sometimes to put profane language
into the mouths of my characters." (Ibid., p. 51.)


17 Baldwin, p. 161.


22 *Ibid*.


24 Simon's emotional responses are often mechanical. In one episode, Simon's "tears rolled down his face, as naturally as if they had been called forth by real emotion, instead of being pumped up mechanically to give effect to the scene." (Hooper, p. 62.)


28 This similarity may result from the fact that Longstreet, Baldwin and Hooper were lawyers.

29 Hooper, p. 97.


31 Perhaps somewhat grim by modern standards, but undoubtedly humorous to the frontiersmen of Hooper's time is a woman who is "accounted wealthy in consideration of the fact that she
had a hundred dollars in money, and was the undisputed owner of one entire negro." (Ibid., pp. 85-86.)

32 Ibid., p. 82.

33 Blair, Native American Humor, p. 89.

34 Ibid., p. 92. Blair finds "the method was particularly rich in its underlining of three types of incongruities." These are quoted in Chapter III, pp. 41-43 of this thesis.

35 Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "Big Bear of Arkansas," in Franklin J. Meine, Tall Tales of the Southwest (New York, 1930), pp. 9, 11-12.

36 Ibid., p. [21].

37 Ibid.

38 Blair, p. 95.


40 George Washington Harris, "Preface", Sut Lovingood, ed. Brom Weber (New York, 1954), xxxi. Hereafter referred to as SL with page references in parentheses. In the "Preface" Sut reverses the mock epic sentiments of Longstreet's lament: "Most book weavers seem to be scary folks, for generally they comes up to the slaughter pen shinin and waggin their tails, a-saying they 'knows they is imperfect,' that 'you'd scarce expect one of my fit,' and so forth, so on, so along. Now, if I is a-rowin in that boat I ain't aware of it, I ain't; for I knows the tremendous gift I has for breedin scares among durned fools...." (SL xxxiii)

41 "But then, George, gals and ole maids ain't the things to fool time away on. It's widders, by golly, what am the real sensible, steady-goin, never-scarin, never-kickin, willin, spirited, smooth pacers. They come close't up to the hoss-block, standin still with their purty, silky ears playing and the neck-veins a-throbbin, and waits for the word.... Give me a willin widder the earth over: what they don't know ain't worth learnin. They has all benn to Jamaica and learnt how sugar's made, and knows how to sweeten with it.... Widders am a special means, George, for ripenin green men, killin off weak ones, and makin 'ternally happy the sound ones." (SL 178-179)

42 Blair, Native American Humor, p. 97.
Brom Weber finds that, in part "Sut obviously functions as a device to carry forward a satirical discussion of political and economic affairs, as well as Harris's thought about such matters as religion, temperance, women, and sentimentality. These wide-ranging intentions of Harris's overlapped, inevitably so because he was unable to devote himself exclusively to either fiction or journalism." (SL xxiii) Heflin explains, "A man of ambition in the Tennessee of that day was very likely to find himself busily engaged in politics. The South's best minds were notoriously turned in that direction." (Heflin, p. 22.)


Blair, *Native American Humor*, p. 101. Meine implicitly substantiates this: "For vivid imagination, comic plot, Rabelaisian touch, and sheer fun, the Sut Lovingood Yarns surpass anything else in American humor." (Meine, p. xxiv) And Twain himself attested Harris's genius in a review of *Sut Lovingood* (1867): "It contains all of his early sketches, that used to be so popular in the West, such as his story of his father 'actin' hoss,' the lizards in the camp-meeting, etc., together with many new ones. The book abounds in humor ... It will sell well in the West, but the Eastern people will call it coarse and possibly taboo it." (Mark Twain, "Letter from 'Mark Twain'," No. 21. Quoted in Hennig Cohen, "Mark Twain's Sut Lovingood," *The Lovingood Papers* (1962), p. [19].) The relationship of Mark Twain to Southwestern humor is clear. Blair says, "But most important of all [other influences, such as Down East humor] was the influence in Mark's writing of the humor of the old Southwest. He grew up with that humor. It adorned the newspaper and periodical exchanges which came to his brother's newspaper, for which he set type. He heard oral versions of it in Hannibal where he lived as a boy and on the river steamboats where he worked as a young man. It followed him to the Pacific Coast, where it was published, sometimes in its old forms, sometimes in newly adapted forms, in the newspapers. To it, he was greatly indebted." (Blair, *Native American Humor*, p. 153). Furthermore, Twain did influence Faulkner, which suggests the possibility that Southwestern humor influenced Faulkner through Twain, rather than *directly*. In my discussion of Faulkner's relation to Southwestern humor I concentrate on Harris because Faulkner has expressed admiration for him, because Twain's influence on Faulkner is itself worthy of a study larger than this thesis, and because while Harris's *Sut Lovingood* is pure frontier humor, Twain is, like Faulkner, much more than a frontier humorist.
III. Structure and Technique

Although a writer whose sensibility encompasses extremes in both tragedy and comedy and whose predilection for incongruity \textit{per se} leads him to be especially effective in such anomalies as tragi-comedy and the grotesque, Faulkner often parallels the structures and techniques of the Southwestern humorists in general, and Harris in particular. Typically, the work of these regional humorists was first published in newspapers and collected at a later date. Between newspaper publication and their appearance in book form, these essays and "yarns" might be widely reprinted or revised. As a consequence, their books are characteristically episodic and sometimes inconsistent. The ostensible relationship between the structure of these collections of yarns and essays and the structure (in the largest sense) of Faulkner's trilogy is indeed slight.

Faulkner himself claimed that he conceived the whole trilogy at one moment in the 'twenties.' Asked in 1957 whether he had \textit{The Town} (at that time unpublished) "in mind for a long time," Faulkner answered:

\begin{quote}
Yes, I thought of the whole story at once like a bolt of lightning lights up a landscape and you see everything but it takes time to write it, and this story I had in my mind for about thirty years, and the one which I will do next -- it happened at that same moment, thirty years ago when I thought of it, of getting at it.\cite{f}
\end{quote}

And in a later interview (after the publication of \textit{The}
Town) Faulkner speaks even more directly about conceiving the trilogy as a trilogy:

I discovered then that to tell the story [of the Snopeses] properly would be too many words to compress into one volume. It had to be two or three. ... I would have to keep on writing about these people until I got it all told, and I assume that one more book will do it, although I don't have any great hopes that it will.²

But, as his ambivalent expectations of telling the whole story might indicate, the trilogy was indubitably expanding in its implications at this time; and while Faulkner may have seen the "entire landscape" thirty years before, his execution of the trilogy as a trilogy was anything but orderly. In fact, his first expressions of that vision are in the short story genre, and each novel of the trilogy does include revised versions of these short stories.³ However, Faulkner executed many of his novels in a similar fashion and speaks about The Hamlet as if transgressing genre distinctions was a matter of little importance to him. "I wrote it in the late twenties. ... It was mostly short stories. In 1940 I got it pulled together."⁴ In his foreword to The Mansion, Faulkner indicates what enables him to speak of the various forms -- short story, novel, and trilogy -- as if they were all part of the same work of art:

...the author has already found more discrepancies and contradictions than he hopes the reader will -- contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author
has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then.

Indeed, Faulkner's predilection to view his work in terms of character rather than form (he says of *The Sound and the Fury*: "I was just trying to tell a story of Caddy, the little girl who muddied her drawers...") indicates that his earlier vision of the trilogy was more than likely one of character rather than of structure. Thus, the process from which the structure of the Snopes trilogy evolves is parallel to the process of evolution of collected editions of the frontier humorists.

While Harris's and Faulkner's works have a similar structural genesis (written first as short stories, and later collected into larger works), *Sut Lovingood* purports to be no more than a collection of tales, whereas the trilogy is an organic work of art. Thus, their works of frontier humor are similarly episodic. But Faulkner, an unquestionably superior literary artist, excels his predecessor in the subtle intricacies of relating the episodes to the large super-structure of the whole trilogy, to the structure of the novels, and to other episodes in the individual novels and the trilogy. Harris relates episode to episode by simple verbal references; in his trilogy, Faulkner makes an artistic use of what has been called the "episodic looseness" of such a work as *The Hamlet*. From Ab's horse
trade to Linda's purchase of the new car, Faulkner encourages
the reader to seek parallels in incidents. The free associa-
tion of just such episodes throughout the trilogy can be
ironic and humorous. Moreover, a sort of literary realism
may evolve from this free association. Indeed, Olga Vickery
finds that "this simple device of repetition with variation..." becomes in Faulkner's hands an astonishingly effective means
for suggesting the quiddity of experience as well as the con-
tinuity of certain traditions in the midst of change.²⁸ Thus,
the number of parallels and the irony and humor and realism
in these comparable incidents in the trilogy are indications
of one way in which Faulkner's genius for structural orchestra-
tion surpasses Harris's.

Faulkner's individual novels are structurally more com-
plex than any of the frontier humorists' works partly because
of his tendency to experiment, especially with the intricacies
of different points of view, and partly because his novels
have large casts of characters. His shifting of points of
view is in part responsible for the varying amounts of frontier
humor in the three novels as well as their success as novels.
For instance, his emphasis on such serious characters, whether
quixotically philosophic (as Gavin Stevens in The Town) or
bitter (as Mink Snopes in The Mansion), tends to limit his
frontier humor as the themes and milieus of these later books
limit its appropriateness. The Town is structurally the
weakest of the three novels. Miss Galbraith finds that "the
major weakness of the novel lies in the lack of integration of structure and symbolic pattern. ...This is partly due to the narrative method of *The Town*. Faulkner's limited point of view in the novel leads him to make his characters comment directly on parallel incidents, a somewhat less commendable artistic device (and one used by the Southwestern humorists) than that of *The Hamlet*, where, left to make his own estimate, the reader is overwhelmed by the parallels and multifarious interrelationships and variations of similar incidents. Each of the three novels contains interesting relationships of sub-plot to plot as well as sub-plot to sub-plot; and *The Hamlet* is far superior to the other novels in the trilogy in its artistic rendition of these relationships. In all matters of structure, Faulkner is more an artist than his predecessor.

The greatest similarity of structure between Faulkner and Harris lies in their parallel use of the box-like structure for humorous purposes. Faulkner does not limit his use of this device to humorous ends alone. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, by no means a comic novel, he adroitly transcends the barriers of time and place by using this structure. However, it is not unlikely that his earliest use of this device was for humorous purposes, for some of the comic short stories (such as "Spotted Horses") which are incorporated into the Snopes trilogy were written before 1931, when the publication of his 'pot-boiler,' *Sanctuary*, increased the demand for his work. But whatever the purposes of his earliest use of this structural
device, Faulkner's use of the framework narrative in the
trilogy is remarkably similar to Harris's use of it in Sut
Lovingood. And, as in his other structural accomplishments,
Faulkner's use of this device is more artistic, more complex,
and in the creation of a realistic literature, more effective
than Harris's nineteenth century use.

In Sut Lovingood, Sut tells all the tales; but in
Faulkner's trilogy, many characters participate as raconteurs
of major or minor importance. And each novel has a different
basic point of view. That of The Hamlet is omniscient, al­
though characters often tell stories. In The Town there are
three people, Ratliff, Gavin, and Charles Mallison, telling
the stories. These characters incorporate parts of what the
other two say and relate other characters' versions of the
events. The point of view in The Mansion shifts from the
omniscient and Montgomery Ward Snopes's points of view in
"Mink" to Ratliff's, Gavin's and Charles Mallison's in
"Linda" and back to the omniscient in "Flem." This omniscient
point of view also enables Faulkner to make characters tell
a story. The principle frontier raconteur is, of course,
Ratliff; but the action passage in "Centaur in Brass" in
The Town is told by Charles Mallison (though he, like
Sterne's Tristram Shandy, is yet to be born when the incident
takes place), who reports what his cousin, Gowan Stevens,
heard about it from the boiler watchman, Mr. Harker. The
structural complexities of the trilogy, then, derive from
both the different basic points of view in the separate novels
and from the fact that some stories from The Hamlet are retold in The Town and stories from both of these are retold in The Mansion, from a point of view perhaps different from those of earlier versions.

Faulkner's use of the box-like structure shows the same three types of incongruity Blair finds in the frontier humorists' use of it. The incongruity between the situation at the time the yarn was told and the situation in the yarn itself is used often by Faulkner in the trilogy. Certainly, Ratliff's vision of Flem haggling about his soul with the Devil in The Hamlet and Charles's account of what Ratliff tells Gavin about Tug Nightingales's battle with Skeets in The Mansion offer superb examples of the comic necessity of detachment that Faulkner derives, like Harris, through this incongruity. Faulkner's most complex use of the device for the sake of detachment is in The Town. In this novel Faulkner's use of the structure and the incongruity between the action and telling of the episodes conduces to both bourgeois humor and frontier humor. Charles's account of Eck Snopes's death in the explosion of the oil tank is heightened by a kind of grim humor when he uses Mr. Nunnery's words and suddenly gives comic relief from an essentially tragic event, the untimely death of the only "good", mature Snopes. Thus, the pain and tragedy of the situation is somewhat mitigated:
...she said she was still running when the explosion (she said she never heard it, she never heard anything, or she would have stopped) knocked her down and the air all around her whizzing with pieces of the tank like a swarm of bumble bees. (T, 109)

This episode, which occurred when Charles was four so that he himself (not Charles via Gowan) can tell it, is told in the past tense until Charles, as raconteur, chooses to make the action immediate and close. By moving through various characters' versions, Faulkner renders variations of perspective and detachment and, hence, of incongruity in the episodes.

Indeed, the action of *The Town* makes this incongruity especially important in that novel. For *The Town* lacks the exuberance of language and numerous colorful incidents of *The Hamlet* and the intensity of Mink's character in *The Mansion*. While *The Town* is surely inferior to the other two novels in many respects, perhaps its lack of action is more true to the real tone of life in the South than the literary realism Faulkner achieves in the rest of the trilogy. And it is in this novel that Faulkner emphasizes incongruity not only between event and raconteur, but also between raconteur and raconteur.

To a great extent, then, Faulkner emphasizes the telling of the tale and not the tale itself in *The Town*. For instance, Charles Mallison's description of Gavin's tendency to see things differently than others would see them is in itself humorous and is a key to the bourgeois humor in the novel. Emphasizing the importance of narrator to event, Charles says:
...until now he sounded a good deal like I sounded sometimes. But Gavin stood...[with] the eyes and the face that you never did quite know what they were going to say next except that when you heard it you realized it was only a little cranksided that nobody else would have said it quite that way. (T 182)

Thus, the incongruity, more evident in the varied points of view, deriving more from point of view per se than from language, and more useful in detaching the reader from the events of a small bourgeois town and focusing his attention on the relation of teller to tale and teller to teller, is particularly important for Faulkner's humor in *The Town*. In his emphasis on the tale-teller relationship, Faulkner uses the same incongruity of the framework narrative that merely provides detachment from the event in Southwestern humor. But Faulkner also uses this incongruity for another sort of detachment -- one which allows him to treat the more mundane aspects of his region and more bourgeois Jeffersonians in a realistic if not uproariously humorous way. By deviating from Harris's emphasis on the tale to his own emphasis on the teller-tale incongruity, as well as through other deviations from Southwestern humor, Faulkner gains range of expression without sacrificing any of the necessities for the more riotous frontier humor.

The other two incongruities Blair finds in the box-like structure are incongruities of language:

Incongruity between the grammatical, highly rhetorical language of the framework on the
one hand and, on the other, the ungrammatical racy dialect of the narrator.

...Incongruity between realism -- discoverable in the framework wherein the scene and the narrator are realistically portrayed, and fantasy, which enters into the enclosed narrative because the narrator selects details and uses figures of speech, epithets, and verbs which give grotesque coloring. 15

Both Harris and Faulkner make use of these language incongruities in their works.

In such a novel as *The Hamlet*, their language similarities are manifestly evident. Faulkner's principle raconteur, V. K. Ratliff, is as well acquainted with the technique of frontier language as Sut Lovingood. And in the reworked version of "Fool About a Horse," the story of Ab Snopes's horse trade with Pat Stamper, Ratliff's knowledge of frontier hyperbole and figure predicates much of the humor. For instance his ungrammatical diction and homely similes occur in his description of Ab and his first horse leaving Frenchman's Bend.

[The horse was]...kind of half walking and half riding on the double tree and Ab's face looking worrieder and worrieder every time it failed to lift its feet high enough to step, when all of a sudden that horse popped into a sweat. It flung its head up like it had been touched with a hot poker and stepped up into the collar, touching the collar for the first time since the mule had taken the weight of it when Ab shaken out the whip in the lot, and so we come down the hill...with that horse[']s...eyes rolling white as darning eggs and its mane and tail swirling like a grass fire. (H 34)

After he trades Pat Stamper for the two mules and proceeds to Jefferson, Ab finds his new team outside Cain's hardware
store. Ratliff's narration offers a good example of the comic hyperbole possible through the use of frontier figures:

"They [the mules] were laying down...with their heads snubbed up together and pointing straight up and their tongues hanging out and their eyes popping and their necks stretched about four foot and their legs doubled back under them like shot rabbits." (H 40) Thus, Ratliff proves to be as capable of detailed description as Sut Lovingood; and they have a common interest in the incongruity between subject and image. In fact, Sut uses very nearly the same image when he brags about his new horse to the men in front of Pat Nash's grocery.

"You never seed a real hoss till I rid up. You'se p'rips stole or owned shod rabbits, or sheep with borrowed saddles on...." (SL 4) Ratliff often achieves a comic effect by describing one kind of frontier animal by comparing it to another. Perhaps even more humorous than the mules that looked like "shot rabbits" is Ab's new horse which was, Ratliff says, "...hog fat,...not like a horse is fat but like a hog: fat right up to its ears and looking tight as a drum." (H 41)

Sut and Ratliff also use frontier figures to describe people and their personalities. Sut says: "Bake Boyd... were nigh onto as clever a fellow as ever were borned. There were durn little weavil in his wheat, mighty small chance of water in his whiskey...." (SL 27) Ab's predicament, that of having fields to plow and no team to do it with,
would only be solved, Ratliff tells his listeners, if Ab “walked up to Old Man Anse’s and borrowed a span of mules which would be just like going up to a rattlesnake and borrowing a rattle.” (H 45) Sut and Ratliff can give their own or other characters’ moods through a well-chosen frontier figure. Sut’s exaggerated praise for Sicily Burns reflects the exuberance of his puppy love for her. When George mentions that she is a handsome girl, Sut explodes:

‘Handsome!’ That—there word don’t cover the case. It sounds sorta like callin good whiskey ‘strong water’ when you are ten mile from a still-house, it’s a-rainin, and your flask only half-full. She shows among women like a sunflower among dog fennel, or a hollyhock in a patch of smart-weed. (SL 35)

Ratliff’s and Ab’s dejection after the horse trade is expressed in Ratliff’s description of Ab’s empty lot. “It had never been a big lot and it would look kind of crowded even with just one horse in it. But now it looked like all Texas.” (H 47) But while Sut rarely changes moods — he is always exuberant — Ratliff increases the feeling of dejection he and Ab share when Mrs. Snopes trades the cow for the separator. Accordingly, Ratliff says, “It [the lot] looked like it would have held all Texas and Kansas too.” (H 48)

In another major episode told by, or rather thought by, Ratliff in The Hamlet, he embellishes the fantasy of the backwoods poetry by creating a setting of fantasy when he envisions Flem in Hell. Ratliff’s imagined biographical sketch of the present “Prince” includes perhaps the best
fanciful details in Faulkner's Southwestern humor, if not in the genre. Ratliff, like Faulkner, thinks in terms of family and upbringing. Thus, the "Prince" has one of his early tutors, perhaps in about the same capacity as old family servants in other Faulkner novels, as an advisor. The devil and his advisor argue violently about the relative merits of the current "Prince" and his father. Ratliff then imagines the "Prince's" momentary sentimentalism thus:

But he [the Prince] remembered them old days when the old fellow was smiling fond and proud on his crude youthful inventions with BB size lava and brimstone and such, and bragging to the old Prince at night about how the boy done that day, about what he invented to do...that even the grown folks hadn't thought of yet.

(H 152-153)

In addition to this extremely fanciful vision, the incongruity of Ratliff's countrified narration and the backwoods diction of Flem, as well as of the devil in Hell, combine to create one of the most risible of episodes in Faulkner's canon.

Faulkner's use of the framework narrative in "Fool About a Horse" and a device very close to it in the Flem-Devil passage is similar to Harris's use of the structure in that both authors have a parallel, if not the same appreciation of the possible incongruities between realism and fantasy. Both raconteurs do tell stories of fantasy, but Ratliff also participates in the action of a complex novel.

Ratliff, as a character, discusses local events with such men as Bookwright and Will Varner. These chats also provide much frontier humor, but it is a humor akin to wit. Further,
almost all of the male characters at least can understand and many of them do speak in this language with varying degrees of comic success. The reason that Ratliff seems to be responsible for this language is that he is apparently the reader's source of information, for again and again in *The Hamlet* Faulkner returns to Ratliff, who speaks in this countrified language. Almost all the events in the novel are either part of Ratliff's experience, or other characters tell him about them, at which times he often analyzes the significance of these events.

The language techniques of frontier humor are used, then, by Faulkner in the speech of many characters. While the incongruity of this figurative speech is generally humorous, the frontiersman can be witty. Indeed, Ratliff's purposefully vague and non-committal figurative answer to Jody Varner's question about the Snopes's barn burning habits is a splendid example.

"I dont know as I would go on record as saying he set ere a one of them afire. I would put it that they both taken fire while he was more or less associated with them. You might say that fire seems to follow him around, like dogs follow some folks." (H 13)

This contains both the intellectual distinctions (which usually center on the precise meanings of words) common to wit and a superb example of frontier understatement. Other examples of frontier speech are even attributed to anonymous characters. One such is a listener to Ratliff's tale of the Snopes-Stamper episode. Before Ratliff has started telling
the story, the listener asks incredulously, "You mean he [Ab] locked horns with Pat Stamper and even had the bridle left to take home?" (H 30) This particular comment is ostensibly Faulkner's reason for giving a short sketch of this horse trader and his Negro hostler-artist, who became a legend within their own life-time. The culminating remark in a comic discussion two anonymous frontiersmen have at the auction sums up Flem's secretive nature: "Flem Snopes don't even tell himself what he is up to. Not if he was laying in with himself in an empty house in the dark of the moon." (H 284) In addition to anonymous comments, Bookwright's steadfast reduction of all things to his own earthy point of view is often effective in setting the tone of the frontier or poor-white life in The Hamlet. For instance, when Tull orders steak at Ratliff's restaurant, Bookwright orders thus: "I won't. ...I been watching the dripping sterns of steaks for two days now." (H 69) But the use of the frontier language is not limited to humorous purposes in The Hamlet, and Bookwright again provides a good example of a more serious use. When Ratliff is finally exasperated about the Snopes family and says that he will do no more to help the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend or his larger cause -- rightness and freedom -- Bookwright answers him, "Hook your drag up, it aint nothing but a hill." (H 326)

These examples by no means exhaust the profusion of frontier figurative language in the speech of the characters
(other than the raconteur, Ratliff) in The Hamlet. Rather, these are merely representative instances of characters relating their thoughts to the life at hand. This phenomenon of backwoods language pervades The Hamlet, in which (to judge from the language) characters continually search for humorous figures of speech.

The characters, then, either through the framework narrative or when merely speaking to each other, offer good examples of frontier language. Ratliff, as both raconteur and ubiquitous character, seems to be the source of much of this language, as indeed he is. But the casual reader of The Hamlet probably would be amazed to learn that the Snopes-Stamper episode and the Flem-Devil passage are the only major episodes of The Hamlet which are actually narrated by Ratliff. For we look to him for the rational man's opinion about the events of the novel and connect most of the frontier language with his character. But in The Hamlet, Faulkner often deviates from the strict box-like structure of the Southwestern humorists and uses an omniscient point of view, by which he gains freedom and range of expression. Further, Faulkner's desire to make Ratliff the primary protagonist against Flem Snopes again limits Ratliff from actually telling many of the tales. The "Spotted Horses" passage is a case in point. Ratliff (Suratt) does tell the earlier short story version but Faulkner's love for the incongruities posed by the juxtaposition of numerous languages could not be yoked to such a limited point of view in The Hamlet version.
The "Spotted Horses" passage is more than a good example of Faulkner's genius for frontier humor for there is an immense range of language in this episode -- from Mrs. Littlejohn's profanity to the highly romantic description of the pear tree. Malcolm Cowley says:

The version of "Spotted Horses" used in The Hamlet ...is nearly three times as long as the magazine version printed ten years earlier in Scribner's, as well as being nearly three times as good. I don't think it would be too much to call it the funniest American story since Mark Twain.16

Cowley's enthusiasm is entirely justified, both in terms of the language and the action in the episode.

The Hamlet itself has a wide and effective range of language, but in the "Spotted Horses" section, this range is integrated brilliantly in a short piece; and the incongruities of the various language styles are an indication of Faulkner's genius for the incongruity of language. We have seen that Harris and his contemporaries reacted with varying success against the Latinate language of the eighteenth century. Fred Lewis Pattee characterizes the later, post-bellum spirit of frontier humor thus:

Everywhere there was a swing toward the wild and unconventional, even toward the coarse and repulsive. The effeminacy of early Tennysonianism, the cloying sweetness of the mid-centural annual, Keatsism, Hyperionism...had culminated in reaction. There was a craving for the acrid tang of uncultivated things in borderlands and fields unsown.17

One of Faulkner's major achievements in language technique is, I think, his successful integration of the two figurative
languages, a feat that could not have been realized through the strict use of the box-like structure. Faulkner incorporates both romantic description and realism to suit his purposes and to satisfy his love of incongruity per se in the following:

The pear tree across the road opposite was now in full and frosty bloom, the twigs and branches springing not outward from the limbs but standing motionless and perpendicular above the horizontal boughs like the separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman sleeping upon the uttermost floor of the windless and tideless sea.\(^{18}\)

"Anse McCallum brought two of them horses back from Texas once," one of the men on the steps said. (H 281)

This and similar non-realistic images give the episode a fantasy-like super-reality. In relation to the humor of the story, these passages have at least two purposes: they stop and pace the motion and violence of the humorous passages, and they present a further incongruity, that of the still night and the utter confusion of the men chasing the horses.

Variously using the poetic languages of romantic poets and frontier humorists, Faulkner himself uses the figurative language of the frontier in this episode. He describes the horses, momentarily motionless, as being,

...larger than rabbits and gaudy as parrots.... Calico-coated, small-bodied, with delicate legs and pink faces in which their mismatched eyes rolled wild and subdued, they huddled, gaudy motionless and alert, wild as deer, deadly as rattlesnakes, quiet as doves. (H 275)

The contrast of the image and the object, the incongruity of the poetry and its subject is what provides humor. Precise counterpointing of concepts is one of Faulkner's favorite
devices for humorous as well as serious writing. Thus, the horses' eyes are at once "wild and subdued."

Another element of frontier humor, particularly Harris's, appears in Faulkner's "Spotted Horses" section. This is the furious confusion, motion, and violence which is the staple of Sut Lovingood's humor, for Sut has a keen eye for detailed description of breakage and damage. By rapidly listing those things which are broken in the melees that are characteristic of what Sut finds humorous, he gives the reader some indication of furious speed and confusion. For instance, when the Burns's bull, "Old Sock," backs into the house, he crashes into a cupboard in one backward lunge.

'Pickle crocks, preserve jars, vinegar jugs, seed bags, herb bunches, paregoric bottles, egg baskets, and delf ware -- all mixed damn promiscuously and not worth the sortin by a dollar and a half.' (SL 51)

And in the next lunge he makes a holocaust of the wedding feast.

'Taters, cabbage, meat, soup, beans, sop, dumplins and the truck you wallers 'em in... milk, plates, pies,...and every durned fixin you could think of in a week were there, mixed and mashed like it had been thru a threshin-machine.' (SL 52)

Faulkner's description of the horses' escape is as detailed as Sut's description of the damage "Old Sock" did at the wedding.

The herd [was] sweeping on across the lot, to crash through the gate which the last man through it neglected to close...carrying all of the gate save upright to which the hinges were nailed with them, and so among the teams and wagons which choked the lane, the teams
springing and lunging too, snapping hitch-reins and tongues. Then the whole inextricable mass crashed among the wagons... (H 306-307)

And Faulkner describes Eck's "free" horse crashing into Tull's wagon both in detail and with the aid of a frontier simile.

The horse neither checked nor swerved. It crashed once on the wooden bridge and rushed between the two mules which waked lunging in opposite directions in the traces, the horse now apparently scrambling along the wagon-tongue itself like a mad squirrel and scrabbling at the end-gate of the wagon with its forefeet... (H 308-309)

Faulkner's omniscient narration in these passages of action has obvious parallels to Sut Lovingood's. Both describe the details of frontier animals and objects in confusion. Their descriptions are dominated by nouns and verbs to represent the motion, mess, and noise of these comic events. Their use of figurative language of the frontier enables both to sum up and heighten the preceding action in a single vivid image. And both Faulkner and Sut find noise and damage conducive to hilarious humor.

Although the "Spotted Horses" passage is not pure frontier humor (it ranges through too many different languages to fit into this pigeon-hole) the episode is perhaps Faulkner's most brilliantly kaleidoscopic passage of frontier humor in The Hamlet, if not in his canon. His achievement here is the result of his successful juxtaposition of multifarious incongruities. For instance, in the language alone, he combines such antithetical elements as high poetry and low comedy.
through his use of the omniscient narrative. His own poetic
description of the pear tree, Eula, and the swirling masses
of horseflesh is contrasted with the earthy speech of the
characters during the confusion and their swapping of individual
accounts of the event afterward on Will Varner's porch. In
addition, there are somewhat less realistic elements --
Faulkner's own frontier figurative language and the peasants'
semi-poetic superstitions about the moon's effect on growing
things. Thus, rapidly changing the tone of the story by
juxtaposing these various languages, Faulkner indeed heightens
the atmosphere of swirling per se, and this, like Sut Lovingood,
with an extraordinary eye for detail and sensitivity to the
comic effects of fast action.

In The Town and The Mansion there are, I think, three
major episodes that are clearly in the tradition of frontier
humor, and, like Sut Lovingood's stories, all contain passages
of action. These are "Centaur in Brass," "Mule in the Yard,"
and "By the People." All were originally short stories and
all are told by more than one person. In these later novels
Faulkner finds that telling a story through more than one
person's eyes increases the range of figurative language he
can use in any one situation. None of these minor narrators
are as important as Ratliff, and some of them, old Het for
example, seem to exist solely for the comments they make.
As raconteurs or partial raconteurs they might be considered
as extensions of Ratliff's sensibilities as they can enhance,
or detract from Ratliff's instinctively excellent story-telling skill.

"Centaur in Brass" and "Mule in the Yard" benefit from revision. In the former story the anonymous narrator, as well as Faulkner, Ratliff, and Chick in other novels, describes Flem's eyes as the color of stagnant water, but in The Town, Harker, a man well acquainted with machinery, describes Flem thus: "him standing there chewing, with his eyes looking like two gobs of cup grease on raw dough..." (T 22) In the original, the chase is described thus:

...the two of them a strange and furious beast with two heads and a single pair of legs like an inverted centaur speeding phantomlike just ahead of the board-like streaming of Tom-Tom's shirt-tail and just beneath the silver glint of the lifted knife;... (Collected Stories, 164)

and by Harker in The Town:

"Jest exactly as on time as two engines switching freight cars. Tom Tom must a made his jump jest exactly when Turl whirled to run, Turl jumping out of the house into the moonlight with Tom Tom and the butcher knife riding on his back so that they looked jest like -- what do you call them double-jointed half-horse fellers in the old picture books?"

"Centaur," Gowan said.

"-looking jest like a centawyer running on its hind legs and trying to ketch up with itself with a butcher knife about a yard long in one of its extry front hoofs..." (T 26)

Faulkner's addition of Harker's description is not only consistent with Harker's character; it has converted this passage into regional humor. The centaur image, presented in Harker's uncertain manner, is far more believable and for that matter, vivid than in the previous passage. And Faulkner has increased
the humor of this image by means of the framework narrative and the language technique of frontier humor -- relating the event to a character's experience.

In another episode Faulkner achieves a range of tone through his technique in using this device. Charles Mallison introduces the "Mule in the Yard" passage: "This is what Ratliff said happened up to where Uncle Gavin could see it." (T 231) As he tells the Hait family history and the story of the mules getting into Mrs. Hait's yard, Ratliff's narrative ends with the hypothetical simile: "it [the mule] probably looked taller than a giraffe rushing down at Mrs. Hait and old Het with the halter-rope whipping about its ears." (T 237) A mule which looks like a giraffe is incongruous enough, but Faulkner now has old Het narrate (through Ratliff and Charles) in terms far more humorous than Ratliff's. Her superstitions make for the best image in the passage:

Old Het said it looked just like something out of the Bible, or maybe out of some kind of hoodoo witches' Bible: the mule that came out of the fog to begin with like a hant or goblin, now kind of soaring back into the fog again borne on a cloud of little winged ones;... (T 238)

And a new, although minor raconteur is born. In this passage, however, Faulkner also exhibits a carelessness about the correspondence of imagery to the narrator's probable experience when old Het describes Mrs. Hait's plunge into the drove of mules:
[Mrs. Hait] rush[ed] right into the middle of the drove, after the one with the flying halter-rein that was still vanishing into the fog still in that cloud of whirling loose feathers like confetti or the wake behind a speed boat. (T 239)

This particular inconsistency might result from a hurried revision of the short story, where the only reference to a boat is that of "the cow...with her tail rigid and raked slightly like the stern staff of a boat." (Collected Stories 256) Generally, Het's descriptions are more detailed (at least in a bucolic way) than those in the short story. For instance, when I. O. falls, the narrator describes him thus:

He lay flat on his stomach, his head and shoulders upreared by his outstretched arms, his coat tail swept forward by its own arrested momentum about his head so that from beneath it his slack-jawed face mused in wild repose like that of a burlesqued nun. (Collected Stories 256)

Het's description is:

He was lying flat on his face, the tail of his coat flung forward over his head by the impetus of his fall, and old Het swore there was the print of the cow's split foot and the mule's hoof too in the middle of his white shirt. (T 240)

Both are humorous passages. Old Het's is in the regional tradition and, I think, more humorous. Her description of I. O. is far less incongruous to the tone of the story.

In The Mansion, the best example of frontier humor is Ratliff's outwitting Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes. The passage is introduced by Faulkner: "Then it was September, Charles was home again and the next day his uncle ran Ratliff
to earth on the Square and brought him up to the office...." (M 315) And Ratliff tells of a victory as decisive as Sut Lovingood's victory over Parson John Bullen. The humor of Snopes's elimination from the senatorial race is derived more from the story itself, than from the language. Ratliff is a far more sober character in The Mansion than in the earlier novels; and indeed The Mansion is a more sober novel. Certain elements of frontier humor are there in the embittered but blunt up-country language of Mink, in the incongruity of Goodyhay and his church, and in Meadowfill's cantankerous fury; but these elements exist alone and the effects are far from hilarious. Ratliff's story is a story of frontier humor; but his language is that of frontier humor only in a few places. Ratliff, having been to New York, explains the location of the "dog thicket" as being "jest above Varner's millpond where it will be convenient for customers like them city hotels that keeps a reservoy of fountainpen ink open to anybody that needs it right next to the writing room." (M 316) This is not the Ratliff of The Hamlet or The Town. While he retains his regional grammar and pronunciation through his description of the thicket, he selects far more sophisticated and euphemistic images than he would have in earlier years: "a dog way-station, a kind of dog post office.... Every dog in the congressional district...has lifted his leg there...and left his visiting card." (M 316) But as the story unfolds Ratliff tells it in increasingly colorful terms:
Clarence felt his britches legs getting damp or maybe just cool, and looked over his shoulder to see the waiting line-up...them augmenting standing-room-only customers strung out behind him like the knots in a kite's tail...then frustrated dogs circling round and round...like the spotted horses and swan boats on a flying jenny, except the dogs was travelling on three legs, being already loaded and cocked and aimed. (M 317)

Faulker, in passages of action in the frontier humor tradition, follows Harris's method. But Faulkner is usually careful (and this with a large number of characters) to keep the image consistent to the character, and has found by using a comment-within-a-story-within-a-story he can achieve a wide range of figurative speech, and Het's "hoodoo witches' Bible" is a superb example of this technique. Harris often uses a profusion of figures leading towards the most emphatic one. For instance, in one paragraph John Bullen stops preaching:

...a-listenin'...sorta like a ole sow does when she hears you a-whistlin' for the dogs...(slaps himself) about the place where you cut the best steak outen a beef...(rubs himself) where a hoss tail sprouts.... Then he spread his big legs and give his back a good, rattlin rub agin the pulpit, like a hog scratches hisself agin a stump, leanin to it pow'ful, and twitchin and squirmin all over as if he'd slept in a dog bed, or onto a pissant hill. (SL 85)

Thus, the way in which the characters tell these stories is no small part of enticing the reader to listen to a mountain hill-billy or an itinerant Mississippi sewing machine salesman. Sut is a man who has seen all the frontier has to show; Ratliff has seen most of it, but knows with unerring
consistency when to let a poor-house Negro speak for him. Het, more than likely illiterate, and Sut, admittedly so, relate the things of the frontier to the events they describe. As an examination of these passages of action would indicate, Faulkner and Harris usually differ in the number of frontier images they use -- not in the technique or spirit of that use.

A further similarity is their representation of the real language of the frontier, a language common to sharecroppers and planters alike. Speaking of this oral frontier humor, DeVoto says:

> It is the frontier examining itself, recording itself, and entertaining itself. ...It was enormously male -- emphatic, coarse, vivid, violent. *22*

> The folk everywhere are bawdy and obscene. The verbal humor of copulation and other physiological functions is eternal and it is the least diluted form of folk art. *23*

And what got into print almost certainly does not indicate the extent to which these characteristics apply to the oral tradition which both Faulkner and Harris knew. McIlwaine reminds us that only "the most sanitary [stories]...now and then appeared in the local newspapers or the *Spirit of the Times*." *24* Indeed, Brom Weber, the editor of *Sut Lovingood*, notes in his "Introduction" that he was forced by propriety to delete "three lines of an extremely offensive nature," (SL xxviii) and in some uncollected Sut stories, Sut indicates a real love for the instance of profanity *per se*. While waiting for dinner under extremely adverse circumstances,
(the road-house was flooded and the passengers were standing in the mire around an ineffectual stove), Sut tells about but does not record this real language of the frontier.

"...sum[were] a cussin wun another, sum a cussin thersefs, sum a cussin Bull's Gap, sum a cussin wun tavrin, sum a cussin fur supper, sum a cussin the strike nine snake Whisky, an all a cussin thar levil best."25

While Faulkner does not write slapstick of this variety, the specific circumstance of women cursing is real and humorous to both Harris and Faulkner. They never fail to provide suitable provocation for it. As a frightened mule runs through her yard, Mrs. Hait answers the avaricious I. O. Snopes who wants his half of Mr. Hait's and the mules' combined, assessed value with "Catch that big son of a bitch with the halter." (T 239) Sicily Burns is provoked by Sut's retribution. Finally, angered by Sut's suggestion that she cool off the rampaging bees with "a mess of SODA,...she lifted the crock so she could flash her eyes at me [Sut], and said, 'You go to hell!" just as plain." (SL 55) In general, Faulkner limits the earthy speech of the frontier to old women and men. And Harris, whose Sicily Burns would be as much of a goddess as Eula, had Sut been literate, also invents a tough old lady who speaks in frontier language. Sut describes Mrs. Yardley as "a great noticer of little things that nobody else ever seed. She'd say, right in the middle of somebody's serious talk: 'Law sakes! Thar goes that yaller slut of a hen, a-flingin straws over her shoulder."' (SL 172) However,
Faulkner does not limit his use of this language to humorous effects, as the "Mink" section of *The Mansion*, among many other examples in the trilogy, would indicate; but, like Harris, he often employs this language for humorous ends and to represent the reality of an earthy frontier.

There can be little doubt about the historical accuracy of Harris and Faulkner's treatment of the folk-speech. McIlwaine finds both Tennessee and northern Mississippi to be one of the "haunts of plain people. There the squires very likely possessed the rough forthrightness of a certain mythical Senator Jones of Arkansas who, in beginning his harangue about changing the name of his state stormed at the presiding officer: 'Mr. Speakeh, God damn you, Sah, I been tryin' for half an hour to get yo' eye..."^\[26] Both Harris and Faulkner find such language in high places humorous. Certainly, when Wirt Staples throws a leg of venison at a judge in a courtroom, Wirt's cursing him adds to an already hilarious event. "Thar's a dried subpoena for you, you damn ole cow's paunch." (SL 147) And when Faulkner's character, Henry Best, yells, "'Wait, god damn it,' so loud that they did hush..." (T 86), the confusion of the Alderman's board meeting momentarily ceased.

A less oral and perhaps less humorous language technique that Faulkner and the Southwestern humorists share is that of giving their characters peculiar names. Typically, such names are suggestive of dominant qualities within the character.
"Sut Lovingood," then, would perhaps suggest "smut" and sexual prowess -- a phase of his character not remarkably well-developed. "Suggs" perhaps is a better example. This is remarkably similar to the word "slug," in Simon's case, indicative of the slimy, skulking snail rather than the hard punch or bullet that the word also means. Of Faulkner's character-naming, Foster and Campbell say:

Caricature, a salient characteristic of frontier humor, [is]...apparent in what might be called Faulkner's name humor. ..."Snopes," then, is a caricature of all "Sn-ishness" in human nature. ...Most important of all is Flem Snopes -- the bellwether of the clan. The name suggests two things to us. In the terminology of I. A. Richards, Flem as a "sense" metaphor, suggests "phlegmatic;" as an emotive metaphor, it suggests phlegm (phonetically spelled "flem" in the dictionary). Both fit Flem's character. The medieval humor, phlegm, when predominant, made a person cold, apathetic, unemotional -- so Flem -- phlegmatic. As a mucous discharge from the mouth, it bears further revolting connotations.

The name-humor is further complicated by the introduction of animal nicknames, suggesting Aesopian animal characteristic, and grandiose Christian names negated by the incongruous nicknames.27

Indeed, Faulkner's clan have more humorous names than any of those in the writings of the early Southwestern humorists, perhaps partly because Faulkner paid more attention to this sort of detail and perhaps partly because the Southern and Midwestern phenomena of odd names was not very well developed in the ante-bellum era in which these humorists wrote. For H. L. Mencken says:
Excessive inbreeding among the mountain people may be responsible in part for this vogue for strange given names "when forty-seven persons in one hollow...possess identical surnames, the given name becomes the common distinguishing factor..."28 And this inbreeding more than likely was a post-war phenomenon.

Thus, in both structure and language Faulkner parallels the Southwestern humorists in general and Harris in particular. Obviously, Faulkner's use of their structures and techniques is more artistic and more complex than Harris's. As his narration of the "Spotted Horses" section in The Hamlet would indicate, he often achieves a different (in that case, heightened, super-real) comic effect by deviating from the formulated practices of the best and purest frontier humor -- that of George Washington Harris. These deviations are conducive to Faulkner's range of tone in the trilogy. Often the humor is heightened by his changes, but in other passages the results are far from humorous. Two examples of his deviation from traditional Southwestern humor may serve to indicate some of the ways in which Faulkner's deviations increase his range of tone. Both deviations are changes in language.

The prevailing language in the best Southwestern humor is oral and figurative. This is generally true of Faulkner's most humorous passages. But in humor derived from language Faulkner does not restrict himself to the frontier tradition and regional dialect. In fact, when Jody takes Eula to school, his "vision of himself transporting not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of
the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses\textsuperscript{m} (H 100) is humorous because of the poetic language in contrast to what we expect from Frenchman's Bend in general and Jody Varner in particular. Traditionally, the humor of the frontier emphasizes the incongruity of the hick's language in juxtaposition to relatively plain prose. Faulkner has reversed the emphasis of this structure by contrasting this exaggerated poetic prose to the facts of the hick's world. This same pattern, as we have seen, is sometimes humorous in Longstreet's works, but while we may question the earlier regionalist's conscious intent, Faulkner obviously intends humor in his passage.

Indeed, Faulkner has a passion for the incongruities of language in relation to the event. And although incongruity is at the heart of comedy, incongruity \textit{per se} does not insure a humorous effect. Nowhere in his canon is this better shown than in Faulkner's Ike-cow passage in \textit{The Hamlet}. Incongruously enough, Faulkner took this passage from the valid but unprintable strain that Southwestern oral humor often was. Faulkner's friend, Phil Stone, reportedly claimed:

\begin{quote}
The story came to Faulkner as a vulgar anecdote of rural sodomy told by a professional politician campaigning through Oxford. As the politician told it to a few male hangers-on, it was simply a brief, brutally pornographic joke.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

But through Faulkner's treatment, this "joke" becomes a story of love, perhaps the finest example of Faulkner's counterpointing incongruities. Of the many superb scenes of Ike and
the cow, the one most promising of humor is that of Ike, who, (having rescued her from a fire and tumbled down a ravine), "lying beneath the struggling and bellowing cow, received the violent relaxing of her fear constricted bowels." (H 176) This scatology offers every possibility of bawdy humor, and it is instantaneously humorous and pathetic. After he attempts to console her for "this violent violation of her maiden's delicacy," (H 176) she becomes "maiden mediant, shame free." (H 177) And in thus deviating from the language of the frontier, Faulkner renders this tale of "stock-diddling" a story of love which is more in the realm of the grotesque and extravagant than in that of earthy, oral humor. The difference between this episode and other episodes in the frontier tradition is the absolute incongruity of the language in relation to the event, and the perfect reversal of the methods of frontier humor. Faulkner's poetry here renders the reader's detachment an impossibility, whereas the frontier humorists' emphasis on backwoods language almost guarantees this detachment. While to some extent the poetic language in "Spotted Horses" increases the humor of that passage, here a similar, if more prolonged use of that language renders this episode equidistant between the uproariously funny and the absolutely pathetic. The facts remain that it is a deviation, a change in emphasis on what was originally the stuff of oral frontier humor to which both Harris and Faulkner are manifestly indebted.
Both authors are geniuses in the frontier humor genre. Harris was the best of the early frontier humorists because of his artistic use of the best device for telling a tale and for his superb sense of the incongruities of frontier speech. But Faulkner, if for merely his artistic innovations on the structures and techniques of Harris, is an even greater genius. His successful integration of the farcical episodes in the complex trilogy attests to a part of this genius. Another aspect of it is evident within the episodes where his close parallels and reversals of the traditional techniques of frontier humor give ample evidence for his kinship with Sut's inventor and a sensibility distinct from and greater than George Washington Harris's.

Faulkner as a frontier humorist surpasses Harris in the same way Harris surpassed his contemporaries. As Blair finds Harris better than they were, I find Faulkner better than Harris: Faulkner's frontier humor is better because he has more sense of incongruities, more exuberance, more imagination and because he has greater genius for transferring the unique artistry of the oral narrative to the printed page. Thus, in matters of structure and technique in the trilogy, Faulkner incorporates Harris's methods for a somewhat derivative and yet manifestly greater artistic effect.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

1Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-1958, eds. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, 1959), p. 90.

2Ibid., p. 193.


4Faulkner in the University, pp. 14-15.


6Faulkner in the University, p. 17.

7Brooks, p. 175.


12Blair, Native American Humor, p. 92.

13The whole of The Reivers is told some fifty years afterward but the use of this device for detachment is not so effective because the first person narrative of Lucius Priest dominates the book and the reader tends to forget the opening sentence, "GRANDFATHER SAID:" (William Faulkner, The Reivers (New York, 1962), p. 3.)
The term bourgeois humor, as I use it in this thesis, indicates that humor which, in contrast to frontier humor, tends to be more feminine than masculine, more learned than blunt, and which focuses on subjects that are more concerned with social consciousness than with individualism. While frontier humor involves highly figurative language and often derives from violent action, the language of bourgeois humor is often plain or euphemistic and its action is usually without violence. It is tame and quixotic. Gavin Stevens and the Mallisons are often the characters of Faulkner's bourgeois humor and perhaps the most laughable example of it is "the Rouncewell Panic." (T 70-72)

Blair, Native American Humor, p. 92. This last incongruity (that between realism and fantasy) because the "narrator selects details" [italics mine] implies character revelation -- one subject of Chapter V of this thesis.


Indubitably romantic, this image resembles one in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" which Faulkner might have known.

...there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad.... [ll-18-21]


My italics.

McIlwaine says: "All but the most refined planters had one literary standard for books read in the family circle and anecdotes related to guests on the veranda, another for the yarns swapped on the courthouse square, at the livery stable...." (Shields McIlwaine, The Southern Poor White (University of Oklahoma, 1939), p. 41.)

Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America (New York, 1933), p. 92.

Ibid., p. 153.
24 McIlwaine, p. 41.


26 McIlwaine, p. 41.


29 See Chapter II, page 15 of this thesis.

30 Phil Stone as quoted by Campbell and Foster, p. 99.

To arrive at a balanced view of the South is a task beset at the outset with complications. Writings about the South are notorious for being more an indication of the writers' prejudices than their facts because accounts other than mere statistics (and even those sometimes) are doomed to attack from other vantage points. Much of the confusion stems from attempts to clarify the whole South and much stems from too hasty generalizations from too few particulars. Further confusion arises from the South's relative insularity both before and after the Civil War. This insularity, besides greatly hindering the development of any universally acceptable description of the South, gave sustenance to the South's regional consciousness, which was born in the first decades of the nineteenth century and became especially acute in the latter half of that century. The rest of the country, as Howe says, "was becoming a self-conscious nation... [while] the South, because it was a pariah region,...struggled desperately to keep itself intact. Through an exercise of the will, it insisted that the regional memory be the main shaper of its life." And the cultured, often romanticized South is a part of this memory. As the rest of the nation became increasingly urbanized and industrialized, this romanticized South, as well as the somewhat less romantic backwoods areas, did in fact become a "pariah region."
As observers and historians from Frederick Law Olmsted to C. Vann Woodward have pointed out, the classical and cultured old South, while to some extent a fact in Virginia, is largely a myth in relation to the facts of almost any other Southern state. W. J. Cash finds that "it was actually 1820 before the plantation was fully on the march, striding over the hills of Carolina to Mississippi...." He further explains the chronology of the South's growth thus:

From 1820 to 1860 is but forty years — a little more than the span of a single generation. The whole period from the invention of the cotton gin to the outbreak of the Civil War is less than seventy years — the lifetime of a single man. Yet it was wholly within the longer of these periods, and mainly within the shorter, that the development and growth of the great South took place....

The inference is plain. It is impossible to conceive the great South as being, on the whole, more than a few steps removed from the frontier stage at the beginning of the Civil War. It is imperative, indeed, to conceive it as having remained more or less fully in the frontier stage for a great part — maybe the greater part — of its antebellum history.

And this is the South that the antebellum regionalists write about.

In general, frontiersmen as a group were bound together by a common closeness to and struggle with the land. This struggle largely dictated their everyday lives. And the fact that they chose to grow cotton to the exclusion of other crops, and this at a time when "cotton was king," when only a fool or a dunce would grow anything less
profitable, had a great effect on the later Southern frontiersmen -- in fact, this, along with the insularity of the South, is perhaps another reason many later Southerners remained virtual frontiersmen, or at least "red-neck farmers," too poor even to leave the "pariah region." The financial burden of the cotton monopolies and the natural burden of cotton's tendency to deplete and erode the soil effected disaster for generations of Southerners.

Another common denominator of this frontier is the nature of its institutions. By comparison with those of the North and the seabord states, the social institutions of this frontier -- its religion, education, and government -- were at best inchoate. They were growing, but they were anything but stable. The camp meeting, the school which met only when a teacher was available and then only when the children were not needed by their parents in the fields, and a travelling legal system were the social institutions of this frontier. This is not to say that there was no common meeting ground for frontiersmen. Their meeting place was the store, the inn, wherever they might speak to one another. But they constituted perhaps the most heterogeneous group of peoples since the Tower of Babel.

"It was as if all the world had gone on a picaresque journey by general consent in various quarters, and at the chance roundup for nightly rest and refreshment fell to telling what, and especially whom, they had met with."
The frontiersmen, in spite of their garrulity, were anything but homogeneous. As their institutions and heterogeneity might foretell, the pervasive common denominator and the real core of their existence was their individualism:

...even at the best and fullest, the idea of social responsibility which grew up in the South remained always a narrow and purely personal one. The defect here was fundamental in the primary model. The Virginians themselves, if they had long since become truly aristocratic, had nevertheless never got beyond that brutal individualism -- and for all the Jeffersonian glorification of the idea, it was brutal as it worked out in the plantation world -- which was the heritage of the frontier: that individualism which, while willing enough to ameliorate the specific instance, relentlessly laid down as its basic social postulate the doctrine that every man was completely and wholly responsible for himself.5

Although there is this "brutal" individualistic aspect of the frontiersman's nature, there also is at least a hint of refinement. Because he shared the planters' acceptance of the Virginian aristocrat as a model worthy of imitation, the common yeoman farmer gained a certain degree of gentility. Cash speaks about these farmers as having "a kindly courtesy, a level-eyed pride, an easy quietness, a barely perceptible flourish of bearing, which, for all its obvious angularity and fundamental plainness, was one of the finest things the Old South produced."6 And further, even the poor white gained something of this quality. Indeed, All the way down the line there was a softening and gentling of the heritage of the backwoods. In every degree the masses took on, under their slouch, a sort of unkempt politeness and ease of port, which rendered them definitely superior,
in respect of manner, to their peers in the rest of the country.7

As Cash's words might indicate, the pervasive, relentless individualism governed every aspect of the common whites' lives. Theoretically it explains much of their provincialism. Further, this individualism is at the core of the frontier's enigmatic paradoxes -- for instance, the paradox of brutality and courtesy or the apparent oxymoron of a slouching politeness. And these paradoxes indicate the variety of ways in which this frontier may be described. And thus, there are multifarious frontier milieus of which the frontier humorists' is but one. And certainly, these frontier humorists created -- by emphasizing certain realities of this frontier -- a stylized and, to the eye of the modern reader, perhaps a romanticized milieu.

There are, then, three frontier milieus which are relevant to frontier humor: the stereotyped romanticized South, if only because it is generally absent in the best of frontier humor; the historical Southern frontier; and the frontier of the Southern humorists, the literary frontier. The South, as portrayed by both Faulkner and Harris, does have a historical relevance, and the historical validity of their writings is, in some instances, an illuminating way to come to their works; but of more importance, I think, is the similarity they achieve in the creation of a literary frontier -- especially for the purposes of frontier humor. In other words, to what extent Faulkner's and Harris's frontiers are historically accurate
is of less importance to a study of their frontier humor than the fact that these frontiers, as they present them, are similar. Thus, the parallels between nineteenth century Knoxville and twentieth century Oxford are not really as important as the parallels between Pat Nash's grocery and Will Varner's store.

Both authors achieve a certain degree of realism by their emphasis on the land and its objects. Not only do their characters tend to view life in terms of this land, but the authors themselves emphasize the things (the animals and objects) of the frontier in their descriptions of the land and the people. Technically, this is far more true of Faulkner than of Harris, for in *Sut Lovingood* nearly all of the descriptions are Sut's. Nevertheless, in introducing Sut to the public, Harris describes his principal character as being:

...hog-eyed, funny sort of a genius -- fresh from some bench-legged Jew's clothing store; mounted on Tearpoke, a nick-tailed, bow-necked, long, poor, pale sorrel horse, half-dandy, half-devil, and enveloped in a perfect network of bridle, reins, crupper, martingales, straps, surcinges, and red ferreting -- who reined up in front of Pat Nash's grocery among a crowd of mountaineers full of fun, foolery, and mean whiskey. This was *Sut Lovingood*. (Sl 3-4)

Faulkner's attention to detail is even more thorough than Harris's, and in the first two pages of *The Hamlet* Faulkner describes Frenchman's Bend and its people. The land was:

... parcelled out now into small shiftless mortgaged farms for the directors of Jefferson
banks to squabble over before settling finally to Will Varner,... [One of the things of this land is an old plantation house which these people] had been pulling down and chopping up -- walnut newel posts and stair spindles, oak floors -- ...for firewood.

[The settlers originally came to this land] in battered wagons and on mule-back and even on foot, with flintlock rifles and dogs and children and home-made whiskey stills and Protestant psalmbooks...They brought no slaves and no Phyfe and Chippendale highboys; indeed, what they did bring most of them could...carry in their hands. They took up land and built one- and two-room cabins and never painted them... (H 3-4)

Both Harris and Faulkner, then, sense that the basic reality of the backwoodsman lies in what he does with what he has. And Faulkner, following his predilection for showing the other side of the coin, achieves a heightened realism by explaining what they do not have. ("They brought no slaves and no Phyfe and Chippendale highboys...") And thus, he himself repudiates the myth of an aristocracy (at least in relation to the world of Frenchman's Bend).

Another way in which these two authors' literary frontiers are similar is through Faulkner's lack of emphasis on twentieth century mechanization. Cecil Eby may be generous in his estimate of how long the frontier was unaffected by modern technology, and his implied date of the cotton gin's invention is late (it was invented in 1793), but he does comment on the similarities between this backwoods South and the antebellum South. "Although the time [of The Hamlet] is about 1890, [Faulkner said 1907] it could well be 1840
or 1940 for with the exception of a cotton gin and the sewing machine, there is nothing which depends upon technological orientation within a particular period. Thus, Faulkner presents a literary frontier in which his emphasis on the things and general lack of anachronisms render his frontier parallel to Harris's frontier. Faulkner does, however, in some instances (such as the old Frenchman's place) portray a post-bellum frontier, but his poor whites show a provincialism parallel to that which Harris himself expresses in his comment on the "bench-legged Jew" and comparable sentiments which appear frequently in uncollected Sut episodes. For example, Faulkner's poor whites would have considered that "...anyone speaking the tongue with a foreign flavor or whose appearance or even occupation was strange, would have been a Frenchman regardless of what nationality he might affirm...." (H 3)

With the exception of Faulkner's portrayal of Mink in The Mansion, neither Harris nor Faulkner consciously emphasize the pathos of the poor whites' poverty. But the parallel instances of Sut's father "playin hoss," albeit for comic effect, and the report from an anonymous bystander that "when their [the Armstid's] mule died three or four years ago, him and her broke their land working time about in the traces with the other mule" (H 318) are indicative of the lack of work animals and a general poverty as well as the struggle against the land that pervades this literature about the frontier. Both Harris's and Faulkner's lack of emphasis
on the pathos of the poverty of their characters tends to make the modern reader accept this poverty as a sort of elemental condition against which to some extent all the characters struggle. And indeed some critics would argue that Faulkner's frontiersmen are not poverty-stricken. For instance, Brooks makes a valid point when he argues that not all of the characters are "poor white trash."

They are white people, many of them poor, and most of them living on farms; but they are not to be put down necessarily as 'poor whites.'

...[The unwary reader] may too easily conclude that the McCallums and the Tulls are simply poor white trash.11

Sut's poverty is never acknowledged by Harris in direct statements and perhaps, by modern standards, his ubiquitous flask would make him anything but poverty-stricken. While Sut is too busy running away from and into trouble to have any job, all of the people of Frenchman's Bend (with the exception of Will Varner) work at something -- although for much of The Hamlet they sit (true to their backwoods garrulity) carving and chatting on the porch of Will Varner's store.

But if Harris and Faulkner fail to emphasize the poverty of the frontier, they do not fail to exaggerate its other aspects. Both emphasize action in their humor, and the action of the frontiersman has long been exaggerated for comic effect. This and another common element of frontier humor — the motley men the frontier was often supposed to attract — are substantiated by Boatright, who quotes an early Texas newspaper:
They have a little town out West...which is 'all sorts of a stirring place.' In one day they recently had two street fights, hung a man, rode three men out of town on a rail, got up a quarter race, a turkey shooting, a gander pulling, a match dog fight, and preaching by a circus rider, who afterwards ran a foot race for apple jack all around, and, as if this was not enough, the judge of the court, after losing his year's salary at single-handed poker, and whipping a person who said he did not understand the game, went out and helped lynch his grandfather for hog stealing.\textsuperscript{12}

Neither Harris nor Faulkner write episodes with this much action in them. They both prefer to give detailed descriptions of single moments of extremely fast action and Faulkner even carries this detailed description into the development of tableaus where the result is not the possible suspended abstraction but a reaffirmation and heightening of his literary frontier. That the real frontier had moments of fast action can hardly be doubted, but that they were as universally comic as Faulkner and Harris render them is quite questionable. But here the reader's ignorance or willing suspension of disbelief is part of their credibility. Brooks finds that the setting of \textit{The Hamlet} ...

...is one that few modern urban and suburban Americans know anything about at first hand and about which they are perfectly willing to believe anything particularly because it is set in the South and populated by poor whites. The association that most citizens have with such a community is likely to be through Al Capp's cartoons of Dogpatch.\textsuperscript{13}

Henry Watterson, writing of \textit{Sut Lovingood}, romantically indicates a further distance from our modern world -- that of
time. The Southwestern humorists wrote in an era when the intricacies of life were more homely and uncomplicated. Watterson says:

They flourished years ago in the good old time of muster days and quarter-racing, before the camp-meeting and the barbecue had lost their power and their charm; when men led simple, homely lives, doing their love-making and their law-making as they did their fighting and their plowing, in a straight furrow; when there was no national debt multiplying the dangers and magnifying the expenses of distillation in the hills and hollows, and pouring in upon the log-rolling, the quilting, the corn-shucking, and the fish-fry an inquisitorial crew of tax-gatherers and detectives to spoil the sport and dull the edge of patriotic husbandry.¹⁴

And the men who inhabit these literary frontiers are just as removed as the setting and time in which they are placed. For, as Howe says, "none of the conspicuous actors in Faulkner's world come from the major social groups we are accustomed to meeting in life or literature."¹⁵

Thus, there is actually a second level of the literary frontier, a level of fantasy which arises from exaggeration and distortion of action and values and is predicated by the reader's unfamiliarity and naivete. Such a legendary figure as Davy Crockett is a product of this sort of fantasy on the frontier where emphasis, exaggeration, distortion and implications of universality all combine to portray a character that is larger than life. But where the gargantuan fantasy-figure of Crockett remains totally removed from reality,
Faulkner's and Harris's figures oscillate between fantasy and reality. Brooks finds that Fulkner's (and certainly the same would apply to Harris's) use of this oscillation gives the effect of a "distortion mirror."

...The folk community...is so far removed from our own that it seems simple to the point of fabulousness, and yet we continue to believe in it. Perhaps it is really a distortion mirror which turns our faces into grotesquely comic caricatures...[and] returns to us...the image of ourselves.16

Harris's and Faulkner's settings are also similar. Both authors' passages of action are often placeless. It is as if they viewed their scenes through telephoto lenses for indeed they focus on specific things and present only the rudiments of a complete scene. By pinpointing their attention on details, they increase the reader's sense of speed and confusion to the minimizing of his sense of identifiable place. For all of Harris's specificity about the things of the frontier, for all his emphasis on traces, reins and halters, mules and horses, lizards, bees, and whiskey, there is no sense of specific place in his passages of action because his comic episodes could happen anywhere -- anywhere on the frontier, that is. Perhaps this placelessness in Harris's episodes indicates a sort of universality, for Brom Weber notes that "the geography...is scrambled together so that Sut...is everywhere at once. The physical background is vague, though Sut is fully capable of precise description." (SL xxiv)

And while Faulkner's The Hamlet is set in the mythical world
of Frenchman's Bend, The Town is set in Jefferson and The Mansion has various settings. This would perhaps indicate that the latter two novels ought to contain less frontier humor of action than The Hamlet, as indeed The Mansion does. But though Faulkner's episodes, like Harris's, are typically placeless, both authors' episodes seem real to some extent because they are permeated with things of the frontier. As an examination of his episodes will reveal, Faulkner typically sets these passages of action outside of Jefferson, in a place where, for example, the chase itself, as well as the fantastic image of Tom Tom and Turl looking like "them double-jointed half-horse fellers in the old picture books" (T 26) becomes credible. Placelessness may also exist within Jefferson in such an episode as a "Mule in the Yard." Here, the furious tangle of mules, people, and barnyard animals extends into the realm of fantasy by Faulkner's careful attention to boundaries and atmosphere. The result is that the minute yard, enveloped by a thick fog, becomes microcosmic and indeed placeless during the melee.

Faulker and Harris, besides exaggerating the action of their literary frontiers, exaggerate and perhaps even distort for comic effect the frontiersman's values and attitudes. For instance, while Sut and Ratliff often have penetrating insights of a realistic nature, they are both humorous in their exaggerated frontier evaluations of the relative worth of those two elements which play such an important part in
the comedy of *The Hamlet* -- horses and women. Sut, in describing Parson Bullen's breach of confidence explodes,

"[that]...stinkin ole ground-hog! He'da heap better a-stole some man's hoss [than reveal to the cuckolded husband Sut and his camp-meeting friend's love making]; I'da thought more of him." (SL 82) But while Sut implies the frontiersman's higher esteem for a horse than a woman, Ratliff (in his comment on Flem's acquisition of Jody's horse) magnifies this esteem beyond credibility when he says, "A man takes your wife and all you got to do to ease your feelings is to shoot him. But your horse." (H 85) Thus, the humor is heightened by Ratliff's thinking in the terms of this fantasy frontier where present-day values are topsy-turvy. And further comedy may result from our uncertainty as to whether this is the thought of Ratliff, the frontiersman, or Ratliff, the bachelor.

On the subject of Yankees, particularly the men of Northern industry, we find Sut to be the more fantastic; true to the literary fantasy of Harris's frontier, Sut speaks with blatant exaggerations and well-chosen distortions.

He [the Yankee] were hatched in a crack -- in the frosty rocks where nutmegs am made outen maple, and where women paints clock-faces and paints shoe-pegs, and the men invents rat-traps, man-traps, and new-fangled doctrines for the aid of the Devil. (SL 69)

And if the reader should have any doubts as to Sut's attitude toward an intruder, especially a Northerner, he more than clarifies this when George asks whether Bake Boyd's man was
a Negro. "Worse nor that. He was a mighty mean Yankee razor-grinder...." (SL 26). But Ratliff takes a more realistic attitude:

[Northerners]...does things different from us. If a fellow in the country was to set up a goat ranch, he would do it purely and simply because he had too many goats already. He would just declare his roof or his front porch...a goat-ranch and let it go at that. [But] when [a Northerner] does something, he does it with an organized syndicate and a book of printed rules and a gold-filled diploma from the Secretary of State at Jackson.... (H 80)

Both characters see the conflicts between the industrial North and the agrarian South. Ratliff's statement is obviously more true of what we might expect from a Southerner; and if his statement is less vindictive than Sut's, it is not any less strongly felt. That Ratliff, himself a country-man, makes his livelihood from selling sewing machines is a typical, although in this case not necessarily a conscious, Faulknerian irony, which stems from the incongruities of his literary frontier -- a milieu, like Harris's, which is a perfect jumble of the real and the fanciful.

Both milieus, by virtue of this oscillation between the real and the fanciful, provide ideal comic incongruities for both writers; but in Faulkner's handling, these incongruities are, as we have seen, anything but strictly comic. Indeed, his obsession with incongruity per se is one source of the marvelous complexities of the trilogy. In creating their literary milieus, then, Harris and Faulkner make the incredible seem credible, and the credible, the real, seem somewhat
marvelous. And in their literary frontiers, the state of flux, both real and fanciful, is conducive to humor and inordinately complex incongruities of effect. The frontier flux is that between government and anarchy, between ethnic groups, classes and clans who are remarkable for their provincial outlook at once more real and distorted than that of, or even acceptable to, the prevailing culture outside this "pariah region," which was inhabited by hyper-individualistic people who are simultaneously brutal and somewhat reserved and who are motivated by their need for money and fun in a generally drab but by no means motionless land where the crop is one which requires hard work at planting and harvesting and no work between those times. This flux and confusion and insularity, plus the reader's ignorance of the region, gives the writer a poetic license, a horizon of imaginative freedom, the boundaries of which remain undiscovered.

II

The complexities and incongruities in their literary milieu and in the tradition of frontier humor, then, provide for the use of simple conflicts and themes. In the largest sense, Harris's *Sut Lovingood* is built on the simplest of all conflicts -- that between good and evil. The same conflict permeates Faulkner's *Snopes* trilogy. And both writers are masters at varying this conflict. Their literary frontiers provide highly regionalized values -- values that imply strange
new goods and evils. But Faulkner's superior variation on this conflict stems from his creation of oscillating thematic characters (such as Tomey's Turl) who represent relative goods and evils.

Harris, by having Sut tell his own story and by making him his own moral judge and the protagonist against evil, deftly captures his reader's suspension of disbelief. Sut's language and insight, as well as his cleverness in arranging "big scares" for those he considers evil-doers, gains him the reader's sympathies. We never question John Bullen's hypocrisy. It is fact -- Sut says so -- and Bullen richly deserves what treatment he gets. Just as excessive in his invective and declamatory statements as he is in his efforts against his enemies, Sut portrays his enemies as if they were Satan's henchmen on the frontier. For example, Stillyards, the former schoolmaster, was, Sut says,

...as oily, slippery a lawyer as ever took a fee...[who] practiced on all the misfortunate devils round that circuit till he got sassy, got niggers, got rich,...got religion and got to Congress. The first thing he did there were to proffer to tend the Capitol grounds in onions and beans on shares; ...when he dies he'll make the fastest trip to the center of soot, sorrow, and smoke on record, not even exceptin ole Iscariot's fast time. (SL 70)

Rarely does Faulkner draw such an evil figure. Rather, by his tendency to complicate characters and themes by variations in point of view, he often draws more than one side of a character, and the reader may be faced with the dilemma of deciding which of the multifarious realities is most real.
One need only contrast Mink Snopes of *The Hamlet* with Mink in *The Mansion* to see what remarkable changes Faulkner is capable of. In short, Faulkner avoids drawing characters who are, throughout the trilogy, consistently and absolutely evil, and his sense of incongruity effects some radical changes in character. And many of his figures (such as Turl) are caricatures, capable of being presented again and again in the Yoknapatawpha books with a different emphasis on their character -- good or evil -- as Faulkner requires.

Besides presenting the same basic conflict, a further similarity in Harris's and Faulkner's episodes of frontier humor is their parallel use of an equally simple theme -- that of retribution. Certainly this theme is consistent with both authors' milieus and it does indeed reflect the "brutal individualism" of the real frontier. There, the violence such a theme might imply could even be considered a pastime or entertainment. Eby explains, "The fight, like the quarter race or the hunt was accepted as a competitive sport, an affirmation of manhood. [And] violent personalized action, detached from vindictiveness or meanness, was a favorite subject of the regionalists...." But violence *per se* is hardly humorous; and it is through the confusion of men, beasts, and things in Harris's *Sut Lovingood* that this frontier commonplace becomes humorous. Having justified his retribution to the reader, Sut is unusually regular in meting
out one variety of punishment — pain. In fact, there is hardly an episode of retribution in which Sut's adversary is not at least in physical pain, and often the embarrassing circumstances which accompany many of Sut's pranks might be considered mental pain. The redundance of this theme and the resulting violence is, in fact, one of the defects of *Sut Lovingood* as a book-length work, for the simplicity of Harris's stories, combined with the repetitive confusion, violence, noise and damage can be quite tiresome.

While the whole of the trilogy might also be considered a story of retribution, no such defect mars Faulkner's work. One of his greatest artistic achievements is his meaningful treatment of simple themes; and indeed, while retribution as a theme is pervasive in the trilogy, Faulkner's shading of parallel incidents, his ability to vary the outcome, the motivation, and the mode of retribution and to present the frustrating lack of retribution heightens the already complex language and structural incongruities in the work as a whole. For instance, Faulkner's treatment of the all too frustrating lack of meaningful retribution in *The Hamlet*, besides indicating Tull's (indeed, Frenchman's Bend's) frontier attitude of "It aint none of our business," (H 72) gives rise to much of the tension in the novel. This is even more true of *The Town*, for Jefferson's bourgeois morality hinders the townspeople from taking even such socially acceptable retributions as Ratliff's mainly economic and intellectual attacks on Flem in *The Hamlet*. All but Tom Tom and Turl's victory over Flem
in *The Town* and Ratliff's effective retribution on Clarence Snopes in *The Mansion* produce somewhat hollow results. These hollow results perhaps reflect the twentieth century confusion of ethics with stability and of respectability with the dollar. For instance, by worsting I. O. Snopes, Mrs. Hait unwittingly helps Flem remove one more obstacle towards his goal of gaining respectability in Jefferson. Even more irony lies in the fact that it is Flem Snopes and not Gavin Stevens (the most vocal of Faulkner's anti-Snopes triumvirate) that rids Jefferson of the rapacious family in *The Town*. That *The Mansion* contains a huge range of effects (from murder to Ratliff's comic victory) which evolve from the simple theme of retribution is additional proof of Faulkner's literary artistry in varying his treatment of this theme.

Faulkner's humorous episodes, although far more complicated than Harris's, have a similar tendency towards this recurrence of retribution as a theme. But what complicates Faulkner's humorous episodes thematically is his predilection to tell more than one story at a time, to use a large number of characters, and more importantly, to extend the simplest form of retribution, violence, into realms of a more bourgeois nature, among which one of his favorites is that of business. In fact, the variety of ways in which Faulkner's characters get back at evil-doers is one reason that the world of *The Hamlet* seems more real than that of *Sut Lovingood*. And thus, Faulkner, by varying the forms of retribution and by presenting
realistic half-victories, complicates a simple theme. The effect is one of credibility; and the reader's reaction is likely to be incredulous wonder that so much might be wrought from so little.

Faulkner and Harris, in their use of retribution as a theme, find various reasons for this human act. Both writers make use of the most obvious of all reasons for getting back at someone — self-interest. This personal retribution, personal because it is primarily motivated by self-interest, is perhaps the most realistic of frontier retributions. And certainly it is not one, especially in the South, conducive to the peaceful settlement of quarrels. For, as one critic points out, "recourse to legal aid to redress a wrong was often a confession of cowardice, for the Southerner felt a man should fight his own battles." And Sut and Wirt Staples, whose fear of law of any sort is overcome by whiskey, do just that. Many of Faulkner's characters similarly avenge themselves on those who have wronged them. Excellent examples of this type of retribution are Harris's "Sicily Burn's Wedding" and Faulkner's "Centaur in Brass" episode in The Town.

Neither Faulkner nor Harris fail to give suitable reasons for their character's retribution; but surprisingly, Harris, who is usually overly generous in finding reasons for Sut to retaliate, presents Sut with a very human reason for taking
retribution on the Burns family — he is hurt by their social slight. Sut's motivation for this retribution reflects one attribute more indicative of him as a human than as a stereotyped frontiersman. As he thinks of the Burns's snobbery, he remembers Sicily's prank, "I were sloungin round the house for they hadn't had the manners to ask me in...I were pow'fully hurt 'bout it and happened to think -- 'SODA!' So I set in a-watchin for a chance to do somethin!" (SL 49) What he does do brings pain to everyone inside the house. He puts a basket over the bull's head; the bull backs against the beehive, and continues to back into the wedding feast, by which time the bull, Sut says, "were the leader of the biggest and the maddest army of bees in the world." (SL 50) The people who are hurt are so riotously humorous in their antics, at least as Sut describes them, that we never consider their pain. For instance, "Missis Clapshaw" is described on top of the table, "a-fightin bees like a mad windmill with her calico cap in one hand for a weapon and a cracked frame in t'other; and a-kickin and a-spurrin like she were riding a lazy hoss after the doctor; and a-screamin "Rape," 'Fire,' and 'Murder' as fast as she could name 'em over." (SL 52) As might already be indicated, the pain of the wedding guests is removed through Sut's language and the fast action. Moreover, his own nonchalance about the event tends to further remove us from any real sense of pain. For instance, he describes the wedding as the most "misfortunate...since Adam married that heifer -- what
were so fond of talkin to snakes and eatin apples...."

(SL 55) Further, Sut says, Sicily's wedding "were the worst one for noise, disappointment, scare, breakin things, hurtin, trouble, vexation of spirit, and general swellin."

(SL 55-56) The humorous way in which Sut admits his meanness -- "If I were just as smart as I am mean and ornery, I'd be President of a wildcat bank in less'n a week" (SL 56) -- removes the last traces of any conceivable disapproval, for Sut knows his own foibles.

Faulkner's treatment of the theme of personal retribution in the "Centaur in Brass" passage in *The Town* is far more complex. Rarely content to tell a single story, here he combines two stories of retribution so that there is a split in the forces for good; and, characteristically, Flem stands in static opposition to this divided force. The chase is a minor episode in the whole story of Flem's defeat as power plant superintendent. Turl's adultery with Tom Tom's young bride offers more than enough motivation for Tom Tom's attack on Turl; and Turl's shock, if not necessarily his fear, is mitigated by an element of fantasy which arises from the fact that Charles narrates Gowan's narration of Harker's mere supposition of what happened when Turl climbed in the window and found "to his horrid surprise...Tom Tom lying fully dressed beneath the quilt with a naked butcher knife in his hand." (T 26) Only on this half-real frontier would no one get hurt in a situation such as this. In the ditch after
their furious chase the two Negroes confederate when they realize what has happened and, as Gavin tells Chick, they reach "a rationality of perspective" and realize that "Tom Tom's home [was] not violated by Tomey's Turl but by Flem Snopes; Turl's life and limbs put into jeopardy not by Tom Tom but by Flem Snopes." (T 28) And with this realization, their inordinately clever retribution on Flem proceeds. Having joined forces (in itself a victory over Flem, who well knows that he can not resist the power of concerted effort of any opposition), they put the brass where Flem originally said he wanted it -- in the water tower. Thus, they successfully retaliate against Flem. But here, where Faulkner, by giving a sign of Flem's human emotion at the news of his defeat, could have illustrated any aspect of Flem's warped humanity, he chooses to leave him at an abstract level by understating the results: "Though by the time water...would begin to taste brassy enough for someone to think about draining the tank, ...it wouldn't be Mr. Snopes. Because he was no longer superintendent now...." (T 29) The implications of the parallel between Flem's and Tom Tom's cuckoldry are clear; Tom Tom is an active agent for good. Turl, by virtue of his humanity (one indication of which might be his sexual appetite in contrast to Flem's sterility) joins the forces for good, and Flem's inhumanity is challenged in a meaningful way by the two Negroes, who are motivated to retaliate by Flem's actions against them.
The theme, as it is used for humor by Faulkner and Harris, provides for comic reversal. The Negroes are, at least in Flem's scheming mind, too stupid to grasp his design and in their furious chase we laugh at them and thus, since they are subject to ridicule in the sub-plot, their ultimate victory is a comic reversal. Sut's victories are universally those of the theoretical underdog. While his language alone reduces him to a bumpkin, his victories prove him to be equally as clever and imaginative as Tom Tom and Turl.

Surprisingly, neither Faulkner nor Harris use this type of retribution very much. Although their frontier milieu is a place where we would expect to find abundant personal retribution, in their humorous episodes, neither writer emphasizes this theme. Faulkner, of course, prefers to use it in such serious stories as Mink's two murders; and had Harris consistently used this theme, Sut's characteristic good-naturedness and fantastic speed in outrunning trouble would have been much less credible.

Other reasons for retribution might be described as altruistic, for they involve the recognition of and a desire to protect something other than oneself. The object may be another person or some principle the protagonist admires. Harris's and Faulkner's humorous use of this version of the retribution theme usually stems from a situation involving a wronged friend or a broken code. The works of both authors
contain good examples of the wronged friend motif as both writers find it conducive to heightened humor in that they can make the wrong which is inflicted seem humorous. Certainly, "Rare Ripe Garden Seed," the story of Mary Mastin's early child, is in itself humorous. Two more stories, "Contempt of Court -- Almost" and "Trapping a Sheriff," provide the even more humorous retributions that Sut and Wirt Staples take on Sheriff John Dolton. In Faulkner's "Mule in the Yard" passage, the instance of Mr. Hait's business ventures with I. O. Snopes (the former drives I. O.'s team of mules across the path of oncoming freight trains in order to get the railroad company's indemnity) heightens the humor of the episode itself. When Mr. Hait's miscalculations lead to his untimely death, Mrs. Hait receives the money for both her husband and I. O.'s mules by claiming that the mules were her husband's property. By driving his mules through her yard, I. O. is retaliating on what he finds a personal injury -- that Mrs. Hait will not give him the assessed value of the mules -- and Mrs. Hait, for both I. O.'s odiousness and Mr. Hait's death, still seeks revenge. Indeed, part of Mrs. Hait's effective retribution on I. O. Snopes (shooting his mule) adds another parallel to Faulkner's symbolic opposition of horses and mules and women, a symbolic theme which is pervasive in his frontier milieu.
The theme of altruistic retribution itself provides precisely the type of story Faulkner enjoyed telling -- a single story which necessitates at least one incident within another. No one need doubt that Faulkner's temptation to tell more than one story was indeed satiated by the use of this theme. Flem's dishonesty, itself the subject of "Centaur in Brass," provides the superficial reason for Gavin taking Manfred De Spain to court. And Gowan's attack on De Spain's EMF roadster is motivated by De Spain's rash teasing of Gavin, while the tire-puncture incident itself heightens the De Spain-Stevens rivalry and thus partly conduces to both the "Rouncewell Panic," perhaps the most lively and truly laughable of Faulkner's bourgeois humor, and Gavin's fist fight with De Spain.

This last incident also provides a good example of the broken code as motivation for retribution. One of the reasons for Gavin's attack on De Spain is the mayor's and Eula's amorous dancing, which conflicts with Gavin's principle that "chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not." (T 76) Already we see that one aspect of this theme is the necessity of value judgments. And value judgment involves both a code and an individual who follows that code. In this incident both Gavin's code and his consistency in following that code are humorous as they are signs of his quixotic, abstracting nature and his bourgeois consciousness, which is perhaps the best, at least the most fully realized
one in Faulkner's canon.

But far more humorous (outside of Gavin's values and often outside of Jefferson itself) are the values of the frontier milieu. And as frontier humorists, both Harris and Faulkner use the aspects of this theme not only to predicate riotous confusion but also to illuminate and find humor in the people who follow variations of this code. As a device for revealing strange values, the adherence to which is apt to make the character at the outset of the story seem ridiculous, the broken code is certainly a superb theme. Although somewhat more than usually cruel when he inflicts pain on the slovenly, lazy son of a preacher, Sut uses the boy as an object of one of his pranks because he broke the frontier code of activity per se. Another object of Sut's scorn is the city-slicker, usually a Yankee. Perhaps generally referring to the stupid outsiders who sometimes annoy Sut while he tells his tales and in specific reference to the Yankee razor-grinder, Sut praises the frontier (in his terms, Knoxville) for taking retribution on those who break the code. Part of the frontier's retribution, Sut says, is: "sweepin out the inside of stuffed-up fellers' skulls clean of all ole rusty, cobweb, bigoted ideas." (SL 27) Rather than leave a job half done, the frontiersman replaced these ideas, Sut says, with "somethin new and active,...one king idea sure...: If I gits away alive, durn if ever I come here again." (SL 27)

Faulkner's most humorous use of this theme in frontier humor may be in Ratliff's version of "Fool About a Horse" in
The Hamlet. For, by explaining Ab's motivation, Ratliff illuminates the eldest Snopes's regional code.

...that Pat Stamper...had come in and got actual Yoknapatawpha County cash dollars to rattling....When a man swaps horse for horse, that's one thing and let the devil protect him if the devil can. But when cash money starts changing hands, that's something else. ...it's like when a burglar breaks into your house and flings your things ever which way even if he dont take nothing. It makes you twice as mad. (H 34-35)

And Ab's furious adherence to this code reduces him to the figure of a virtual automaton. Ratliff explains the "pure fate" which involves two chance facts -- Pat Stamper's camping in Jefferson on that day and Ab's having money -- plus Ab's motivation to revenge the broken code, "...the entire honor and pride of the science and pastime of horse-trading in Yoknapatawpha County depending on him [Ab] to vindicate it." (H 35) Ab's ridiculousness in following this code and the tools of his trade, "a dimes worth of salt peter...and a number ten fish hook," provide more than enough detachment for an effective comic reversal and this partly through the theme of altruistic or social retribution.

The theme of retribution for the broken code is effective for both parody and satire. By describing Ab's motivation in ridiculously high flown English ("to vindicate the honor and pride"), Faulkner, or rather Ratliff, ridicules Ab himself and to some extent parodies the simple motivation, as well as the language of the backwoodsman in the tradition of regional humor as exemplified by Harris's Sut Lovingood.
And Harris, by giving Sut such human emotions as fear and sexual desire and making him follow a code at least somewhat less mythical than that of man in the wilderness, may be parodying the earlier regionalists. In fact, Bernard DeVoto notes the wide range of ultimate effects derived from the Southwestern humorists' curious mixtures of fact and fiction. In their works, he finds, "fantasy and realism exist side by side. In the same way, burlesque and extravaganza, which are theoretically derived from fantasy, are hardly to be separated from satire, a derivative of realism." Both Harris's *Sut Lovingood* and Faulkner's trilogy exhibit such wide ranges of effect. In part this range derives from the fact that there are numerous frontier milieus and thus almost any statement might be considered some sort of distortion of one of these milieus. Harris and, to an even greater extent, Faulkner, although his distortions are less consistently humorous than his predecessor's, manifestly delight in this wide range of effects.

Harris uses the theme of retribution, both social and personal, as a vehicle for satire. The Yankees, lawyers, sheriffs, and lazy boys that Sut retaliates against represent people and human traits that Harris scorned. In *Sut Lovingood* Harris generally achieves a comic effect as well as satiric propaganda. He presents his hatred for these people in both the concrete details of their wrongs, as Sut describes them -- a tavern keeper served him food which he says "A hungry dog wouldn't have smelt...nor a experienced buzzard
even lit onto it..." (SL 197) -- and in the more subjective value judgments of Sut -- "He were a mighty mean Yankee razor-grinder...." (SL 26) A post-war sketch which did not appear in Sut Lovingood indicates how vitriolic Harris's satire might be. In "Sut Lovengood, on the Puritan Yankee," Sut merely rails against the Northeners, and the only element of humor in this sketch is Sut's down-to-earth language. And in Sut Lovingood, whenever the reader recognizes Harris's more direct diatribes, as in Sut's trip with "old Abe Linkhorn" -- "Our fool-killers have done their duty, and consequently the South have seceded" (SL 227) -- Sut himself becomes somewhat less humorous. In general, however, Harris, in his use of retribution as a theme in Sut Lovingood, achieves both comedy and satire. Where he does not use such a theme to provide him with a story, he is less humorous, and to the modern reader, perhaps less effective as a satirist.

Faulkner also uses the theme of social retribution for satiric effects. His "By the People" passage in The Mansion might well be considered satire on the Southern politicians in general and perhaps on those of northern Mississippi in particular. And, like Harris, in treating the politicians of his age, Faulkner emphasizes Clarence Snopes's hypocrisy -- a favorite theme of Southern political satirists. In The Town De Spain's laughable act of retribution on the "old mossbacks," Mayor Adams and Colonel Sartoris -- that of hanging their law which prohibited automobiles on the streets of
Jefferson on the walls of the courthouse -- is perhaps mildly satiric. Further, in the "Spotted Horses" section of The Hamlet, the peasants' desire to get something for nothing which, ironically, is the same evil they think Flem guilty of, is perhaps a satiric statement about the poor whites' dog-eat-dog economics and the progress of Snopesism in Frenchman's Bend. While Faulkner is less consistently satiric in his stories of social retribution than Harris, both writers do realize the satiric possibilities of the theme.

Both authors are masters at combining the personal and social motivation of retribution. In "The Widow McCloud's Mare," Stillyards deserves Sut's retribution from both a personal and social point of view. Sut more than likely takes as a personal injury his ridiculously meager offer of "a gill of whiskey" as payment for helping him. And he commits the social sin of being a Yankee and a lawyer who got rich practicing on the "misfortunate devils" with whom Sut identifies. Thus, Sut is personally and socially motivated to retaliate. Ratliff's vision of Flem in Hell is also predicated by more than one motivation. Flem's shady note handling in the goat trade might be grounds for Ratliff's personal retribution. And his desire to see Eula marry someone who is more deserving of her might be the basis for the wronged friend motif. Further, his sense that Flem is economically ruthless might provide Ratliff with altruistic grounds for his intellectual and all too frustrating vision
of Flem amidst fire and brimstone. Of the two authors, Harris consistently combines the different analytical types of retribution far more than does Faulkner. This indicates perhaps how much Harris's polemical journalism affected his thematic considerations. The same fact also indicates that Faulkner represents motivation for retribution in a more realistic way than Harris. That Harris takes great pains to stack the cards against Sut's adversaries becomes obvious when one considers how often one meets a Yankee-cum-avaricious lawyer-cum-Congressman who "proffers to tend the Capital grounds in shares" in American literature.

But in their attitude towards retribution, especially as a comic theme, Faulkner and Harris have a parallel admiration for the necessary assertion of individualism in an act of retribution. This is not to say they admire violence or violent retribution. Rather, Harris and Faulkner create a comic effect by their use of the violence that retribution provides; and moreover, both condone in comic passages the retribution consistent with their milieus. One feels, as he reads their works, that both authors have a romantic love for, and a literary skill in presenting, the life of the frontier. Perhaps the essence of what both authors present in their comic episodes is the backwoodsman's perennial assertion of his sturdy individualism. While we laugh with him and at him, we rarely can bring ourselves to steadily dislike the mythical poor white.
While Harris uses his squabbles for comedy and satiric purposes, Faulkner surpasses Harris's efforts by magnifying this essentially simple theme into a complex orchestration of human response in a half-real, half-imaginary world. Part of Faulkner's artistry lies in his ability not only to achieve complex and varied effects from this theme, but in his ability to deal with many different themes in imaginative and meaningful ways. While the complexities of his treatments of the themes of love and power are less conducive to humor than the theme of retribution, they indicate the magnitude of the artistry in his trilogy. Even in the complexities of laughable humor Faulkner surpasses his predecessors. Nowhere in Sut Lovingood do we find such an imaginative retribution as Ratliff's damnation of Flem. And nowhere in Hooper's whole book of Simon Sugg's economic feats do we find anything as complex as Ratliff's goat trade.

Just as Faulkner's use of the theme of retribution is parallel to Harris's use in provoking humorous situations, some of his humorous plots and incidents within these plots have parallels in Southwestern humor. One such parallel is that between Sut's and Ratliff's attacks on figures of public prominence, figures remarkably alike for their hypocrisy, John Bullen and Clarence Snopes. Cleanth Brooks, in attempting to rectify some critical confusion as to what relation Ratliff's narration has to reality, says:
Apparently, it does not occur to them [the commentators] to allow for the broad embellishments of a tale which Ratliff devised and got circulating through the community and which was so good a story that it caught on, and by turning Clarence into a laughing stock made old Will Varner withdraw his support. 23

That this victory be played down as the tallest of tall tales -- that is, a tall tale on an already mythical frontier -- is neither consistent with thematic development nor with the artistic freedom that Faulkner has developed with such skill throughout his trilogy. Ratliff's and Sut's parallel comic victories are wholly within the tradition of Southwestern humor and similarly incorporate the confusion of man and animals. The humorous passages of action in Sut Lovingood arising from the same source are indeed innumerable; when they are not in fact the incident of humor itself, they are implied by Sut's language. In the trilogy versions of "The Waifs" and "Centaur in Brass" precisely the same sort of language implies the confusion of man and beast. Moreover, as we have seen, the "By the People," "Fool About a Horse," "Mule in the Yard," and "Spotted Horses" episodes focus on just such confusion as a major source of humor. In this last, the incident of an animal -- a large frontier animal -- being inside a house is the same incident that makes for the laughable humor of Harris's "Sicily Burns' Wedding."

Yet another parallel is found in the two authors' ability to provoke humor through the use of comments on the quality of food. Whether retribution or incredulous amazement motivates
the character, the effect is the same -- embarrassment to the proprietor. At "Tripetown," where Sut was served food and says, "I tried a bite, and it flew outen my mouth like there'd been a steel mattress spring coiled in my throat," (SL 196) he waits until there is a long line of dissatisfied customers behind him. He then gives the proprietor advice on making better coffee. To improve on the coffee now being served, Sut recommends, "just you -- instead of makin outen ole bootlets -- put in about half of a ole wool hat chopped-fine, finer nor you chops your hash say, into pieces a inch square. It will help the taste pow'ful, and not set the smell back a bit." (SL 197) Similarly humorous is Eck's question about the meat at Flem's cafe; and Faulkner, like Harris, emphasizes the number of people present. Eck says, "not even privately but right out loud where half a dozen strangers...heard him: 'Aint we supposed to be selling beef in these here hamburgers? I don't know jest what this is yet but it aint no beef.'" (T 33) These few examples in addition to those cited elsewhere in this thesis, reflect the multifarious possible plot and incident parallels between Harris and Faulkner. And similar parallels to other Southwestern humorists help to substantiate Faulkner's familiarity with the genre. Many of these are, like the Ike-cow story, so far removed from (and generally improved upon) their probable sources that the parallels can hardly be recognized.
The very difficulty of ascertaining precisely which incidents he did borrow and which he coined himself is testimony to Faulkner's artistry in topping his predecessor's yarns -- the principle from which the whole genre evolves. Through the invention of similar literary milieus, the choice and execution of a simple theme, and the use of similar plots and incidents, Faulkner, like Harris, creates a mythology. Faulkner's and Harris's mythologies are those of the backwoods, "mythologies," as Constance Rourke says, "which men disbelieved in and still riotously enjoyed, heaping invention on invention."²⁶
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV

1 Howe, pp. 22-23.


3 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

4 George E. Woodberry, America in Literature (New York, 1903), p. 159, as quoted by Blair in Native American Humor, p. 75.

5 Cash, p. 81.

6 Ibid., p. 72.

7 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

8 William Faulkner, Faulkner in the University, p. 29.

9 Eby, p. 18.

10 See The Lovingood Papers, ed. Ben Harris McClary, 1962-1963. This periodical is in the process of publishing those "Sut" stories which are not incorporated in Sut Lovingood. Because these stories are published in their original form, the language quoted from them in this thesis will show more grammatical and orthographical deviations than those quotes from Sut Lovingood, ed. Brom Weber (New York, 1954).

11 Brooks, p. 10.

12 Quoted from the Texas Monument, July 9, 1851, by Mody C. Boatright, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (New York, 1949), p. 16.


15 Howe, p. 7.

16 Brooks, pp. 189-190.

17 See p. 127 of Chapter V of this thesis.

18 Eby, p. 17.

19 Ibid., p. 16.
Harris's invention of Sut as a playful scoundrel whose code is distorted, but essentially real, might be considered a parody both on the myths of the old South of the seaboard states and on the already stylized exaggerated hunter-giant, such as Crockett. "Blown Up With Soda" is a good example. It is unlikely that such riotous action would have been a part of the myth of the old cultured South or that earlier strong men would have been duped by merely a beautiful woman.

De Voto, p. 241.


Brooks, p. 235.

Brom Weber cites yet another parallel (which, although not relevant to the trilogy per se, again reflects the connection between the two authors) when he writes of "the basically-identical plot structure of Harris's uncollected "Well! Dad's Dead" and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying." (SL xiii-xiv)

Faulkner's "Fool About a Horse" episode does have parallels with Longstreet's "Horse Swap" in both character motivation, that of wanting to beat the other man in a trade which is viewed more as a sport than as a business, and in the comic reversal. A further similarity is the figure of the small boy in each story. But Faulkner, through his repetition of trading, the reappearance of the same horse throughout the trading, and through the symbolic relevance of horses and cream separators, manifestly excels Longstreet in the presentation of pure farce.

Constance Rourke, "Examining the Roots of American Humor," *American Scholar*, IV (Spring, 1935), 251. John Cullen, perhaps unwittingly, reveals the importance of Faulkner's place in the continuation of this literary genre when he speaks about the "Spotted Horses" section of *The Hamlet*. He says: "The invented details in this story are absurd. Anyone would know better than to chain a string of wild ponies to a barbed wire as the Texan did in the story. Much less, a man from Texas. Guts would have been strung about in short order."

V. Character

The complexities of Harris's and especially Faulkner's milieus, themes, and structures culminate in the two authors' characterizations. In this chapter these frontier characters are divided into two analytical groups: thematic and structural. In the introductory section I further group them in relation to the numerous stereotyped frontiers.

The similarity of the two authors' milieus, themes, and structures perhaps suggest parallels in characterization. Both authors' characters reflect unbelievable and inventive aspects of mythology. And because Harris's and Faulkner's mythologies are wholly or partly comic, their characters are often types rather than individuals. These typed characters seem to be real people partly because they are contrasted with fully developed characters and partly because the literary frontiers themselves are stylized.

This stylization is not without historical precedent. In fact, as early as 1782, Crevecoeur, in his essay, "What is an American," divides America into three segments -- the costal (and in the North) industrialized cities, the near frontier, and the far frontier. He finds American westward expansion to result from the pioneers' conquest of the wilderness which precedes the settling of the land. Further, according to Crevecoeur, the men of these various Americas
differ considerably. For the far frontier attracts those men who are adventurers purely for the sake of adventure. Almost totally undisciplined, these men live like pigs -- better, like wild boar -- and relish a society without institutions. On the other hand, the settlers of the near frontier build a more stable society, one suitable to their agrarian economy which in itself implies their greater interest in a community. Crevecoeur finds that their common motivation plus their heterogeneity tends to make them more tolerant and thus more democratic than either their hyper-individualistic precursors or the urban population which was to some extent already ethnically grouped by 1782. In relation to the stylized nineteenth century Souths, (rather than the total America Crevecoeur outlined in the eighteenth century) these three categories need very little modification. Characteristically less industrialized than the North, the Southern seabord has always reflected a more polished, Europeanized, and aristocratic culture than that of the interior. The far frontier of the South was reputedly even more violent than its Northern counterpart. Thus, in relation to America in general, the stylized South contained the uttermost extremes of Americans -- from the quasi-bestial pioneers to the effete aristocrats.

The range in the genre of Southwestern humor encompasses such a figure of the far frontier as Hooper's Simon Suggs and such an aristocrat as Longstreet's Virginian.
In Sut Lovingood, these contrasts are less vivid. But such ruthless scoundrels as Bullen and the proprietor at Tripetown certainly represent the dregs, if not the core, of the far frontier already moved west; and were Harris’s political sympathies for the South less militant, the weak intellectuals that interrupt Sut could as well be Southern as Northern. That is, one feels that Sut would hate their ilk whatever their origin, as the essential conflict between them is one between the frontiersman and the non-frontiersman. Faulkner’s trilogy contains such figurative beasts as Byron Snopes’s Indian children and such ineffectual aristocrats as Mr. Backus, whose life in the trilogy is justifiable only as a further illumination of the similar figure, Gavin Stevens. While Gavin is not as inactive as Backus, their tendency to contemplate rather than do is similar and neither have a place on the frontier, far or near.

Even a cursory examination of Sut, Ratliff, and Flem in terms of Crevecoeur’s frontier groups reveals the raconteurs' similarities and some of the origins of Flem’s hatefulness. Ratliff, like Sut, stands for decency and fair play, notably a facet of the near frontier -- the peace-loving and constructive American’s real home. Flem, like Simon Suggs, is ruthless as he begins his rise. But Flem Snopes commits the most grievous of crimes in terms of frontier ethics. He figuratively moves from west to east, from, as Gavin says, "scratch (scratch? scratch was euphemism indeed for where he started
from)...* (T 283) to a house that Ratliff says "might have been the solid aristocratic symbol of Alexander Hamilton...." (M 154) And Flem embodies the worst of all three Americas: like the most odious of pioneers, he is ruthlessly destructive as he conquers nature; like the worst of the near frontiersmen, he is only interested in those institutions, such as law, which further his advance; and, like the worst of urban people, he values the trappings of civilized man, not the ideals of honesty and social leadership which at their best they represent. Flem is neither the masculine American pushing westward, the honest settler striving for a better community, nor a cultured aristocrat. Perhaps he represents the worst aspects of both nineteenth and twentieth century nouveaux riches without even the ingratiating, comic element of bad taste -- for Flem's sense of utility per se leads him to buy at least the appropriate veneer of respect, and this at the lowest possible cash expense. In part, then, much of Flem's hatefulness stems from his un-American aspects in terms of the stylized frontier. Social prestige, the pursuit of wealth and adventure are American goals; but to stop when one succeeds, to gloat with satisfaction is the antithesis of all the best American characteristics. In these terms, Flem Snopes has no prototype in nineteenth century frontier humor.

Still, both Harris and Faulkner do create characters who roughly correspond to the three Americas Crevecoeur saw in the eighteenth century. While the insights that derive from placing these characters on the various frontiers reveal the
two authors' keen sensitivities to basic American stereotypes, the similarities between Harris's and Faulkner's frontier characters are substantiated when these characters are analytically grouped.

Both authors create thematic and structural characters, and both use parallel techniques of characterization. Their thematic characters are often caricatures; but the major structural characters, such as Sut and Ratliff, and Gavin and Charles, are real characters. The minor structural characters such as George in *Sut Lovinggood*, and Het and Harker in *The Town*, are useful for their language alone, which, while it does reveal their various personalities, does not make them important characters. These characters exist, then, chiefly for the language they use, and in George's case, to ask Sut the questions which lead him into his narrations.

The major structural characters are obviously also thematic characters, but it is their structural importance that reveals them as complete personalities -- at least in contrast to the thematic characters.

For these thematic characters are often caricatures, and while Faulkner's caricatures may appear to be real people at times and no less than demigods at other times, the two authors use similar methods in characterizing these figures. Commonly, Harris and Faulkner emphasize the few physical or mental aspects of these caricatures and thereby indicate the particular aspects of good or evil they intend these figures to personify.
In *Sut Lovingood*, all of Sut's enemies are categorically evil, while in the trilogy, neither the Snopeses, nor the anti-Snopeses are entirely good or evil. In grouping his characters in this way, Faulkner achieves a more realistic and more complex representation of the forces in his basic conflicts. The Snopeses have their Eck; and the anti-Snopeses have Henry Armstid. No such realism complicates *Sut Lovingood*.

But this is not the only way in which Faulkner's thematic characters are more realistic than Harris's, for Faulkner tends to treat them not as caricatures, but as real people. And the complexities of these characters are furthered by Faulkner's shifting points of view, comparing them to various standards, and treating them in different languages. Thus, as they interact they may gain or lose certain qualities as different narrators describe them and as they come in contact with other thematic characters; and while Harris's similar figures remain black or white, Faulkner's seem to be grey-toned, and this, like that of his milieu, an oscillating grey at that.

Because of his wider thematic range, the sheer length of the work, and Faulkner's ability to integrate the actions of an immense and varied group of people in his chronicle, there are many characters who have no prototypes in *Sut Lovingood* even though they may resemble other characters of frontier authors or incorporate elements of frontier humor. Such grotesque figures as Ike, Mink, Goodyhay and many of the bourgeois
characters, such as the Mallisons and Linda, have few parallels in Harris's work. Still, for all the exceptions, many of Faulkner's thematic and structural characters do resemble figures in *Sut Lovingood*.

**II**

Both authors create thematic characters who are paragons of frontier masculinity. Eula's two lovers, Hoake McCarron and Major De Spain, have a parallel in Sut Lovingood's friend, Wirt Staples. McCarron and De Spain both represent virility and masculinity in conjunction with Eula's fertility. However, they are no more masculine than Sut's ally against Sheriff Dalton, Wirt Staples, himself married to a woman "purtty as a hen canary," (SL 152) who, as Sut describes him, might well be Eula's match.

[Wirt's] britches were buttoned tight round his loins and stuffed 'bout half into his boots. His shirt bagged out above and were as white as milk; his sleeves were rolled up to his arm-pits and his collar as wide open as a gate. The muscles on his arms moved about like rabbits under the skin, and onto his hips and thighs they played like the swell on the river. His skin were clear red and white, and his eyes a deep, sparklin, wicked blue, while a smile fluttered like a hummin-bird round his mouth all the while. When the State Fair offers a premium for men like they now does for jackasses, I means to enter Wirt Staples, and I'll git it, if there's five thousand entries. (SL 145)

No less a critic than F. O. Matthieson substantiates the fact that Wirt is truly a character of immense proportions when he
Wirt is the common man in his full stature." Less common, but as much a "premium" man as Wirt, Hoake McCarron, who enters Frenchman's Bend, Ratliff says, "like a cattymount into a sheep pen.... Like a wild buck from the woods jumping the patch fence and already trampling them local carrots and squashes...." (M 117) And De Spain is described as being a match for Eula. While Jefferson was not yet against Flem Snopes nor "in favor of adultery, sin," (T 15) as Charles puts it, they were in favor of what Gavin calls "the divinity of simple unadulterated uninhibited immortal lust" (T 15) which Manfred and Eula represent. Besides being "the Jefferson Richard Lion-heart of the twentieth century," (T 13) then, Manfred is like McCarron and Wirt Staples in his masculinity and virility. All are type characters, and, while Faulkner's characters are gentlemen, it is their virility that Faulkner emphasizes for thematic reasons. Their possible prototype, Wirt Staples, represents almost a frontier deity to Sut. He is common man, witty, happy-go-lucky, and, as one critic finds him, in every sense a frontier "hero."7

Both McCarron and De Spain meet their match in Faulkner's bucolic goddess, Eula Varner, whose prototype may well have been Harris's Sicily Burns. In fact, Eby notes the same parallel:

Eula Varner is not the swooning female of the sentimental Southern novel...She is instead a raw physical female...The emphasis on corporeal substance rather than ethereal
intangibles was also characteristic of descriptions of the female of the earlier humorists. George W. Harris's characterization of Sicily Burns...delighted his masculine audience.®

Sut describes Sicily as being "gal all over, from the point of her toe-nails to the end of the longest hair on the highest knob of her head -- gal all the time, everywhere, and one of the excitingest kind." (SL 38) Described in various languages, Eula's "corporeal substance" is similarly exciting. "Her entire appearance suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysic times -- honey in sunlight and bursting grapes...." (H 95) And, "even at ages nine and ten and eleven there was too much of breast, too much of buttock; too much of mammalian meat...." (H 100)

Both Harris and Faulkner find these female caricatures useful as objects for humorous description, for their ability to predicate events (such as "Blown Up With Soda," "Sicily Burns' Wedding," and Ratliff's damnation of Flem in The Hamlet), and as foils for the male characters -- Sut in Harris's work, and almost every male from Charles Mallison to Will Varner himself in Faulkner's trilogy. Indeed, Faulkner's treatment of Eula is far more complex both in terms of the multifarious languages used in connection with her as well as in terms of thematic development. From Charles Mallison's description, "Too much of maybe just glory...," (T 6) to Will Varner's earthy terminology, "confounded running bitch...," (H 145), the thought or the presence of Eula demands descriptions
which, besides revealing Eula's character, reflect the character who describes her. And of thematic significance is the fact that Flem is the one male in the trilogy who says absolutely nothing about her.

Faulkner's characterizations of Flem and Eula in *The Hamlet* reveal a close parallel to Harris's techniques of characterization. For both authors create caricatures through emphasis and exaggeration and thus, Sicily Burns, Eula, and Flem manifestly lack total personalities. In fact, by comparison to Flem (personal aggrandizement incarnate) and Eula (a demigoddess of fertility), even Sicily seems somewhat human. But Faulkner treats his caricatures differently than does Harris. Perhaps the most obvious change in Faulkner's caricatures can be seen in *The Town*. As Cleanth Brooks explains, "By daring to bring his rustic Helen...and his countrified Faustus out of the brooding countryside into a small town, Faulkner immediately risks trimming them down to size." And significantly, it is in *The Town* that we become aware of the humanity of both figures. Thus, partly for credibility and partly for thematic development, Faulkner shifts and treats Flem and Eula as human beings.

Eula's transformation in *The Town* is not very successful because here, as a would-be real person she is both a more credible and a more puzzling character. Brooks finds that "Faulkner, in his anxiety to have Eula's behavior baffle and shock Gavin Stevens, [may have] succeeded only too well and
produced a character whose behavior baffles and shocks the reader too.\textsuperscript{10} Certainly, without the aura of goddess about her, she becomes a less humorous figure. And when we see Flem as a human being in \textit{The Town},\textsuperscript{11} he becomes pitiful as well as odious. But it is precisely the fluctuating nature of Faulkner's treatment of Flem that creates tension in \textit{The Town} and even more effectively in \textit{The Mansion}.

Generally, as Mink's character in \textit{The Mansion} (where, as Howe puts it, Mink becomes "a creature with a kind of bottom-dog dignity\textsuperscript{12}") would indicate, Faulkner's characters are far less laughable than his caricatures. But his ability to shift his figures from caricatures to believable, humanly motivated people reflect some significant differences between Faulkner and Harris -- the most important of which is Faulkner's greater sense of humanity.

To Harris, caricature remains abstractions of, for example, laziness and stinginess. But to Faulkner all of his figures -- caricatures and characters alike -- are real people.\textsuperscript{13} While for comic effect, Faulkner is rarely more and often less a realist than Harris, in matters of characterization, he is infinitely more complex. For, viewing his figures as real people, Faulkner undoubtedly delights in finding standards by which these figures seem human, delights in just such incongruities as the hateful, avaricious innocence of Flem Snopes when he realizes he must educate himself in the ways of banking. But while, as real people, they add meaningful
depth and tension to Faulkner's trilogy -- a depth and tension that *Sut Lovingood* generally lacks -- it is in their roles as caricatures that Faulkner's thematic figures resemble the people we laugh at in the work of Harris and other Southwestern humorists.

Furthermore, Flem Snopes does have an obvious prototype in Hooper's Simon Suggs. Having said "Flem Snopes is cut from the same cloth as Simon Suggs," one critic describes their similarities:

The unscrupulous rise to power of Flem Snopes recalls the similar rise of Simon Suggs. Suggs' motto, "it is good to be shifty in a new country," would have served as well for Flem. Both men through a smooth even-tempered facility are able to manipulate the strings in unstable societies where neither law nor conscience are strong curbs (both, it should be noted, begin as clerks in general stores).

But while these are not the only parallels, for Flem is, like Simon, machine-like and perhaps pathologically self-centered, Faulkner's treatment of Flem resembles Harris's treatment of Sut's enemies more than Hooper's treatment of Simon. For Simon is capable of being humorous himself; Flem is not. And Simon Suggs is a far greater human being than Flem in *The Hamlet* -- for we see Simon's mind at work whereas we only see the results of Flem's scheming. In this, Flem resembles the proprietors, preachers, Yankee razor-grinders and lawyers that are objects of Sut's hatred. While there is no single figure in *Sut Lovingood* that is Flem's prototype, Faulkner's caricature does personify many of the evils that are characteristic of Sut's enemies, for Flem's qualities in *The Hamlet*
his avariciousness, stinginess, sobriety, and mechanical insensitivity — are all qualities to be found in Sut's antagonists.

Both Harris and Faulkner knew that personifications must remain at a distance to be humorous. And thus, the reason that such a caricature as Stillyards is a success as a comic type is that we never really see him as anything more than a human likeness in torturous contortions on top of Widow McCloud's mare. Faulkner's treatment of the lesser Snopeses would indicate his similar knowledge of comic technique but Flem Snopes is not really humorous; in fact, he is so much an abstraction that he lacks those rudiments of human nature that are necessary and in fact are the basis of comic characterization. As a personification, he can predicate many humorous situations through others' reactions to him and through the virtual helplessness he instills in other people. But Flem, as a living being, does not exist. Indeed, the success of The Hamlet partly lies in the fact that Flem, like Eula, is an abstraction.

Flem's larger-than-life aspects derive from Faulkner's distance from him. In merely attempting to locate Flem, we often find, like Ratliff, no more than "the straw bag, the minute tie, the constant jaw...." (H 151) And as a caricature, Flem is magnificently handled. In fact, one way in which he becomes larger-than-life is through the reader's frustration at Flem's lack of substance. Flem has a sort
of collective character -- that is, because he is not a person and is the bellwether of the Snopeses, he seems guilty of condoning if not causing events (such as Lump's peep show) with which he is not even connected. Perhaps Irving Howe describes this phenomenon as he explains the structure of *The Hamlet*. He finds that "the spiralling [of Faulkner's narrative method and events], the circling, the meandering, all have a way of coming back, with a comic exasperation and finality to the steady growth of Flem's power." Thus, as a sort of demi-god of evil and avariciousness, Flem is indeed larger-than-life, and this through Faulkner's extremely detached treatment that surpasses Harris's parallel distance from his caricatures. And Flem might as easily represent the sum of the traits of Sut's adversaries as that of his own family's traits.

Of lesser importance individually are Flem's cousins -- thematic characters all. *En masse*, they constitute one of the most hateful families in the annals of American literature.

...The Snopeses are invincible liars and thieves because they recognize almost none of the rules of decency or fair play. They cheat each other, the Varners, the whole community, even the shrewd Ratliff. And they do it so impersonally, imperturbably that their victims are left stupefied or in helpless and abject rage. There seems to be no way of stopping them until, like rodents, they have destroyed or eaten up everything in sight.

It is the creation of the Snopes family that testifies the truth of Cullen's remark that Faulkner knew "the cussedness to be found in humanity everywhere...."
As a group they represent many of mankind's most detestable vices. But they rarely embody more than one or two specific evils, and, thus, they seem at least somewhat credible in an only half-credible frontier. That is, a Snopes who inherited all the Snopes's evil traits would manifestly deserve Montgomery Ward's notion of the ideal of every Snopes -- to have "the whole world recognize him as THE son of a bitch's son of a bitch." (M 87) That none of the Snopeses deserve this title indicates the relative nature of their evil aspects. Even these lesser Snopeses appear somewhat human in contrast to Flem. Many of them have very close parallels in Sut Lovingood. Unlike Harris's villains, however, they often have very human weaknesses. That Faulkner's family contains such anti-Snopes figures as Eck and Wallstreet Panic and such grotesque figures as Ike and Mink reflects, as in the other aspects of his trilogy, a far greater range than Harris's. But the parallels in specific characters are numerous, and Faulkner, while he creates a family with more variety and greater deviations than Sut's enemies, parallels Harris in technique and the spirit of caricature.

Both authors describe these caricatures in terms of frontier animals. While Sut's passages of action often contain numerous animal references, Faulkner is generally more consistent in assigning animal-like qualities to the Snopeses. Greet finds that these qualities "reveal the essential vacuousness of those to whom they apply." Of these, excepting...
his cousin Flem, perhaps Lump is the most vacuous of the Snopes clan. He is very much like the devious, cheating proprietors in *Sut Lovingood* and becomes, through his fawning admiration for Flem, one of the most hateful of the Snopeses as he looks at the judge "with the lidless intensity of a rat...." (H 329) Lump himself finds the huge omniverous St. Elmo Snopes who "appeared to have gone to sleep chewing ..., 'worse than a rat.'" (H 323) Similarly, in *Sut Lovingood*, Old Skissim's middle boy's "eatin beat the eatin of a rat... [and his family] waked him to eat, and then had to wake him again to make him quit eatin." (SL 17-18) But Stillyards, who "looked like a cross atween a black snake and a fireman's ladder" (SL 69) is far less dangerous than Mink who, as Ratliff says, "seems to be a different kind of Snopes like a cotton-mouth is a different kind of snake." (H 92)

Further, the similarities between Clarence Snopes and Harris's caricatures of Parson John Bullen and Sheriff Dolton are numerous. Faulkner's figure is both hypocritical and an unprincipled politician. Clarence's unprincipled power is no more frightening than a stick of dynamite, "just as you dont mind a stick of dynamite until somebody fuses it." (M 297) And his brother, Doris, resembles Clarence "not only in size and shape but [in] the same mentality of a child and the moral principles of a wolverine." (M 295) Similarly, Sut's campmeeting girlfriend begs Bullen "not to tell on her. [But] he et her cookin, he promised her he'd keep dark -- and
then went straight and tole her man." And Sut comments on
his actions: "Weren't that real low-down wolf-mean?" (SL 82)

While other Snopeses, by their actions or characteristics,
are similar to Harris's and his contemporaries' figures, these do give an indication of the close parallel between Faulkner's and Harris's methods of dealing with thematic caricatures as well as the manifest similarities in specific characters. This is not to say that Faulkner deliberately builds on Harris's Aesopian caricatures. Rather, it reflects both authors' keen sensitivities to the power of frontier simile as a descriptive tool -- a sensitivity which, in Faulkner's case, may well have been engendered by his reading of Harris.

Furthermore, both authors' frontiersmen embody exaggerations of frontier qualities. Brom Weber finds that frontier humorists,

...grossly and sardonically exaggerate the qualities which enabled a man to triumph over circumstances: coarseness, endurance, decision, brutality, shrewdness, trickiness, speed, strength. Weakness, sentimentality, stupidity, regret, thoughtfulness, and respectability were handicaps for survival in a new country, therefore characteristics of the ludicrously inept and worthy only of contempt and ridicule.

(SL xxii)

While major characters such as Simon Suggs, Sut Lovingood, and to some extent V. K. Ratliff, and Flem Snopes embody these qualities, Faulkner's minor frontiersmen seem somewhat less fantastic than his predecessors' for he renders his characters more real by incorporating within a single character the
strengths and the weaknesses of the frontiersman. One such character is Will Varner. While he has the obvious frontier assets of virility and practicality, he is humorous because he has no speed or youth.

[He] cheerfully...declined to accept any such theory as female chastity other than as a myth to hoodwink young husbands with..., was engaged in a liaison with the...wife of one of his own tenants. He was too old, he told her baldly and plainly, to be tomcatting around at night.... (H 141-142)

But the two authors' frontierswomen present more comic incongruities. Their frontier attitudes, like the frontiersmen's, conflict with those prevalent in the rest of America; and because they are women, these characters flout our concepts of femininity as well. While frontier humor is normally masculine, both Harris and Faulkner are well aware of the comic incongruities of the independent frontierswoman. For instance, Mrs. Hait and Mrs. Yardley strongly resemble each other; and both authors, in portraying the independent nature of these women, emphasize their masculine outlook and expression. Another comic woman in Sut Lovingood is the "widder McKildrin" whose only daughter has a child five months after her marriage. Perhaps even more humorous to the nineteenth century audience than to more modern sensibilities is her duping her astonished son-in-law through a copious allowance of "swell-skull" whiskey and her story of the "rare-ripe garden-seed's" power on growing things. A parallel deviation from the typed outrage of the wronged girl's mother is Mrs.
Varner who, in her only real appearance in the trilogy, reacts to Eula's pregnancy and Jody's yelling with even more frontier incongruity than Mrs. Yardley when she says, "I'll fix both of them. Turning up pregnant and yelling and cursing here in the house when I am trying to take a nap." (H 144)

In matters of characterization, then, Faulkner parallels Harris both in his creation of similar characters and in his methods of creation. While Faulkner's characters perhaps encompass a wider range between comic caricature and complex human beings, the twentieth century author's greater artistry in relating character to character makes even the simplest of caricatures appear somewhat more real than those of Harris. That is, Flem's inhumanity tends to make his cousins seem more human than they are. Only when one considers that by comparison to Flem and his cousins a figure such as Will Varner in *The Hamlet* seems a sympathetic human being, does one discover Faulkner's artistry in creating and sustaining as immense a group of thematic characters as the trilogy contains.

III

Much of the humor in *Sut Lovingood* derives directly from Harris's structural-thematic character who, because of his narrations, seems a real person. Faulkner uses a similar
device, but consistent to his greater complexity and greater artistry, he creates not one, but three structural characters, Gavin Stevens, Charles Mallison, and V. K. Ratliff. Gavin and Charles are indeed the sources, even the subjects of much of the bourgeois humor in the trilogy. Significantly, neither appear in *The Hamlet* because the Heidelberg Ph.D. and middle-class child are not in fact very closely connected with the frontier humor of the trilogy.

One of the salient aspects of the box-like structure is that the narrator's character can be revealed through his language; but, except for retelling "what Ratliff said" and for providing him with an interested audience, neither Gavin nor Charles are consistently colorful in this frontier tradition. But in characterizing them through their language, Faulkner takes care to give himself range. For, it is the nature of small boys to assimilate others' languages and at any moment Charles Mallison may shift from Gavin's romantic, Latinate, heroic style to Ratliff's earthy speech. Similarly, Gavin, for all his learning, likes Ratliff's countrified speech and finds it useful in his political appeal as county attorney. Thus, while Charles does tell some episodes, the frontier humor in them is nearly always in someone else's language; and Gavin's flowing verbosity may find its way into either Charles or V. K. Ratliff's speech. The use of these three narrators heightens the possible language incongruities and therefore, unlike Harris's presentation of just two
realities (those of Sut and George), Faulkner presents numerous realities: "Just as," Faulkner said in his University of Virginia lectures, "when you examine a monument you will walk around it, you are not satisfied to look at it from just one side."  

Faulkner explained Gavin Stevens's point of view as being that "of someone who had made of himself a more or less artificial man through his desire to practice what he had been told was a good virtue, apart from his belief in virtues, what he had been told, trained by his respect for education in the old classical sense." Gavin is obviously no frontiersman. His learnedness is perhaps paralleled in Sut Lovingood only by an itinerant encyclopedia salesman, who, for correcting Sut on his quotation of the marriage ceremony, is answered, "You go to hell, mistofer," (SL 124) and receives the following tirade for using the word "repose" for "sleep." "You must talk English to me or not git yourself understood. I weren't educated at no Injun or nigger school." (SL 136) Gavin's romanticism, his eagerness to see others in his own image, and the quixotic but ineffectual battles that rage within his own mind separate him from the traditionally realistic approach common to Faulkner's and Harris's portraits of frontiersmen. And one might hypothesize that Gavin Stevens, in the world of Frenchman's Bend, would be equally as welcome as Harris's encyclopedia salesman. While Gavin's connection with the best of Southwestern humor is somewhat tenuous, his conscious
playing with words, his literary training and his lawyer's love for Latinate language gives him some parallels to Baldwin, whose Flush Times in Alabama reveals a similar sensibility. And Gavin's learnedness is a superb foil for both Ratliff and Charles.

Faulkner said that Charles's mentality "was the mirror which obliterated all except truth, because the mirror didn't know the other factors existed." However, more or less surrounded as he is by Ratliff and Gavin, Charles rarely appears to have a distinct personality. He presents a credible and useful link between Gavin and Ratliff during the years that Gavin is away. Both Gavin and Ratliff seem to think that, as a child, Charles should learn about Snopesism; therefore, as a prompter for the stories they tell, Charles is used by Faulkner as Harris uses George. But Charles is capable, if only through his close association with Ratliff, of retelling stories of frontier humor and using a few vivid frontier images of his own. For instance, his description of Montgomery Ward Snopes is one of the most humorous frontier images in the trilogy. When Montgomery Ward returned to Jefferson to open his "ATELIER MONTY," "he wasn't in uniform..." Charles explains, "but in a black suit and a black overcoat without any sleeves and a black thing on his head kind of drooping over one side like an empty cow's bladder made out of black velvet, and a long limp-ended bow tie..." (T 120) However, Charles is generally a sort of innocent
nonentity in *The Town*. Faulkner uses him as a structural character whose youth and training, at least in theory, make him capable of a wide range of languages. And as an errand boy for Gavin and a listener for Ratliff, he is in a position to give a balanced and at time a penetrating narration of event.31

One critic does describe Charles as "a precocious critic of the society that rejects Eula and accepts Flem." Cert-
tainly, his asides are often both truthful and humorous -- a superbly vivid example of which is Charles's parenthetical characterization of Flem: "...the old fish-blooded son of a bitch who had a vocabulary of two words, one being No and the other Foreclose...." (M 215-216) However, Charles's ultimate value is that of a vehicle, not a strong personality; and many of the deficiencies of *The Town* are predicated, I think, by the realistically incredible range of languages Charles uses. If Faulkner uses Charles more as a device than as a person in *The Town*, he manifestly corrects this defect in *The Mansion*. In this novel Charles becomes an individual.

In both *The Town* and *The Mansion* Charles's growth reflects the passage of time; and because Charles grows at least to chronological maturity during modern times, it is through him that Faulkner reveals his own disenchantment with the youthful crass cocksureness of the contemporary bourgeoisie. While Charles's sophomoric wisdom is perhaps one of Faulkner's most artful indictments of modern life,33 Charles, as a realistic human being, seems less a figure of
any of the three frontiers. As a representative of bourgeois American youth, he lacks both Gavin's sense of form and Ratliff's humanity. Both as an innocent child and as a rather crass modern youth, Charles tends to heighten Gavin's and Ratliff's stature as realistic human beings.

This last structural character, Vladimir Krillytch Ratliff, is undoubtedly Faulkner's greatest achievement in characterizing a complex human being in the trilogy. Of significance to his original concept of the trilogy both as frontier humor and in terms of character is Faulkner's letter to Malcolm Cowley. Cowley quotes Faulkner: "I wrote them [the stories after "Spotted Horses," such as "The Hound" and "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard"] mainly...because 'Spotted Horses' had created a character I fell in love with: the itinerant sewing-machine agent...." Like Harris's Sut Lovingood, Ratliff perhaps seems even more human than he is by comparison to other characters. As Charles Allen comments, "Faulkner's most effective use of foil tactics is the masterful highlighting of Ratliff's humanity. By opposing him to the inhumanity of everyone else...Faulkner makes them all Ratliff's foils." And John Arthos enthusiastically comments on the success of this characterization:

The great achievement of the work is the characterization of Ratliff....The picture of the stooped man in the blue cotton shirt, sitting on the porch of the store, whittling, seeing everything while appearing to see nothing, matching wits with all, is memorable to the point that it is exactly as if one saw him there. For art of this kind there can be no useful comment.
Still, while Faulkner's artistry in portraying Ratliff is perhaps superior to the artistry of Harris's portrait of Sut and while Ratliff is manifestly a more realistic and more complex human being, the two characters have much in common.

To some extent both are typed characters. In other words, to Faulkner and Harris, Ratliff and Sut represent easily abstracted principles. But because these are the principles of the near frontier, the combination (perhaps peculiarly American) of social and individualistic ideals, Ratliff and Sut can embody these principles unostentatiously and still seem human beings. Indeed, Ratliff and Sut represent the reader's own ideals to such an extent that it is difficult to think of them as anything but human. Both characters are intelligent, realistic, and practical — precisely as the reader hopes himself to be. Allen finds Ratliff to represent "the whole pantheon of American values," and Faulkner's own evaluation of Sut ("He had no illusions about himself, did the best he could; at certain times he was a coward and knew it and wasn't ashamed; he never blamed his misfortunes on anyone and never cursed God for them." ) partially reveals Sut as representing a similar "pantheon of American values." Of Sut's values, Weber says,

...out of the seeming chaos and meanness of Sut's personality and actions there gradually arises a superstructure revealing that a morality and a philosophy have been in existence always; that they contain, ironically enough, numerous traditional and wholesome values. (SL xxv)
Thus, Sut and Ratliff are to some extent typed characters—almost demigods of the near frontier.

As such, Sut Lovingood is a total frontiersman. His character contains to some degree all of Weber's positive frontier qualities. In accord with his predilection to incorporate frontier strengths and weaknesses in his characters, Faulkner heightens the realism and humanity of Ratliff by making him fallible and human in his lapses into dejection, disillusionment, and bitter irony when, for instance, exasperated with the hamlet's total lack of meaningful action, he says, "What is it the fellow says? Off with the old and on with the new; the old job at the old stand, maybe a new fellow doing the jobbing but it's the same old stern getting reamed out?" (H 164) And perhaps even the fact that Ratliff is not immune to sickness furthers his ties with humanity.

To a great extent Sut is similarly fallible and emotional in a very human way, but Ratliff's humanity is far greater and far more successful than Sut's. Certainly, the reader has a better sense of Ratliff as a man than he does of Sut. While this sense derives from Faulkner's more successful gradation of foils and the fact that Ratliff, unlike Sut, does not constantly tell his own stories, Ratliff's character is further enhanced by the greater ironic truth of his failure. And while Sut's defeat in "Blown up with Soda" is short-lived and humorous, Ratliff's defeat at Flem's hands is perhaps the stroke that best vivifies Ratliff in the trilogy because, unlike Sut, Ratliff must live with it throughout the trilogy
and it is a loss of more importance than Sut's unrequited puppy love. That Ratliff is rational man's representative in the battle against Snopesism suggests the grave implications of his defeat. While Eby finds that "the real protagonist [in The Hamlet] is not Ratliff, Flem or any other human character but Frenchman's Bend itself," Ratliff's fall tends to link him with the most human characters of The Hamlet. Longley says: "The major irony of the Frenchman's Place episode is that it precisely repeats the pattern of the spotted horses, with exactly the same kind of temptation." Moreover, Ratliff's rationality in the face of his defeat makes him truly a heroic figure and reflects Faulkner's artistic genius in fusing the admirable endurance and patience of man with his inherent weaknesses. Allen finds that "the statement...made in 'Spotted Horses' is the compassionately proud and fiercely sardonic conviction that man endures -- even in spite of his stubborn addiction to frailty and evil." Ratliff's persistent rationality through The Town and The Mansion certainly suggests that "man not merely endures; he will prevail." In this way, Ratliff is certainly a figure of greater literary, indeed human significance than Sut Lovingood. This is not to say that Ratliff is not a Sut-like character; rather it is to assert Ratliff's manifest success in representing a moral truth of greater magnitude than does Sut. Ratliff, however, in action and attitudes, reflects the intimacy of Faulkner's acquaintance with Sut Lovingood.
Sut and Ratliff are both active frontiersmen. Both actively fight injustice and have a similar awareness of forces larger than themselves. Their acts of retribution on such figures as John Bullen and Clarence Snopes reveal the two raconteurs' similar clearheadedness -- minds which penetrate the titles of "Reverend" and "Senator." As frontiersmen, Sut and Ratliff are practical and rational. Of the two, Sut is obviously far more active and much less realistic, if more consistently humorous. Sut's actions directly reveal his frontier morality. He tirelessly wages war on cheats. The battles he fights almost always result in physical action, although often his imaginative and psychological tactics predicate this action and his long legs deliver him safe from harm at precisely the distance required to vividly recount that action. In his decisive, imaginative retributions, Sut Lovingood is a character of heroic proportions. But, as Allen remarks, "Ratliff's measure of heroism can be gauged not so much by his particular actions as by his unostentatious morality. By implication he stands for...the morality and truth and justice of Gavin Stevens." But Ratliff's motivation for choosing his particular morality is more akin to Sut Lovingood's than Gavin Stevens. Sut, as a man of the near frontier, has an aura of masculine practicality about him. In fact, in the "Preface" to Sut Lovingood, speaking about those readers whose concern for their reputations will motivate them to read the work secretly, Sut is
guided by his practical sense. He speaks of the futility of attempting to reason with these people. He says:

They has been preached to and prayed for now nigh onto two thousand years, and I won't dart weeds where thirty-two pound shot bounces back. (SL xxxii)48

Thus, Sut generally follows what might have been the maxim of Jacksonian democracy, a "live and let live" morality until he encounters those gross and wrangling injustices that he fights so ardently.

Faulkner says that Ratliff, in The Town, "practiced virtue from simple instinct, from -- well, more than that, because -- for a practical reason, because it was better. There was less confusion if all people didn't tell lies to one another, and didn't pretend."49 Certainly, Ratliff's morality is a practical one in comparison to that of Gavin Stevens's. Thus, both Ratliff and Sut are realistically motivated for the social stability necessary to the near frontier. And their similar, realistic views of the fantastic frontier is the most important aspect of our believing in them. The reader trusts Ratliff because he, like Sut, "had no illusions about himself," and few, if any illusions about others.

No small part of their comic effect derives from this trust. It is to a great extent the source of our detachment from the comic action of their narrations, for our feeling safe with them, and even for (in Ratliff's case) our relative detachment from all the other frontier figures in the trilogy.
As raconteurs (or, as I call them earlier, structural characters), Ratliff and Sut are the major source of the frontier humor in the two works. Their importance as raconteurs cannot be over-emphasized. The box-like structure used by Harris and Faulkner is a sword with a double edge. The story-teller is only as successful as his story, because the story reflects the character of the raconteur. Thus, that both characters are generally consistent to their stories suggests Harris's and Faulkner's superb artistry in using this device. Moreover, it implies the two authors' steadfast views of these characters.

Because they are raconteurs, Sut and Ratliff are closer to the reader than the thematic characters. Ratliff, as Faulkner's most able raconteur of frontier humor and most consistently sympathetic figure in the trilogy, then, has a counterpart in Sut. Faulkner's sense of credibility and his earnest desire to write a "chronicle" and not merely a collection of humorous stories substantiates the fact that Ratliff is less prominent in *The Town* and *The Mansion* than in *The Hamlet*. That the reader awaits Ratliff's shrewd evaluation of events even in the later novels where he appears only occasionally indicates the extent to which we align ourselves with his rationality. Sut's narratives prove him to be equally rational, if more exuberant.

The cardinal parallel in the two raconteurs' similar appeal is their expression. John J. Heflin finds "Sut, himself, is very prominent as the teller of the story, his
manner immensely important." And T. Y. Greet says, "The manner of [Ratliff's] speech as much as its matter lends to his reports and comments the veracity which gives them value." Ratliff's and Sut's frontier speech makes them seem at once bumpkins and poets. Their appeal derives from the fact that they are not poetic enough to ruin the illusion of their country heritage and they are not stupid enough to slip into the grating aphorisms of an I. O. Snopes. To find intelligence such as Sut's and Ratliff's on a generally unintelligent frontier is a revelation. And both as raconteurs and characters, they are like their historical predecessors, the yarn-spinners, who, Weber says, consistently "underscore[d] the proximity of the homely and heroic," (SL xxiii) perhaps the fusion of which gratifies a desire which, if not indigenous to Americans, is one undeniably American in spirit.

And, ultimately, Ratliff resembles Sut (as Faulkner resembles Harris) in the spirit -- the masculine, earthy, and realistic spirit -- of frontier humor. However similar their individual traits, their outlook represents that of a young and optimistic frontiersman -- simultaneously individual and social. The nomadic mischief-maker and the itinerant sewing machine salesman epitomize the common man at his best.

Sut's fanciful descriptions of his heroic deeds are poetic. Ratliff's similar language and his admitted predilection to tell the story of Eula and McCarron not as he thinks it occurred, but as he prefers it to have happened, substantiates their similarities as raconteurs.
Perhaps the greatest similarity between these two raconteurs lies in the reader's instantaneous acceptance of them. For their sense of humor, their sense of irony, and the reader's sense of their honesty and integrity all conduce to their similar appeal as characters and their success as raconteurs. They, themselves, are inimitable. But the memorable portraits of the two raconteurs — Sut Lovingood, "resting by a fine cool spring at noon, with an invitingly clean gourd hanging on a bush over the water,... at full length on the grass looking intently at the gourd,"
(SL 104) and V. K. Ratliff, his "bland affable ready face and his neat tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group at a crossroads store..." (H 13) -- remind us of their kinship in spirit. Sut Lovingood and V. K. Ratliff vivify and substantiate De Voto's generalization: "To the eyes of anyone...who reads American literature,...the American is universally a story teller." And while Faulkner is in every respect artistically superior to Harris, in Ratliff's narrations, his character, the people, the land, and the language do become the stories as in the most pristine — Sut Lovingood -- frontier humor.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER V

1Allardyce Nicoll finds that most comic writers "will try to suggest that a certain figure is itself representative of a class. The fundamental assumption of comedy is that it does not deal with isolated individualities." (Allardyce Nicoll, An Introduction to Dramatic Theory (London, 1923), p. 134.)


3See Chapter IV, p. 81 of this thesis. That Texas in particular attracted the most desperate men in the country was a common nineteenth century myth.

4Backus, Charles says, would be "...sitting all day long out there on that front gallery with a glass of whiskey-and-water in one hand and Horace or Virgil in the other -- a combination which Uncle Gavin said would have insulated from the reality of rural north Mississippi harder heads than his -- ..." (T 178)

5The term thematic character indicates a character who embodies thematic elements, but is not a raconteur. Two examples are Flem and Eula. A structural character, like Ratliff, is a raconteur and may also embody thematic elements or, like such a character as old Het, he may be purely structural. The reader learns about thematic characters by what they do and thus, whether narrated by structural characters or an omniscient narrator, their portraits are characteristically objective or in the third person. Structural characters may or may not be portrayed by other narrators' comments, but these structural characters reveal themselves through their own narratives and thus are presented subjectively or in the first person.


7Ibid., p. 643.

8Eby, pp. 18-19.

9Brooks, p. 193.

10Ibid., pp. 211-212.
See Chapter 17, pp. 262-295 of The Town where, perhaps ironically, it is Gavin Stevens, one of the most ardent anti-Snopes figures, who reconstructs Flem's activities as vice-president of the bank. Here, Flem's innocence and lack of education makes him at least a somewhat sympathetic underdog.

Howe, p. 112.

Asked if he thought of the characters "...in The Town as people and not as symbols," Faulkner answered, "Yes. Yes; to me they are people...." (Faulkner in the University, p. 108.) And in reference to the Snopeses: "Those characters to me are quite real and quite constant." (Ibid., p. 78.)

Throughout this discussion (pp. 122-125 of this thesis) I refer to Flem Snopes, the caricature and figure of Southwestern humor, as he is presented in The Hamlet.


Ibid., p. 18.

See Footnote 1 of this chapter. Flem, because he is a frontier deity in The Hamlet, becomes an "isolated" individuality.

Howe, p. 245.


Cullen, p. 117.

Campbell and Foster's "roll call," although not a complete one, serves to validate Faulkner's consistency:
1. Flem Snopes (froglike)
2. I. O. Snopes, the platitudinarian (weasel)
3. Lancelot (Lump) Snopes (ratlike)
4. Ike H. Snopes, the idiot (bovine)
5. "Mink" Snopes, the murderer
6. St. Elmo Snopes -- omnivorous, huge, fleshy, beastlike

(Campbell and Foster, pp. 104-105.)


See Chapter IV, p. 107 of this thesis. Eck's comment on the quality of food in Flem's restaurant reveals him to be more like Sut than any of the Snopeses.
Ab does, in his innocent, stupid greed and bravado, have many parallels with Longstreet’s “Blossom,” who claims to be “a leetle, jist a leetle, of the best man at a horse-swap that ever trod shoe leather.” (Georgia Scenes, p. 23.) Ab similarly tells his wife, “You better thank the Lord that when He give me a eye for horseflesh He give me a little judgment and gumption with it.” (H 31)

Faulkner once correlated the scoundrel to the individual. He said, “...a scoundrel, to be a good one, must be an individualist, that only an individualist can be a first rate scoundrel.” Faulkner then admitted (in the words of a questioner) to have “some grudging admiration for Flem Snopes, who pretty well sticks to his character,” (in Faulkner’s words) “...until he was bitten by the bug to be respectable, and then he let me down.” (Faulkner in the University, p. 33.)

Examples of their masculine language appear in Chapter III, pp. 62-63 of this thesis. In fact, the independent woman of the frontier has long been a source of comedy. The independent Mrs. Hait has a manifest parallel in Longstreet’s woman in “Taking the Census” who brings her chickens in the house for the “chicken-man” to see. Other such independent Southern women in Faulkner’s canon are Jenny DuPre, Rosa Millard and even Emily Grierson.

Faulkner in the University, pp. 139-140.

Ibid., p. 140.

Both Gavin and Baldwin consciously toy with language and, to modern tastes, are stuffily erudite. See T 43 and Chapter II, p. 17 of this thesis.

Faulkner in the University, p. 140.

Refer to Chapter III, p. 43 of this thesis where Charles finds Gavin to be “crank-sided.” Further, Charles says of Gavin’s praise for the ladies who called on Mrs. Snopes, “It would be the most outrageous praise, praise so outrageous that even Gowan at just thirteen years old could tell that.” (T 31)

Vickery, p. 183.

Charles’ imagined wire to Ratliff magnificently reflects this youth’s self-infatuation and narrow vision. The language is peculiarly modern but perhaps the tone of cocksureness is common to overconfident youth in general. Charles thinks: “Are they [Gavin and Linda] bedded formally yet or not? I mean is it rosa yet or still just sub, assuming that you assume the same assumption they teach us up here at Harvard that once you get the clothes off those tall up-and-down women you find out they aint all that up-and-down at all.” (M 205)
One of the most flagrant misreadings of Faulkner is committed by Irving Howe, usually a sound and careful critic, when he comments on this passage. Howe says, "Nothing in the text, so far as I can see, provides any ground for supposing that Faulkner takes a caustic view of this sophomoric wisdom, or that he wishes us to see Mallison in any but a sympathetic light." (Howe, p. 288.)

Faulkner's critics are unified on at least one aspect of his trilogy -- the success of Ratliff as a character. While many of the critical comments about him refer to Ratliff in The Hamlet, they have an equal relevance to him throughout the trilogy. Although he is less prominent in The Town and The Mansion, Ratliff is a consistent character in the trilogy.

Cowley, p. 366. Faulkner's predilection to think in terms of character is substantiated again: "My book [perhaps Sanctuary or The Unvanguished] had created Snopes and his clan, who produced stories in their saga which are to fall in later volumes."

Charles Allen, "William Faulkner: Comedy and the Purpose of Humor," Arizona Quarterly, XVI (1960), 67. Although Mr. Allen refers specifically to The Hamlet, I think his statement applies to Ratliff in the whole trilogy, particularly in a study which focuses on the frontier humor of the trilogy.

John Arthos, "Ritual and Humor in the Writings of William Faulkner, Accent, IX (Autumn, 1948), 27. He also notes the relationship of Ratliff to Faulkner's other characters. In The Hamlet, "for the first time [in a novel] Faulkner sets up a rational man as the central figure in a story. The gain is enormous, considering the characters and pictures have lost neither intensity or vividness." (Arthos, p. 27.)

Allen, p. 65.

Stein, p. 79. Without committing the logical error of asserting their absolute similarity, I think it is interesting to note that Faulkner's characterization of Sut applies equally well to Ratliff.

See Chapter V, p. 127 of this thesis.

Ratliff's bitter diatribe against Snopesism includes his satiric use of aphorisms, I. O. Snopes's prominent trait. But the villagers' bewilderment at Ratliff's bitterness emphasizes both his humanity and his normally steady affability. "Big ears have little pitchers, the world beats a track to the rich man's hog-pen but it ain't every family
has a new lawyer, not to mention a prophet. Waste not want not, except that a full waist dont need no prophet to prophesy a profit and just whose. Now they were all watching him -- the smooth, impenetrable face with something about the eyes and the lines beside the mouth which they could not read. (H 164)

42 Eby, p. 20.
43 Longley, p. 74.

Ratliff acknowledges his defeat through understatement, a commonplace of frontier humor. "Bet you one of them I beat you [Bookwright]." (H 366) Longley praises Faulkner's artistry in this passage. "It is easy to imagine what might follow this realization in the hands of a less gifted writer: despair, rage, cries of anguish. In Faulkner's hands the reaction is reduced to simple comment." (Longley, p. 76.) Further, Ratliff's reaction heightens rather than subdues the tension of the closing pages of The Hamlet.

44 Allen, p. 67.
46 Allen, p. 64.

Sut's answer to those who "have a wholesome fear of the devil," and thus will find Sut's stories improper is both practical and sane: "...if you is feared of smut, you needn't climb the chimney." (SL xxxii)

47 Faulkner in the University, p. 140.

Vickery finds that The Town lacks the economic directness of The Hamlet; therefore (because Jefferson offers him no medium in which to battle the Snopes) Ratliff becomes a reporter in the two later novels of the trilogy. (See Vickery, p. 183.)

48 Allen, p. 64.
50 Greet, p. 335.
51 Greet, p. 335.

See The Mansion, p. 119 ff. Through his narrative Ratliff comments that he is telling the story as he thinks it should have taken place. For example, after giving a general and abbreviated account, Ratliff comments, "Except I dont think that was exactly it. I dont think I prefer it
to happened that way. I think I prefer it to happened all at once." (M 119) "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." (M 122)

De Voto, p. 92.
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