CHAPTER IV

THE SPHINXES: THEIR RISE AND FALL
THE SHOESSES : THEIR RISE AND FALL

The Civil War damaged the basic structure of the folk-culture and the plantation economy of the South. The so-called Reconstruction proved still worse. The cheap black labour which was the mainstay of this order became scarce with the formal disestablishment of slavery. The management of the big plantations without the negroes and the credit machinery of the old South became extremely difficult. The federal laws were harsh and worked against the interest of the big land holders. The planters were in debt. The landed gentry struggled hard for survival. The choice before them was either to give up the aristocratic values of the ante-bellum South or to fall back to 'more primitive and brutal standards' of life. Never before had a planter's family experienced such economic strain or passed through such a great financial uncertainty.

W. J. Cash aptly describes the plight of a planter:

... he came unavoidably to some such impasse as this: that either he was going to have to deny his children the
toys they clamored for at Christmas; to turn a deaf ear to the pleas of his womenfolk for a new coat for winter; a new hat at Easter, a new piano for the parlor, a new coat of paint for the drab nakedness of the house, and, almost certainly, to son Will’s ambition to go to college; to resign himself and his family to an unending prospect of accumulating shabbiness and frustrated desire—in many and many a case, indeed, actually to seeing himself reduced to sending his children to school barefoot or all but barefoot in winter, and even to setting his daughters to work in the fields like those of any European peasant or any blackman...!

The economic prospect was so grim that without superhuman determination and supreme effort it was impossible to revive and rejuvenate the agrarian economy of the region. The bone-deep knowledge of defeat paralyzed the will of the people. Consequently, men brought up in the rural way of life with a puritan background had to accept not only the humiliation and hardship of the Reconstruction but had to witness the disappearance of those human values of the home-land for which they had waged a holy war. Technically, they lost the war and accepted

its consequences, but never accepted the hegemony of the North. Consequently, even today the South remains a separate section of the United States. Francis B. Sinkins makes it clear:

\[\text{\ldots the South was, is, and will continue to be a unique section with a distinctive way of life,\ldots the South ever really travelled down the "Road to Reunion" and insists that its peculiar traits continue to survive even in the midst of the extreme nationalism of mid-century America.}\]

Sinkins rightly maintains that the deep South retains its ante-bellum identity. But it is also true that the new South is very much different from the South of the big planters imbued with the Cavalier tradition. After the decline of the patricians the South lost the necessary will to keep its house in order. There followed a veritable chaos and vacuum in all spheres of life. The old order lost its creative vitality and disruptive forces augmented the process of disintegration. Prof. Allen Tate observes:

\[\text{\ldots the destruction of the old South released native forces of disorder and}\]

corruption which were accelerated by the brutal exploitation of the carpetbaggers and army of occupation; thus the old order of dignity and principle was replaced by upstarts and cynical materialists.3

Perhaps, this is the basic historical pattern one witnesses the world over. Whenever a social, political or economic order collapses, it always provides ample scope for those divisive forces which remain active beneath the surface for certain compelling reasons but all of a sudden come to the fore. Irving Howe visualizes the situation in this manner:

Let a world collapse, in the South or Russia, and there appear figures of coarse ambition driving their way up from beneath the social bottom, men to whom moral claims are not so much absurd as incomprehensible, sons of bush whaleors or peasants drifting in from nowhere and taking over through the sheer outrageousness of their monolithic force. They become presidents of local banks or chairman of party sections, and later, a trifle smoother in appearance and style, they make their way into Congress or the Central Committee — Scavengers without inhibitions they need not believe in the code of their society; they need only learn to mimic its sounds.4


If in *The Sound and The Fury* Faulkner writes about the end of an order, he also hints at the beginning of a ruthless commercial enterprise. In *Jason* he portrays the new economic man of the South. He is the first representative of the acquisitive society, finance capitalism and of a thoroughly modern world with its corruption, moral uncertainty and loss of positive values. He is purely impersonal, sardonic, anti-social and remorseless. He never hesitates to exploit his family, kinmen and community. His callous disregard for the noble and heroic ideals of the home-land makes him a soulless monster, a pure 'negative quantity'.

Faulkner in the Snopes Trilogy - *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion* records the rise of a clan whose Jason-like greed exploits the slender material resources of the region to build a new economic empire which thrives on excessive lust for wealth, deceit, usury and complete indifference to moral commitments and human interests.

In Faulkner's earlier novels we often hear about the Snopeses. We learn that they are rootless, immoral and heartless. They are considered as the outsiders in the community because of their amorality and unconventional approach to the basic social norms of the region.
rise of this monolithic group inspires the country people
with fear and concern; but they cannot muster enough courage
to arrest the conquering march of this unprincipled group.
It seems that Faulkner at a very early stage in his life
grew conscious of a group who made it their mission to work
only for material gain and defy all those ideals which
sustained the aristocratic structure of the ante-bellum
South. Strangely enough, these upstarts not only exploited
the rural common-folk but also the local gentry for their
own selfish ends. Nelson Manfred Blake aptly describes
the community:

The Snopeses represent an intrusion of the
rural poor whites into the Southern towns.
Southern society was becoming more mobile:
tenant farmers rose to the status of store
keepers; bank clerks became bank presidents.
Losing ground in politics and business, the
older aristocrats sneered at the newcomers.
Their attitude... was partly one of jealous
vexation, and partly one of sincere regret
at the loss of the old code of gentlemanly
conduct.

This chapter discusses the rise of Snopesian and their
fall to show that if the ante-bellum South fell because of

5 Nelson Manfred Blake, Novelists' America: Fiction
as History, 1940-1940, (New York: Syracuse
its super human pride and blindness to human dignity.
Snopesism fell because of its total lack of love, honour, and pity.

In the Snopes trilogy Faulkner upholds the legend of
Flem Snopes and his kinmen who from the unfamiliar quarters
come to Frenchman's Bend to begin their nefarious activities.
These people are simple share-croppers or at the most work
as tenant farmers. They are unscrupulous new Southerners
who do not bother about the old moral laws of the village
community to which they come. This folk-community Faulkner
describes in the beginning of *The Hamlet*:

They took up land and built one and two
room cabins and never painted them, and
married one another and produced children
and added another room one by one to
original cabins and did not paint them
either, but that was all... They supported
their own churches and schools, they
married and committed infrequent adulterices
and more frequent homicides among themselves
and were their own courts, judges and
executioners. They were Protestants and
Democrats and prolific; there was not one
Negro land owner in the entire section.
Strange Negroes would absolutely refuse
to pass through it after dark.6

[*All references hereafter, to the text, will be
to this edition.*]
Will Varner the richest man of this community looks after the affairs of this village unit. He is shrewd, profane and lazy. He has money but lacks the refinement of an aristocrat. Mrs. Olga Vickery calls him bucolic Sartoris. Faulkner presents him in a humorous way:

He was shrewd, secret and merry, of a Rebeccaisian turn of mind and very probably still sexually lusty (he had fathered sixteen children to his wife though only two of them remained at home...). He was at once active and lazy.7

His son Jody Varner who looks after his father's business is also a shrewd man and rivals his father for caginess. He exploits his people in business by manipulating the account book. He is a bachelor and makes others conscious of his non-marital state. Faulkner's description of Jody is equally humorous:

The son Jody was about thirty, a prime bulging man slightly thyroidic, who was not only unmarried but who emanated a quality of invincible and inviolate bachelordom as some people are said to breath out the odor of sanctity or spirituality.8

7 Ibid., p. 5.
8 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
... Flem comes to the usurious Varner's as a 'poor-white trash' but works out his way up and finally becomes the president of the bank in Jefferson. His unprincipled odyssey for money and respectability begins from a share-cropper's cottage and ends in a mansion in Jefferson where he meets with a violent death at the hands of his Kinsman. This is precisely the theme of the trilogy. Faulkner introduces many unrelated subjects in the trilogy, but basically it is about Flem's rise and his violent death. Flem who is the hero of the new South and the builder of the economic empire is a man who knows no human sentiments. He is simply a heartless manipulator of figures and directs his energy to convert everything into the cash-nexus. He never allows anything to come between his cold calculations and the monetary gain. His legalism, pure objectivity, complete absorption in the world of commodity, his lack of simple instinctive humanity annoys the country people. If Flem is soulless, his community is a microscopic manifestation of the untraditional society of the South. Faulkner paints the leader of the community with care:

He did not speak. If he ever looked at them individually, that one did not discern it - a thick squat soft man of no establishable age between twenty and thirty, with
a broad stiff face containing a tight
seam of mouth stained slightly at the
corners with tobacco and eyes the
colour of stagnant water, and projecting
from among the other features in startling
and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose
like the bauk of a small hawk. It was as
though the original nose had been left
off by the original designer or craftsman
and the unfinished job taken over by some
one of a radically different school or
perhaps by some viciously maniacal humorist
or perhaps by one who had had only time
to clap into the center of the face a
frantic and desperate warning. 9

V.K. Ratliff an itinerant sewing machine agent and self-
appointed protector of the bucolic community rightly reads
the warning, the danger and the threat that are so clearly
manifested through Flo's face. From him we learn the
ture nature of the Snopeses and specially about Flo's all
cinister plan to exploit the simple folk of Frenchman's
bond. Ratliff condemns Flo and his kinmen not because
they are unscrupulous, amoral, underbred and live by
skullduggery but because in business they never show any
human sentiments. Particularly Flo the bell-wether of
the clan is purely loveless. Paradoxically he is above
corruption. His business instinct is so sure that he

9 Ibid., p. 52.
never commits an error which his cash register does not permit. Ratliff views Men as pure evil simply because his emotional inadequacies and rapacious tendencies do not allow him to grow as a normal human being.

More than anything else Ratliff knows the weaknesses of his people. Specially Will Varner’s unorthodox management of his business does not remain a secret to anyone who closely watches his business techniques. But Will Varner is not totally a despicable character because he remains humane throughout the trilogy. His desire to help Hink amply shows his human side. On the contrary Men meticulously follows the business ethos and never accepts anything which the law does not permit. This complete submission to the world of trade makes him a base calculator, a ‘negative quality’, a skunk. His single-minded industry finally defeats even the Varners. He fully exploits the situation when he finds the Varners in real trouble because of Bula’s pregnancy.

Will Varner’s daughter Bula is a typical Faulknerian creation. She is a belle whose entire energy goes into making herself a full-bodied matron even at the age of thirteen. She is lazy, mindless, and indifferent to all
those graces which women consciously acquire to draw towards
them lusty men. She is her creator's Helen, Semiramis,
Lilith and Venus. Prof. Brooks calls her a rustic
Aphrodite. Faulkner describes her:

... not yet thirteen years old, she was
already bigger than most grown women and
even her breasts were no longer the little,
hard, fiercely-pointed cones of puberty or
even maidenhood. On the contrary, her
entire appearance suggested some symbology
out of the old dionysic times - honey in
sunlight and bursting grapes, the writher
bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine
beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof.

Lebove, the school teacher in Frenchman's Bend becomes
conscious of her early physical maturity. Faulkner describes
his condition:

... one morning ... he saw a face eight
years old and a body of fourteen with the
female shape of twenty, which on the
instant of crossing the threshold brought
into the bleak, ill-lighted, poorly-heated
room dedicated to harsh functioning of
Protestant primary education a moist blast
of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan
triumphal prostration before the supreme
primal uterus.

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10 Ibid., p. 95.
11 Ibid., p. 114.
A little later Faulkner again writes about Eula:

It would have but one point... that center swarmed over and importuned yet serene and intact and apparently even oblivious, tranquilly abrogating the whole long scene of human thinking and suffering which is called knowledge, education, wisdom, at once supremely unchaste and inviolable: the queen, the matrix. 12

Labove who desires to possess her body just once in his life fails in his attempt to rape her but rightly predicts about the man who will be her nominal husband. He predicts:

He would be a dwarf, a gnome, without glands or desire, who would be no more a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the fly-leaf of a book. There it was again, out of the books again the dead defacement of type which had already betrayed him: the crippled Vulcan to that Venus, who would not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, babbles, as he might own, not a picture statue: a field, say. 13

Labove proves right and Eula, the goddess of fertility

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12 Ibid., p. 116.
13 Ibid., p. 119.
becomes pregnant. Her seducer leaves the village the moment he learns that she is pregnant. The Varnors are in search of a man who can readily accept her and save the family from shame. Finally, the choice falls upon the store clerk Flem. This marriage which is not only ill-conceived, but is not a marriage at all, paves the way for Flem's phenomenal rise. Flem uses his young beautiful wife's liquorish passion as a commodity for barter and to gain power and respectability. Later, in the trilogy we learn that Flem is impotent and dangerous. Naturally, he decides to use his wife in a way which suits his purpose.

In the trilogy Faulkner creates a world in which characters of all shades and pretensions find a place. If in this world we often encounter a passionless Flem who outwits everyone and uses his wife to placate the mayor of Jefferson, we also meet Mink Snopes, his cousin, who murders rich Houston not for material gain but to protect his human dignity because he feels that Houston has not only charged an extra dollar from him but has also ignored his humanity. Idiot Ike Snopes' love for a cow reminds us of the primitive romantic love. Faulkner introduces Ike's affair with a cow to show us that even today 'love is best'. Houston's love for his wife is really intense.
and deep. He becomes almost mad after her unnatural death, caused by his stallion. Manfred De Spain's sexual involvement with Bula continues for eighteen long years and ends only when Bula commits suicide to protect her daughter Linda from scandal and contumely. Gavin's attachment to Bula and Linda also figures in the trilogy. Faulkner describes her marriage with Barton Kohl and his death in detail and finally prepares her to play the role of a goddess of retribution. She helps Hink who comes out of the prison and kills Flem and in this way eliminates Snopes from Jefferson. U.K. Ratliff, who is a bucolic grass-root philosopher in the trilogy often meets the reader and gives him the necessary and authentic information about the Snopes. His role as a chorus is important and without his guidance it is almost impossible to understand the deeper significance of the Snopes trilogy. Gavin Stevens and Young Charles Mallison involved in the saga of Snopes try to protect their people from the Snopeses.

If we ignore the loose episodic nature of the trilogy and read it as a well-knit work of art we realize that Faulkner's intention was not to write an obscene book.
about the Snopeses. Hence, we find it difficult to agree with the intelligent reviewer who writes:

It's a nice bucolic idyll of insanity, avarice, cruelty, rape and murder, centering around the nearest passel of white folks this side of the nineteenth-century novel.14

Stephen Vincent who sees it differently states:

He does not, it is true, get anywhere in particular but his disillusioned comment represents the defeated virtues of civilization - at least by comparison with the Snopeses.15

Hoffman sums up the whole argument:

The principal objection was the spectacular accumulation of evil, large and small, with no relieving contrast.16

14 Quoted by F.J. Hoffman, "William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism", from Newsweek, April 1, 1940, (eds.) F.J. Hoffman and Olga Vickers, (Michigan State University, 1951), p. 25. (Though the remark is about The Hamlet, it may easily be applied to the whole trilogy).


Faulkner published *The Hamlet* in 1940, *The Town* in 1957 and *The Mansion* in 1959. Now, after four decades of its publication, critics view *The Hamlet* and the whole trilogy in a different perspective. There is a considerable body of positive criticism to prove that Faulkner was fully aware of its meaning and form. It is one thing to say that the trilogy is loose in its structure but it is certainly not correct to assert that it does not move in any properly conceived direction. Chester E. Bisinger very confidently puts the case:

Bound to history and the institutions of the past, engrossed in the preservation of what was good in the past, Faulkner has naturally turned a hostile gaze upon modern times. The attack on the modern ethos in the books of the forties strikes first at the business civilization, a modern way of life as against the traditional pastoral or agricultural way. Faulkner regards that civilization as dehumanized, impersonal, non-productive, and unprincipled. All these adjectives can be applied to Flem, who is the proto-type of such a civilization. Without conscience this type figure of business with the calculating-machine mind ruthlessly devours Frenchman's Bend, never seeming to savour what he eats. 17

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Since both the beginning and the end of the trilogy are devoted to Men's rise and his subsequent fall it becomes obvious that Faulkner's aim was to record the rise and fall of an economic order symbolized by him. Again, the trilogy is basically about the rise and fall of Menius, hence, one valid charge that can be made against Faulkner is that he has dealt with many disjointed subjects in the course of the narrative. One simple answer is that Faulkner not only condemns the mercenary Snopes of the present century but also describes the basic difference between the heartlessness of the economic man and the primitive and passionate love of the simple people. This becomes clear when we read not only the story of Men but that of Ike and Hink in the trilogy.

Men comes to Frenchman's Bend with a feeling that there is no benefit in farming. He tells Jody Varnier:

\textit{Aint no benefit in farming, I figure. on getting out of it soon as I can} ... \textit{... you run a store, dont you?}\footnote{18}

From this very brief exchange between Jody and Men Snopes

\footnote{18 The Harlet, p. 25.}
it appears that Flem has already realized that for his material advancement a farm is not a right kind of tool, the store is the thing which will equip him with the desired instrument to dupe and use the people of Frenchman's Bend. And we see that in no time, not only does he become the account-keeper and manager of the store, the son-in-law of Will Varner, the owner of the old Frenchmen place, but the richest man of the hamlet. This happens only because he is a great business manager and succeeds in creating artificial want and prepares people to buy a thing which they do not need. After five years he leaves the bucolic community of Frenchman's Bend and moves to Faulkner's pseudo-polis Jefferson with his wife Bula and daughter Linda to corrupt the old community of Jefferson. It is strange that Flem outwits even the same and wise Ratliff. He tempts him to buy the old Frenchman's place to dig it for the hidden pre-civil war treasure. Shylock must have his pound of flesh nothing less, nothing more. But one thing which makes him more abhorrent than Shylock is his complete want of human sentiments, even a negative one. His Kinsman Mink kills Houston because Houston played with his savage pride. When Mink's trial opens he looks for his Kinsman, but Flem simply does not bother
about him because he is no more useful for his rapacious
design and prolongs his stay in Texas, honey-mooning with
Bula. And in this way knowingly violates the ancient
immutable laws of simple blood-kinship. This colossal
contempt for the human cause makes him a perfect symbol
of depravity. In Jefferson Plant soon becomes the superin-
tendent of the power-plant. The Mayor De Spain creates
a post for him and the town quietly accepts the new incumbent.
The mystery behind the appointment in no time becomes an
open secret. The moment Manfred De Spain sees Bula he
takes a fancy for her and soon becomes her foster-husband.
To silence the legal husband he gives him the post of the
superintendent of the power-plant. The town watches with
a heavy heart, the fateful development. Faulkner describes
the situation thus:

... De Spain was creating, planning how to
create that office of power-plant superint-
dendent which we didn't even know we didn't
have, let alone needed, and then get
Mr. Snopes into it. It was not because we
were against Mr. Snopes; we have not read
the signs and portents which should have
warned, alerted, sprung us into frantic
concord to defend our town from him...
The De Spain - Eula affair lasts for eighteen long years. In the meantime Flem moves from the post of the power-plant superintendent to the vice-presidency of the Sartoris bank. Now, he is rich and wants to buy respectability which he gets when the Cotillion Club invites the Flems for the Christian Ball. Here, for the first time he meets the stiff resistance of the town. Gavin Stevens openly reacts against the libidinal alliance between Eula and De Spain and Flem's active connivance. Gavin who desires to play the role of the conscience keeper of the community fights with De Spain openly. Charles Wallison comments on the situation:

What he was doing was simply defending forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not. 20

Gavin Stevens, an intellectual and romantic idealist plans to eliminate the Snopeses from the community but he simply fails because the forces which help Flem are too strong for him. Besides his encounter with Eula in the office renders him ineffective. She listens to Gavin:

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20 Ibid., p. 76.
... "But of course", I said. "Naturally it is one of Manfred's nights since it's Manfred you are saving: not Elen. — No, wait! I said, "May be I am wrong; may be it is both of them; may be they both sent you: both of them that scared, that desperate; their mutual crisis and fear so critical as to justify even this last desperate gambit of your woman's — their mutual woman's — all?" 21

After this quiet listening she offers her body to Gavin giving the reasons:

"Because you are unhappy", she said. I don't like unhappy people. They are a nuisance. Especially when it can — " 22

Certainly, Gavin is unhappy. But the cause of his unhappiness is not obtrusive sexuality. He is unhappy because he is a gentleman and cannot accept Eula's body. He is unhappy because he cannot imagine that Elen can be so mean as to use his wife's beauty and health to obtain a lucrative position. This is something which a man with the Southern background, who views marriage as a sacred institution and who not only loves women but worships them, cannot imagine or tolerate. He is unhappy because 21

Ibid., p. 92.

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Ibid., p. 93.
the community cannot rise in arms against this moral contamination. Gavin's failure in discharging his moral duty again troubles him. More than anything else Gavin is unhappy because he whole-heartedly condemns the De Spain - Bula affair but inwardly he admires Bula and recognises De Spain's manliness. This inner conflict not only makes him ineffective but to a great extent a pathetic character in the trilogy. His interest in Linda's education clearly indicates that his mind works on different levels and in different directions. His attempt to 'form' Linda's mind, to protect her from Snopes shows that perhaps Gavin fights against inhumanity not against amorality. Bula is not only too feminine but she is also too humane. And her pity extends even to the despicable Men - she tells Gavin before she commits suicide:

"He... can't. He's - what's the word? - impotent. He's always been. Maybe that's why, one of the reasons. You see? You have got to be careful or you will have to pity him. You will have to."

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Ibid., p. 331.
In Jefferson Flem's economic empire steadily expands and with this grows the area of his influence. He is now in a position to use his money to eliminate anything which does not contribute to his two desired ends—money and respectability. The owner of Atelier Monty Montgomery Snopes when starts trafficking in obscene photographs and the town begins to talk about his immoral dealings with the people, Flem takes prompt steps to eliminate him from the town. He is keen to see that nobody from his clan does anything which brings any discredit to the community.

Fully secure in the Sartoris Bank as the vice-president and in the town as an important citizen, Flem's only problem are his daughter Linda's physical growth and the near completion of Mink's jail term. He knows that once out of the penitentiary Mink will certainly kill him. The only way to contain Mink is to see that he again gets twenty years for the prison break. He uses Montgomery Snopes for this purpose who is in Parchman for a term. Montgomery induces Mink to escape from the prison disguised as a woman. Mink's attempt proves abortive and he gets another twenty years. This makes Mink completely bitter and for the time being, loses faith in all superhuman agencies.
But he quietly accepts his destiny and lives to avenge the wrong.

Now, free from Hink, Flem diverts his attention to Linda. Gavin Stevens wants to send her to a fairoff place for education. But Flem does not like the idea. He does not disclose the real cause, of his opposition. But Fatliff as usual rightly guesses his motive. He explains:

Here was the girl, the one pawn which could wreck his hopes of the Varner money, whom he had kept at home where he could delay to that extent at least the inevitable marriage which would ruin him, keeping her at home not only against her own wishes but against those of her mother too... keeping her at home even when to him too probably it meant she was wasting her time in that anachronistic vacuum which was the Female Academy.24

Only when Eula agrees to part with half of her patrimony does Flem allow Linda to go to the State University at Oxford. Once Linda is away and free from Flem's iron clutches Eula decides to leave Flem. She meets once again Gavin in his office and informs him about her future plan.

24 Ibid., p. 230.
In the course of her talk with Gavin she not only tells him about her husband's sterility but talks about Manfred De Spain with whom she plans an elopement. Bula implores Gavin to protect Linda by marrying her.

The same night Bula shoots herself. In the morning Jefferson is forced to remember the old outrage. The mourners gather but De Spain attends the bank as usual. Even the eighteen-year old association does not qualify him to become a mourner for his departed partner whose bed he shared with impunity. Charles Hallison informs us about De Spain's behaviour:

That he had to get up this morning and shave and dress and may be practise in front of the mirror a while in order to come to the square at the same time he always did, so everybody in Jefferson could see him doing exactly as he always did like if there was grief and trouble anywhere in Jefferson that morning, it was not his grief and trouble, being an orphan and unmarried; even to going on into the closed bank by the back door as if he still had the right to. 25

Manfred De Spain's decision not to appear in black is appreciated by the people of Jefferson. They understand

25 Ibid., p. 358.
that De Spain has no courage to flout the communal code of the old South. He cannot mourn for somebody’s dead. Morally he has no right to mourn for Bula. But the thing which really troubles the people is what made Bula take this drastic step. Finally Ratliff propounds his theory which Gavin readily accepts:

"May be she was bored," Ratliff said.
"Bored," Uncle Gravin said... "Yes".
He said. She was bored. She loved, had a capacity to love, to give and accept love. Only she tried twice and failed twice to find somebody not just strong enough to deserve, earn it, match it, but even brave enough to accept it. "Yes", he said, sitting there crying, not even trying to hide his face from us, of course she was bored.

Faulkner views Bula as pure elemental passion fecund and warm, and Flem as simple passivity, cold and barren. On a higher plane, their union proves destructive because two basically different principles of life cannot cohere. Again, Faulkner suggests that this bucolic Helen is above the moral categories of humanity. Helens are never corrupt, they are simply destined to burn the topless

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Ibid., pp. 353-59.
towers of their palises. Consequently, when we read on Eula's gravestone the following:

Eula Varner Snopes

1889 1927

A virtuous wife is a crown to her husband
Her children rise and call her blessed

We know that Faulkner is not insincere. And Flem does not give concession to southern respectability, but simply submits before the un-written law which proclaims that Helens are never profane because the primal source of life is never defiled.

Eula's death makes Flem free. He allows Linda to go to the Greenwich village in New York for further studies. De Spain leaves Jefferson. Flem becomes the president of the bank. He remodeled De Spain's ante-bellum Mansion and makes it his residence. Life takes a different colour
for him. Eula decently buried under a grand epitaph, Linda safely away in New York to meet her doom and destiny.

In the new mansion he enjoys the position of a very important citizen of Jefferson.

In New York Linda meets a Jew sculptor Barton Kohl who is a communist. Linda likes Kohl and she decides to marry him. Gavin Stevens and Ratliff attend her marriage. After this, Kohl and Linda go to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Here Kohl dies in action and Linda becomes deaf. She returns to Jefferson as a war veteran. She lives with her father who is not only rich but important. Gavin Stevens revives and intensifies his contact, but fails to involve himself in a lasting bond. This disappoints Linda and she goes to Pascagoula to work in a shipyard. Here again Linda invites Gavin Stevens. Gavin meets Linda but again nothing comes out of this meeting. Surprisingly Gavin returns to Jefferson and marries Helisander, a widow with two grown up children. Later, when the shipyard stops production Linda once again joins her father in Jefferson.

In Jefferson Linda makes a sincere effort to educate negroes but meets a very stiff resistance from the principal
of a negro school. Ultimately she drops the plan and quietly lives with her father in his mansion. Occasionally, people see her with her father in a car which takes them to a place where they buy whiskey. This is really intriguing. Especially, Ratliff feels that Linda stays with her father not for nothing. And one day when she wants Gavin to help her in getting Mink released from the Penitentiary, Gavin finds it difficult to understand Linda's concern for an unknown kinsman who happens to be a murderer. But he has to work for Mink and the governor signs the petition for Mink's release before his jail term expires. Gavin knows that once out of the prison Mink will be a furious man and it will be difficult to divert his attention from his cherished goal which is nothing but the murder of Men, who not only failed him once but worked for his complete humiliation with the help of another kinsman.

Mink murdered rich Houston not because he charged an extra dollar pound fee from him, but because his arrogance never allowed him to see Mink as an individual. Mink's confession reminds the reader of the nature of the wrong the rich perpetrate:

I aint shooting you because of them thirty-seven and a half-four bit days. That's all right; I done long ago forgot and forgive that.
Likely Will Varner couldn't do nothing else, being a rich man too and all you rich folks has got to stick together or else may be some day the ones that aint rich might take a notion to raise up and take hit away from you. That aint why I shoot you. I killed you because of that-ere extray one-dollar pound fee. 27

Faulkner informs us that as a boy Mink was deeply religious.

He tells the prison warden in Parchman:

Before I had that-ere cow trouble with Jack Houston, when I was still a boy, I used to go to church ever Sunday and Wednesday prayer meeting too with the lady that raised me until I... 28

And a little later again he informs the warden:

You dont need to write God a letter; He has done already seen inside you long before. He would even need to bother to read it. Because a man will learn a little sense in time even outside. But he learns it quick in here. That when a judgement powerfui enough to help you, will help you if all you got to do is jest take back and accept it. You are a fool not to. 29

28 All references hereafter, to the text, will be to this edition.
29 Ibid., p. 99.
30 Ibid., p. 100.
Bitter, disillusioned, tired, mellowed and clear eyed Mink ultimately accepts that, 'the old Hoater jest punishes; He dont play jokes'. He also accepts that it is too much to demand justice in this world, but one should be satisfied with just fairness. Faulkner gives the inkling of his mind:

Sixty-three he thought. So that's how old I am. He thought quietly. Not justice; I never asked that; jest fairness, that's all.30

Mink who becomes the instrument of retribution in the trilogy remains a very controversial figure. Ratliff calls him an out and out mean Snopes. It seems that Faulkner does not agree with Ratliff and devotes a long section of the trilogy to him. Faulkner presents the true nature of his suffering and disappointment. He writes:

... because he, Mink, was not a contentious man. He had never been. It was simply that his own bad luck and all his life continually harassed and harried him into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights.31

30 Ibid., p. 106.
31 Ibid., p. 27.
Prof. Brooks views Mink in a very sympathetic light and says:

Mink is one of Faulkner's many 'Calvinists', who do not believe in a God of love or mercy, but do believe that there is a final justice. Old Hester will see to it that Mink gets out of the penitentiary while Flem is still alive and he will see to it that Mink, with a weapon in his hand will someday stand face to face with Flem. There are provisos, to be sure, but they are provisos that any Calvinist would honour. God helps those who help themselves: Mink must be prepared to endure to the limit and to dare to the utmost. But most of all, Mink must never waver in his trust in Old Hester's fairness.32

Mink quietly suffers for his cherished cause for thirty-eight long years in the prison. A peculiar thing about him is that he not only accepts the judgement heroically but waits patiently and preaches the same stoic endurance to all. Faulkner gives expression to his attitude:

Because ever since his own abortive attempt eighteen or twenty years ago he had been known as a sort of self-ordained priest of the doctrine of non-escape.33


33 The Mansion, p. 94.
It is strange to learn from the trilogy that one simple obsession for primitive justice could sustain Mink for thirty eight years in the penitentiary. He has no one in the world to receive him—'family gone and scattered, wife died twenty five or thirty years ago, and no body knows what becomes of his two daughters'. He is terribly lonely. But he keeps up his spirit to perform the last ritual of removing the dark presence of Men Snopes from the town. This resolution of Mink makes him a terrible reality in the trilogy. Prof. Reed comments:

... a great portion of Mink's power is his force as an absurdly anachronistic nemesis. 34

In understanding the true nature of Mink's mission Irving Howe's observation sounds pertinent:

The portrait of Mink is beyond praise: a simple ignorant soul, who sees existence as an unending struggle between Old Master (God) and them (the world), with Them forever and ever rightly and naturally triumphant, always in control of events as they move along, yet with Old Master standing in reserve, not to intervene or help but

to draw a line, like Mink, himself, and say
that beyond this line no creature, not even
a wretched little Mink, dare be tortured or
tried. Mink's is the heroism of the will, a
man living out his need, the last and in some
ways the most moving embodiment of... the
Faulkner gesture.35

If Prof. Brooks glorifies Mink and Prof. Reed sees
him as an instrument of vengeance, Howe rightly states the
ture nature of his agony. Mink as we know from the beginning
is a poor farmer. He knows only one or two basic truths
of life — like one should be loyal to one's kinmen and if
possible one should accept even the extreme hard conditions
of existence and lead an honorable life. But he also
realizes that there are forces which deny even the most
basic amenities to mankind. Jack Houston was such a man
who never bothered to see Mink as a human being and provoked
him to such a degree that he was forced to end his life in
an ambush. Men, his kinmen, is another bush-league-Machiavelli,
who betrays him not once, but plots to eliminate him
altogether. Now, Mink is free; he has nothing to do but
to punish his cousin whose failings as a man he cannot
simply condone even after thirty eight year's mute suffering
in the penitentiary.

35 Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study,
(Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press,
Once out of the penitentiary Mink plans to reach Memphis to buy that deadly engine which will put an end to Flemish. That night he spends with Goodyhaw who asks him to pray:

Save us Christ, the poor sons of bitches. 36

In Memphis Mink buys a pistol from a pawn-shop. Faulkner describes this ugly instrument of destruction in detail:

'It looks like a cooter'... It did; snubnosed short-barrelled, swollen of cylinder and rusted over, with its curved butt and flat reptilian hammer it did resemble the fossil relic of some small antediluvian terrapin. 37

This primitive instrument in the hands of Mink becomes the symbol of natural justice. Mink uses it to vindicate his right as the restorer of 'Old Moser's' justice once again in human affairs.

Armed with the lethal weapon, Mink moves towards Jefferson to perform the sacrificial ritual ordained by

36 The Mansion, p. 271.
37 Ibid., p. 291.
the priestess of Vengeance, Linda. The guardians of the civic life try to hamper his progress towards the Mansion, but they prove ineffective before the adamantine laws of Nemesis. Mink, with a little difficulty locates his cousin in his mansion, sitting on a chair, inert and expressionless. He faces Mink with his deadly weapon but shows no signs of dread. When Mink's first attempt proves abortive and there is enough time for him to leave the chair, even then he does not move. His second attempt proves successful and with a loud sound he falls at once on the ground. A little later Linda encounters confused Mink and tells him to take his weapon and shows the right way to get out of the mansion. She says:

"Here. Come and take it. That door is a closet. You'll have to come back this way to get out".38

The entire county participated in the big funeral. The Baptist minister performed the last rite. And when all left the burial ground only his kinsmen were there:

They were like wolves come to look at the trap where another bigger wolf,

38 Ibid., p. 416.
This merciless comment of Faulkner shows that he has irrepressible disgust for the community whose wolverine domination for four decades polluted the very source of the decent civic life of Jefferson and the South.

After the burial Gavin and Ratliff discover Mink in his old abandoned house:

Faulkner arduously builds up the image of Mink. In the trilogy Mink becomes a very powerful character not because he murders Men, but because he stands for that cardinal

39 Ibid., p. 421.
40 Ibid., p. 432.
virtue - human pride, a Southerner prizes above everything.
Gavin and Ratliff together seek Mink because he accomplished
something which they failed to achieve for their community.
Their brief encounter with Mink is really touching and
elevates Mink to the status of a true tragic hero:

"'I'my', he said.
"You can't stay here", Stevens said...
"I ain't going to stay", he said. "I
just stopped to rest".
"I am fixing to go on pretty soon:
who are you fellers?"

After a minute Gavin offers him money:

"You mean when I take it I ain't promised
nobody nothing?"
"Yes". Stevens said.
"Much obliged", he said.

After this moving encounter between the town's Guardians
and Mink, Faulkner takes the reader to Mink again before
his final apotheosis:

... himself among them, equal to any, good
as any, brave as any, being inextricable
from, anonymous with all of them: the
beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the
brave, right on up to the very to itself
among the shining phantoms and dreams which

41 Ibid., pp. 422-33.
are the milestones of the long human recordings - Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim. 42

Mink dies and he is with the 'unhomed angels'. Here, Faulkner does not use the traditional Southern rhetoric to deify a worthless man; on the contrary he is open and compassionate and pays an unstinted tribute to a man who stands for simple legitimate human pride. Linda, after the burial rites, returns the mansion to De Spain's people, settles major and minor financial details and leaves Jefferson in a new car. After accomplishing her mission as the avenger of her mother's untimely death, she feels that there is nothing for her to do in Jefferson. People, with a heavy heart, accept her decision thinking that they cannot afford Helen's daughter for long. Ratliff eliminates Clarence Snopes from the political scene of the country and in this way demolishes the very citadel of the corrupt power. Old Gavin decides to drop all his youthful plans and derives satisfaction from the fact that at least the community is free from the Snopes menace. In this way the trilogy comes to a fitting close 'all passions spent'.

42 Ibid., p. 436.
Warren Beck considers the Snopes trilogy the very crown of Faulkner's creativity. With a little reserve it is not difficult to agree with his pronouncement. Undoubtedly, in the trilogy Faulkner once again handles a very important subject of the modern times - the depravity of the economic order. His grim view of this world, he artistically bodies forth in the trilogy. He adumbrates in detail what contributes to the rise of an order which spreads like the flood-water and disappears like a salt-sea-bubble. In the trilogy Flem's rise to the seat of power and authority bewilders all. But this happens because Flem's manipulative energy flows only in one direction and transforms anything into a marketable commodity. Hence, a colossal impersonal system grows to annihilate all human concerns. Flem's sin is greater than Popeye of Sanctuary. Popeye sexualizes money, Flem commercializes sex, and there is no doubt that Flem's crime is more sinister and pervasive. If damnation means total alienation from God, and death of the soul, Flem is doubly damned. He is not only alienated from God but he has no living contact with the world of men. He is a more subtle logician than Nephilophilts and possesses less soul than him, because he never suffers from 'poena damn'. His deeds are darker than those of the prince of
Bis because he violates the immutable laws of blood-kinship. Faulkner takes considerable pains to project him before the reader at the time of his death. He sits inert and expressionless in his chair. He is pure matter and symbolizes material prosperity. Linda rightly considers him a source of pure contamination of the communal life and takes steps to eliminate him from the community. She uses Mink, a cousin of Men, to accomplish this task. The rise of Men becomes possible in the South because of the decline of the Southern aristocracy and even the custodians of the public weal cooperated with him. But finally the moral principles of the South asserted themselves and demolished the dark foundation of this order. In this way, Faulkner proposes to show that any order which ignores the moral impulse of men cannot be accepted by the people of the South.

In the trilogy Faulkner appears to be extremely troubled about the decay of the values in which he passionately believed. He simply cannot bless the complete separation between economics and ethics. His agrarian background makes him a crusader for the traditional values of the South. These values he simply cannot allow to disappear even from the wicked world of the Snopeses.
is extremely sentimental, Bok is innocent, Hink is the
paragon of legitimate human pride and Linda suffers from
righteous indignation. The only thing is that these virtues
are present in an aberrant form, but that does not mean
that they are less significant in human affairs.

Obliquely, Faulkner suggests that these values ultimately
sustain a human order. The Snopeses declined because they
never cared for the traditional moral values of the South.

If the aristocratic order of the ante-bellum South
collapsed because of its super human pride and a total
disregard for human personality, the Snopeses collapsed
because they paid not even scant regard to human values.

If Faulkner tacitly accepts the old order, he unequivocally
condemns the anti-communal stance of the new order.

Robert Penn Warren writes about this new creed:

The Hamlet is a tale of the corruption of
Frenchman's Bend by Flann, the first stage
in his long career towards the presidency
of a bank. "Modernity", in this sense, is
the end of that idea of community which
is based on mutual recognition of human
qualities and needs among its members;
what may take the place of community is
a mere agglomeration of individuals related
by the more mechanics of self-interest or
competition - a no-society, an anti-community.43

43 Robert Penn Warren, Faulkner: The South, the Negro
and Time, in Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays,
p. 256.
Those critics who maintain that the trilogy is about love and economics or about sex and money or about the purification of the Snopes clan unnecessarily complicate the issue. The main theme of the trilogy is the brutality of the economic order; other subjects are introduced to strengthen the impact of the basic theme. It is an epic of man's quest for money, money which becomes more precious than life. As Richard Roberts writes:

Money is the symbol of value, ... and value is created by the expenditure of the priceless stuff of life. A coin is so much minted life, a holy thing, neither common nor unclean; a sacramental thing like the bread and wine of the Communion, the symbol of life fruitfully expended. That is why the banker should be as a priest, and a bank a holy place.44

But Faulkner's South cannot worship this 'holy-thing' and decides to shed the blood of the priest to

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renew and revive the earth. Faulkner himself ridicules this Mammon worship thus:

What a commentary. Sweden gave me the Nobel Prize. France gave me the Legion d'Honneur. All my native land did for me was to invade my privacy over my protest and my plea. No wonder people in the rest of the world don't like us, since we seem to have neither taste nor courtesy, and know and believe in nothing but money and it does not much matter how you get it.45