CHAPTER I

A SENSE OF NATURE
While attempting to define the sense of nature in the works of William Faulkner, one is reminded of Hegel's statement "the condemnation which a great man lays upon the world is to force it to explain him". The complexity of Faulkner's writing poses a continual challenge and any effort to search for the clue to an understanding of his novels is perhaps not unlike the Grail-quest. This thesis is an exploration of his image of nature in order to discover its relevance to human experience in time.

The treatment of nature in Faulkner's works has been discussed in the past. The earlier focus, initiated by his contemporaries Robert Penn Warren and Malcolm Cowley, was on the empathetic evocation of nature, effusive in lyricism and observation. This theme was further developed by Cleanth Brooks for he extended the range of nature from setting to men and moods. Later the interest shifted to a review of nature in the works of Faulkner, as one of the functional agents within the mythic mode as delineated by Brylowski, Warren Beck and R.P. Adams. Though all these insights into Faulkner's idea of nature are illuminating they tend to highlight one aspect of either form or content while de-emphasizing the other. For a writer of such significance it does not seem fair to define his image of nature as an appendage to an
earlier tradition, nor to reduce his use of nature to a modernistic device.

In order to arrive at any conclusive direction of Faulkner's idea of nature, it is first necessary to define the term 'nature' as is depicted in his works. Of the several offered in the dictionary, the one most largely applicable to Faulkner's usage is the dual definition in Webster as "a creative and controlling force in the universe and an inner force or the sum of such forces in an individual". Nature in his novels appears to be the creative force generated by the interaction between external phenomena and the innate impulse in man. His image of nature appears again and again in the familiar close-ups of the Yoknapatawpha scene, evoked in the ravaged wilderness, the gurgling muddy river and the fragrance of the wisteria, twice-bloomed. Embedded within the vivified landscape is the author's projection of change and immutability in nature and its relativity to human experience.

To comprehend the complexity of Faulkner's view of nature it is essential to associate the magnitude of his conception to the versatility of his artistic expression. The title 'Vision and Voice' refers to the skillful coordination of the artist's imaginative apprehension of human existence in time and the controls used to convey that commitment. Faulkner
appears to communicate a feel for nature quickened by conviction without verging on the doctrinaire. His reader is constantly faced with the experience of nature without being confronted by a concept.

A discussion of nature in Faulkner's works would not be valid without reference to the historical dimension. The American experience, which has been projected as a unique consciousness in literature emerges from the first traumatic encounter with nature. The preliminary experience consisted of the dramatic conflict between the physical, in the stark reality confronted within the present, and the psychic in the mythic illusions carried over from the past. It was followed by a period of unrest caused by a denial of the economic terrors of the European past and a longing for the security of a familiar tradition within the physical terrors of the present. The aftermath came in the form of a continued neurosis with nature in the disenchantment with the past and a sense of want within the present. The American began to believe that he could compensate for his disinheritance by a greater involvement in nature. Wilson Clough accounts for this faith in nature as endemic to the American culture. In a review of the earlier history, he states that:

'At first the European man tried desperately to link the lineaments of the new reality with past myths, or the myths with the reality; but in time the reality was sufficient
to itself and wonder was available within a real world.
Thus a new kind of man arose for whom the reality was more important than the preservation of old myths.¹

The Europe, which the American pioneer had left behind, was a country so steeped in historical turmoil that nature had been turned into a profane reality twice-removed. For the American, the physical reality of the wilderness was the only reality he was exposed to, and therefore history became a profane illusion. Gradually as the American consciousness began to sense a lack of the past, the function of history was projected on nature. Nature and history were juxtaposed and found to follow parallel patterns of sequential activity, both were accessible to change and both adhered to objective reality. The progress-oriented climate of the twentieth century further enhanced this theory. Scientific discoveries reduced nature to a muted activity of anticipated crisis, while political conditions turned history into a state of cultivated crisis. The representation of crisis being the common denominator, the conflict arose from the belief that the function of nature and history is presentation of truth. The discovery of the subjective element in both resulted in deflected shadows of reality. The thinkers of the age called for a reconditioning of the image of reality and of the agents of communication.

Cleanth Brooks redefines the term 'innocence' in the modern American context.² He cites the experience of Sutpen, Gatsby and Newman as indicative of failures in the perception of reality. This failure can be traced further back to the shift in the image of reality from nature in its physicality, to the pseudo-natural environment. It led to a similar shift in nature speculations from the quantitative in the externalisation of reality to a more internalised quest. The image of the American Adam, struggling to reassert his lost ego through acts of endurance in the New World Garden, has been transformed into the new American Adam, placed in the New World Industry, striving to recover his emasculated ego through affected feats. The earlier image finds expression in Melville's Moby Dick, whereas the latter image is represented in a metaphoric form in Faulkner's Light in August. In Moby Dick, the image of reality is concretized in the sea and the whale, whereas in Light in August, the circle and the street remain an abstraction. Moby Dick ends with the possibility of resolution in the figure of Ishmael moving towards the end to his solitude. Light in August does not terminate at the point of Joe's death. It closes on an ironic note of the openness of experience. With reference to Faulkner it is essential to make a distinction between the levels of innocence which appear to be controlled by the extent of perception in the individual character. The

experience of Sutpen, Flem or Popeye is not comparable to that of Ike McCaslin or Chick Mallison. All these characters come to the realization that man is poised not against natural forces or destiny but against himself. But in Sutpen, Popeye and Flem, innocence is ironically evoked to underline the arrested consciousness.

The American preoccupation with the representation of time in nature and in history is evident in Faulkner's novel Absalom, Absalom. In Quentin and Shreve's imaginative reconstruction of Southern history lies the ethos of the creative consciousness in evolution. Quentin's pained affirmation, at the end, "I dont hate the South, I dont", is an abnegation of faith in the historical approach. Faulkner implies that though history simulates the ratio-empiric method, it fails to account for the changing and the immutable in human experience. The authentic self emerges from the confrontation in nature for such an experience calls for the individual's reckoning with the foreseeable and the unforeseeable in the outside world.

This chapter is an effort to place Faulkner's image of nature within the context of past literary usage in order to realize the uniqueness of his art. Nature portrayals have undergone considerable transformation and the twentieth century version appears as a distilled product. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha scene, Robert Frost's New Hampshire country,
Yeats' Irish countryside and Eliot's Waste Land, in their exploration of temporal and spatial perspectives differ: from the flatness of surface in Hardy's Wessex county, the Lake District of the Romantics and the Concord exclusive to the Transcendentalists. In the upholding of nature as an entity apart from man, the earlier writers presented nature as microcosmic islands of imaginative speculation located within a familiar context. The modern image of nature functions as a macrocosm of impenetrable reality, apprehended in a dynamic man and nature interaction and evoked in aesthetic abstractions. In terms of technique, the earlier treatment is in the form of contractions - the movement is centripetal in a compulsive narrowing down by the imposition of doctrine, and inevitably attenuating in an act of faith. Nature in the modern schema, evolves a process of extraction - the movement is centrifugal and outward toward the metaphysical periphery, achieved through nuances. It appears to provoke tentative deduction.

In an effort to outline the points of distinction between Faulkner's idea of nature and earlier variations of this theme, it is necessary to juxtapose his contribution with the treatment of nature in the tradition. His lyrical evocations of the natural scene, his sensitive portrayals of man and nature interaction and his concern with the past, have tempted critics to place him within the Romantic tradition. But such a claim appears to disregard the upheaval of the century and the shift in the centres of gravity from faith in Man, God and Nature to commitment to the timeless in experience.
Faulkner's primitivism does not intrude on his works as a detached cultivated interest as in Romantic usage. There is no elevation of the primitive to the image of the Rousseausque 'noble sauvage' as apprehended by Johnson and Wordsworth. Nor is the primitive depicted in naturalistic terms as an exclusive species of anthropological interest to provide a perspective to the modern condition as in the works of Cooper, Melville and Thoreau. The earlier authors simulated reality in their depiction of the primitive for their view is from the outside. In Faulkner's novels the primitive does not remain in isolation as an individual or an aggregate, the primitive element is diffused into the entire Yoknapatawpha culture. The elemental is projected as a response endemic to the race and its history. The chapter which follows is an analysis of Faulkner's use of the primitive hunt experience for the dramatisation of a tension in time.

On the surface, Faulkner's treatment of the community in the earlier novels, may appear to be similar to Hardy's depiction of the village rustics. The image of the rustics in *The Return of the Native* makes an interesting comparison with Faulkner's projection of the mob in *Light in August*, for they both appear to function in terms of group dynamics. But the contrast lies in the artist's considerations which are ethical in Hardy and aesthetic in Faulkner. In Hardy's tales, the community is inextricably tied to the human condition. Faulkner does not concern himself with the good and bad of the community. He
uses the communal experience for the projection of a human response to time. Besides there is a sameness in the evocation of the rustic in most of Hardy's novels; whereas in Faulkner the primitive element is varied for it is controlled by the fluctuating response in the individual. In *The Bear*, to associate the primitive strain in Boon with that in Sam Fathers would be to ignore the hierarchy of responses.

The element of irony which dominates Hardy's portrayal of nature invites comparison with Faulkner's ironic stance. The image of man caught within a web appears common to both. And yet in Hardy, irony becomes integral to the vision while Faulkner seems to adopt the ironic mode for an artistic end. In Hardy's novels, the web is an external force, verging on the physical. But in Faulkner's works the web is internalized. In terms of control, Hardy's commitment to determinism restricts his scope to the recounting of experience in linear progression. The levels of irony explored by Faulkner indicate an awareness of the polarity in an ego-oriented anthropocentric image of the world and the effacement of self in a success-oriented culture. He assumes the tragi-comic mode as the most appropriate form to enunciate the variability of human experience.

Endemic to the American culture is the conflict in the perception of nature, identified by Leo Marx as 'the pilot's dilemma'. The quest for reality in nature precipitated by a

fluctuating response to a recognisable content is the centre of Ahab's search on the sea voyage, Thoreau's reflections beside the Walden Pond, Twain's voyage down the Mississippi and Ike McCaslin's hunt for the bear. Though there appears to be a resemblance between Melville's image of the whale and Faulkner's projection of the bear, it is necessary to draw a line between the idea of reality in the two centuries. In Melville's portrayal of *Moby Dick*, the dialectics consist of an accepted empathetic evocation of nature and the result-oriented empirical approach. In Melville's age the physicality of nature was yet a source of wonder, and what the thinkers of that time sought for was a metaphysical experience in the reality of the natural environment. Ahab's encounter with the whale in *Moby Dick*, is presented as a cosmic confrontation between two diametrically opposed forces. Faulkner's concern appears to extend beyond the dialectics of reality to the polarity in time. In Faulkner's age nature no longer remains an entity beyond the human ken, and in his novels the centre of gravity indicates a shift from a metaphysical experience to an aesthetic experience. *The Bear* story appears to simulate a resemblance between man and nature as two dynamic states which evolve their own postures of immutability and change in time. Man and nature interaction in Faulkner's works does not terminate in a spiritual experience but in a cognition of time.

An analogy may be drawn between the range of man's experience in nature in Twain and in Faulkner. Huck Finn's
adventures down the Mississippi, the rapport between the white boy and the negro slave and his exposure to the communal culture is strikingly similar to Chick's experience in Intruder in the Dust. But on closer scrutiny the resemblance appears to lie merely in the affected mock-humourous tone.

The content of nature in the river and Huck's movement within it suggest that the conflict in Twain is between the forces of primitivism and civilization. And in Huck he seeks to resolve it by upholding the moral in experience. The image of nature in Intruder in the Dust is not restricted to a single entity but seems to assume control over the entire landscape, so that the natural setting and community together combine in an evocation of time. Besides the relationship between the white boy and the black man in Faulkner's novel is not governed by moral concerns. In Intruder in the Dust, he appears to explore the potentials of this relationship as a human experience in time.

Critics in an attempt to prove Faulkner's affinity with the Romantics, have called attention to his references to Keats, cursorily made in Light in August and more explicitly in The Bear. Lawrance Thompson makes a case for Faulkner's commitment to truth and he uses the experience in The Bear to further substantiate his point. He first analyses the word 'immortality' in Faulkner's usage and infers an alignment in the experience of immortality and truth. According to him:
Faulkner found he needed to reinterpret the term "immortality." Faulkner uses it to refer to the continuation of life on earth through generation after generation. He finds in the human race a seemingly unquenchable capacity for clinging to earth, and feels the race has achieved success in it, so far as through conscientious expressions of moral truth, and in spite of man's own self-destructive brutality.

"Truth" has a particular meaning for Faulkner — it is the quality of being in accordance with facts or realities of experience which have thus far enabled man to achieve and preserve his "immortality." 4

Thompson's claim that Faulkner's art is guided by a moral vision does not account for the complexity of human experience in time. By inferring moral attributives in the terms 'immortality' and 'truth' he restricts the potentials of Faulkner's involvement in time and in the evolution of language. To believe Faulkner's reference to the dialectics of beauty and truth, to be indicative of his commitment to the Romantic creed, would be to disregard the reconditioned image of art in Faulkner's works. Malraux points out that the distinction lies in the evolutionary quality of human experience in time. He states that:

...art resuscitated by our metamorphosis is a realm as vast and varied as was life itself in ages previous to ours.

We subject that art to a passionate enquiry, akin to that questioning of the scheme of things inherent in our present-day art and culture. Just as the crucial historical event of the nineteenth century was the birth of a new consciousness of history, so the crucial expression of the metamorphosis of this century is our consciousness of it.¹

In the context of Malraux’s definition, the terms ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’ acquire a more dynamic shape than their connotations in nineteenth century usage. Faulkner’s use of the Keatsian credo suggests an aesthetic purpose rather than endorsement. The Bear is Faulkner’s exploration of an aesthetic experience. In his novels the aesthetics never conforms to a creed for it is continuously placed in time and the context of the individual experience.

Such a comparative study of the theme of nature in the literary tradition enables one to gauge the extent of influence on Faulkner’s idea of nature. The image of nature in his novels does not acquire its uniqueness by a denial of the earlier tradition but by an assimilation of the conscious and unconscious heritage in the creative vision. This study establishes that Faulkner’s vision of nature derives its authenticity from its involvement in time.

The contemporaneity of Faulkner's art demands that the critics devise new tools for a comprehensive study of his image of nature. Perhaps the most logical approach would be to subject his various representations of nature to philosophical scrutiny in order to arrive at the conceptual content. But Faulkner's treatment of nature is too sophisticated, stylised to be reduced to a one to one correspondence. Nature, in his novels, is so integral a part of man that it never appears detached as a dramatic backdrop or as a character; it is projected as an innate and ineluctable activity in time.

This study is an attempt to prove that nature, in Faulkner's works assumes a stance in time. One feels that the old specifications of landscape requires revision in the context of a modern consciousness of time. It is what John Lynten terms as a 'duality of consciousness' that isolates all great writers from others of their time. Faulkner appears to surpass most of his contemporaries in his projection of nature as a dynamic surface of continuity and timelessness. His presentation of nature appears to follow a kaleidoscopic pattern of chaos and order containing within it man's frenetic activities in a passage of time. Faulkner's evocation of nature does not offer an ethical antidote to the

current catastrophe; it generates a creative unity within the refracted images of timelessness. His landscapes are explorations of the experiential and visual in space. Joseph Frank traces the use of the spatial form in modern literature to the ancient Egyptian, Oriental and Byzantium cultures. He asserts that in modern art:

... the artist abandons the three dimensional world and returns to the plane, reduces organic nature, including man to linear-geometrical forms and colours.  

Faulkner's portrayal of nature appears to derive an order from the configurations of "linear-geometrical forms". Visual perspectives in the landscape convey a sense of temporality in the horizontal lines and an instance of timelessness in the vertical incline upwards as a synchronous containment within the horizontal and a veering away from it. The design of the spiral on the horizontal appears to represent an affirmation in the repudiation of the temporal. The recurring evocation of this time-transcending motif in references to the natural scene suggests that it is an aesthetic rendering of a human experience in time.

The method evolved in this study is of tentative deduction rather than categorical assertions. The preliminary probe into Faulkner's image of nature limits itself to the structural elements. The chapter which follows is a scrutiny

---

of the experience of pursuit, not as an elemental experience in nature but as an elemental texture of response. A recurring pattern of continuity and crisis emerges from the various images of pursuit. Faulkner uses the image of pursuit to represent a tension in the pace of human responses to time. The action of pursuit in the individual and the community is posed ironically for it is used to evoke an aura of stasis. Pursuit expresses itself explicitly in the communal behaviourism of the lynch-mob or the black exodus in *The Unvanquished*, and imperceptively in an individual urge as in *Flem* or in the black man, *Rider*. Though the elemental response is projected in all its fluctuations, the stasis is evoked in the temporality of the impulse. Stasis does not appear to govern a condition, it denotes a total disregard of all time. Chapter three offers an analysis of Faulkner's mythic evocation of fertility. The image of fertility in the landscape appears to be transposed into his evocation of female forms. His use of myth indicates that he evolves an art form for the dramatisation of responses to the fecundity of nature and the state of proliferation in the female. A survey of Faulknerian women shows how the author explores the myth of Diana and the myth of Persephone to define the variations in response. The evocation of mythic fertility in nature and the female appears to serve an artistic purpose. The images of the twice-bloomed wistaria in *Absalom, Absalom*, the intoxicating honeysuckle in *The Sound and The Fury* and the burgeoning pear-tree in *The Hamlet* are
used to underline stasis in an individual condition. The connection between the image and the individual is too explicit to be disregarded. Faulkner's reference to myth in the projection of the female does not seem to be for the purpose of elevating the individual or the condition. Myth appears to be used to control the pace of response in the passivity of the Diana state of fertility and the aberrative gesture to repudiate that condition in the Persephone act of rape. Faulkner's females do not conform wholly to the image of Diana or Persephone. He seems to implicate the mythic referent in projecting the variations in an individual's abandonment to mythic time.

The structural approach to Faulkner's image of nature reveals that he devises artistic tools to delineate stasis in human responses to time. In the later chapters the focus shifts to the content of nature on an assumption that it expresses the artist's weltanschaung. The study of landscapes in four nature-based novels indicates that there is a recurring pattern in the designed setting. The chronological perspective underlines the process of a widening spectrum and a perfecting art and the achievement in the alignment of Vision and Voice. The central image or images in all four novels appear to represent a sense of timelessness in the embodiment of the spiral on the horizontal geometrical shape. The image, reiterating a transcendence of the temporal, is inserted at
intervals to evoke a response in the individual consciousness. The responses appear to follow a pattern in temporal sequence. This study evolves a new approach to nature in Faulkner's novels in terms of 'motif' and 'movement'. The central image in the four novels appear to cohere in their embodiment of the time-transcending motif. One objective in the chronological scrutiny is to trace the artistic development in the projection of the image from a symbolic approximation to an imagistic precision. The study probes the structure of images in a claim that unity lies in the evocation of a hierarchy of responses. The term 'movement' has been used to define the generative activity in an individual's responses to the motif. The movement determines the motions of an accreting consciousness as distinct from the stasis in others' responses to time. The chronological perspective is used to view the depiction of the movement in its isolation in an early work like Light in August and the artistic assimilation in the maturer work as in Intruder in the Dust.

The study is an attempt to prove that the inner unity of Faulkner's vision of nature lies in integration of image to discourse. It springs from the author's realization that nature no longer provides an End to the modern anathema. Frank Kermode in a study of endings in modern literature remarks that:
Later tragedy itself succumbs to the pressure of 'demythologizing'; the End itself, in modern literary plotting loses its downbeat, tonic-and-dominant finality, and we think of it as the theologians think of Apocalypse, as immanent rather than imminent. Thus, as we shall see, we think in terms of crisis rather than temporal ends; and make much of subtle disconfirmation and elaborate peripeteia. And we concern ourselves with the conflict between the deterministic pattern any plot suggests, and the freedom of persons within that plot to choose and so to alter the structure the relations of beginning, middle and end.

Faulkner's involvement in time to a great extent appears to control his renderings in nature. In his novels, the central image superimposed on the surface of continuity assumes a shape of crisis when transposed on the surface of the individual consciousness as the image of Old Ben and Ike's experiences in The Bear tale. The recurring image evokes a sense of recurring crisis and the pattern of responses in the individual is projected to simulate a resemblance to a beginning a middle and an end. The time-

transcending motif in its generative potential resonates with clarity in the upbeat of the clock. The downbeat is diffused in the vibrations of human experience and provided with an aesthetic unity in the movement. The image of nature in Faulkner's works resists definition for it emerges as an evolutionary process in time. Faulkner's nature is the index to his creative vision for it continues to formulate an artistic order from the chaos of human experience.