CHAPTER V

THE UNASSIMILATED IMAGE
The time span between the writing of the two novels *Light in August* and *The Wild Palms* is considerable. It appears to be reflected in the sophistication of stylistics in the latter. In *Light in August* the three streams are carefully interwoven through events and symbols, but the connections are mainly thematic. The stories in *The Wild Palms* are cast independently, yet they project the effect of one experience. Faulkner himself apprehends this convergence in terms of an orchestral effect, as "a contrapuntal quality like music". The author explicates that the relation lies in contrast, and that one is used to offset the other in the individual achievement. Most critics have successfully traced the parallels between the two tales. Through elaborate associations of plot and symbols, the correspondence between two diametrically opposed textures of experience has been established. But such an approach tends to reduce the complexity of the novel to an exposition of contrasts. Melvin Backman views Harry as:

"the modern helpless male marked for defeat by a general stasis of will and by a failure of nerve." And in contrast the convict's cosmic encounter appears to him to be "'an ancient honourable struggle'". Backman's

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73. Faulkner in the University, eds. F.L. Gwynn and J.L. Blotner (New York: Random House, 1965) p.171

interpretation tends to be too conclusive. He seems to assign success and failure to the accomplishment rather than the experience. Besides, Backman ignores the implications of the intricate time-patterns in the novel. Olga Vickery's is a more sensitive account of *The Wild Palms*. She comes closest to the artistic intent in her discussion of motion and stasis in the recurring images of earth and water. She illustrates how both the convict and the lovers are exposed to a similar experience in confinement and flight. Olga Vickery highlights the correspondences rather than the contrasts in her estimate of the novel:

Regarded as parallel, each is concerned with the relationship between the individual, society, and nature and between freedom and order. In both, the same pattern of confinement, flight, and capture is developed though in different contexts. Juxtaposed, the two narratives obviously modify and influence the reader's interpretation of either one. 75

In her attempt to telescope the two experiences as one, Vickery fails to point out the distinction in the evocation of time in the two stories. This study assumes that both stories are explorations in time and consciousness and that the variation lies in human responses to time. The antithesis in fulfillment in one and failure in the other,

is skillfully depicted in ironic inversion to the actual events. The ironic inversion here is not explicit as in the earlier novels, but implied in the linguistic mode which most often parodies the romance novels. The artist's expanding vision enables both the stories to operate alternately in varying levels of consciousness. Both individuals are caught at a state of arrested consciousness, both are exposed to crisis, but while in Wild Palms there is a discernible growth of consciousness, the Old Man tale fails to record any expansion. In each story the motif precipitates the movement and may be distinguished by the horizontal motion of time in the flux of the river, and the vertical act of repudiation in space in Wild Palms.

In an analysis of the stories in terms of motif and movement, it is necessary to make a reference to the titles. A comparative study of its usage in Light in August indicates that the latter shows a greater clarity in perception. The writer exploits the symbolic portents of the title, in Light in August, in order to magnify its significance. In The Wild Palms, Faulkner mocks at the symbolic echoes, and projects the titles purely as time perspectives. In Wild Palms, Faulkner's references to the word "palms" in double entendre indicates that he uses it ironically. The word "wild" is the operative in the title for it conveys
tension. There is affirmation in the palm's resistance to wind and in the posture of upward incline. In *Old Man,* the only conclusive interpretation one may derive from the river, is not as a sanctifying or punitive force, but as a linear motion. The focus here is on the word 'old' which functions as an attributive in folk usage, in homage to the river for its quality of endurance. On application to the stories, the titles indicate a distinction in the act of prevailing and the act of enduring.

The graphic urban scenes in *Wild Palms* places the story within the linear pattern of man-bound time; whereas the exaggeratedly Biblical backdrop of *Old Man* presents Edenic time, parallel in form and antithetic in content. And yet the ironic overtones of the language indicate that both converge at the level of a preconscious response, direct in one, and in inversion in the other. There is a distinct evocation of the primeval in the depiction of the texture of life at the various havens that the couple seek. Harry and Charlotte fool themselves into believing that their flight is an act of repudiation, only to discover on each occasion that they play into the hands of time and society. The act of elopement and the act of abortion merely provide society with the leverage to exercise sanction. In *Old Man,* the action, on a varied surface, represents man's instinctive
urge to survive against the onslaughts of time and nature. And yet the inherent irony reduces the heroic element to an anticipated response. And it is at this point that the stories diverge in movement, in the widening apprehension of time and its resolution.

This study focuses on a single image of the landscape as the referent for tracing the parallel line of response in both stories up to the point of apprehension. In chronological perspective, the first image of the palms appears casually among the exotic foliage that outlines a house where Harry tags along with his friend to attend a party. This is the venue for the first dramatic confrontation between Harry and Charlotte; one, a striving intern, the other, the erratic wife of a sophisticate. Their dialogue is nominal but this encounter registers a tension that is steeped in responses essentially instinctive. This tension arises from a spontaneous revocation of expected commitments and it is recorded in the image of the cabbage palm, conspicuous as a variety that is carefully tended as a show piece. The language used to describe it is steeped in the sensuality of the experience. The image forces itself upon the consciousness though actually visualised at a distance thus:

... a wall of soft muted brick above which the crest of a cabbage palm exploded raggedly and from beyond which
came a heavy smell of jasmine which seemed to lie visible upon the rich stagnant air already impregnated with the smell of sugar and bananas and hemp from the docks, like inert wisps of fog or even paint. 76

The author here labours to accentuate the innate stasis of this Bohemian condition in order to contrast it with the exotic image of the palm. The palm is viewed on a different surface on the three occasions throughout the novel, and the quality of response in Harry, on each undergoes accretion. The shift is from the instinctive through the rational to a crystallisation in the maturing mind. From the first foiled rendezvous in a hotel room all of Harry's and Charlotte's gestures follow an identical pattern up to a certain point. It appears as though the vigour of a spontaneous reaction etiolates into puny responses which intermittently repudiate time in spirit rather than in form. Most critics tend to telescope Harry and Charlotte's responses into the joint venture. This study isolates Harry's consciousness in order to guage the growing response. It seems that Faulkner abandons the female consciousness for possible growth and development, despite the fact that Charlotte is projected as one of his most potentially dynamic women. A glimpse of the extent of her apprehension appears in her vision of the buck at the Wisconsin lake shore. The image of the buck caught standing on the shore edge "pink in the Sunday dawn, its head up,

76. W.F. The Wild Palms, pp.31-32.
watching them for an instant before it whirled, its white scut arcing in long bounds" appears to be the image in its nascent form of the magnificent buck so often recalled in The Bear legend. Charlotte's fascination is drawn to its 'motion, the speed' rather than its beauty, for she sees in it the life force that she had been desperately trying to recreate in her clay figurines. Harry's line of introspection, at this stage, responds wholly to the surface of the lake. His response to the landscape of this scenic resort becomes a discipline in rational approach, and he "deliberately atrophies his natural senses" to become one with all men. The apparent stasis of his condition is most exquisitely evoked in the image of the autumn leaves which he himself visualises in a hypnotic cradle-like motion:

The first red and yellow leaves drifting down, the double leaves, the reflection rising to meet the falling one until they touch and rock a little, not quite closing. Harry's condition is comparable with Joe's experience in the woods which too is enacted in a hazy dreamlike state, measured merely by the rise and set of suns. In this story the linear pattern of time in the distancing of days

77. Ibid., p.92
is seen as one "same stationary recapitulation of
golden interval between dawn and sunset" against which
the "diminishing rows of cans" are juxtaposed to
contribute to Harry's drowsy and foetus-like state". And then immediately after, follows a statement which runs a correspondence with Joe's experience in the wood for it reads "Then one day something happened to him". But the reference to *Light in August* is not for the purpose of drawing a parallel but for deciphering a maturing vision amidst these images. In *Light in August* the words "Something is going to happen to me" acquire an ominous note for soon after we find that Joe is faced with the moment of resolution. But in *Wild Palms* the words no longer herald such a pat conclusion. Here it is used as a spring board from which to project yet another dimension in time. His gesture of sketching and then burning up the calendar indicates his awareness of a new reality in time and represents his ineffective steps to alleviate his state. Reality fails to crystallise into experience, and as his consciousness continues to remain still submerged at a particular level of response, one anticipates that his immediate shift to Chicago can provide no refuge. The writer uses the Christmas season, a religious motif, to project a preconscious response in inversion. The store where Charlotte earns her living
is evoked in the primeval image of a "Synthetic marble cavern", where all action is reduced to mimicry, splendidly expressed through the gestures of the charwomen who appear "as though they were another species just crawled mole-like from some tunnel or orifice leading from the foundations of the earth".

Harry soon tires of his role as writer of cheap stories, "his sexual gumdrop" and his apprehension of his condition is most aptly conveyed through the image of the typewriter's tape, "a little strip of inked ribbon, daily I watched myself getting more and more tangled in it like a roach in a spider web". Harry's awareness precipitates his decision to quit Chicago and the demands of respectability, and seek a less trammelled existence at the Utah mines. At this stage, the individual consciousness apprehends to the extent, that Harry makes a distinction between the experience of solitude which he had sought at the Wisconsin lake and that of isolation which he now sets out in quest of. The discourse with McCord is a verbalisation of Harry's vision in time. The conversation takes place at the railway station on the day the couple are due to leave for Utah. Tension in time is created in dual perspective. At one level, time is stamped on "the ubiquitous and synchronised face" of the clock at the entrance. Time is evoked in the image of the train, "the long motionless line of darkened Pullmans," for it seemed to stand "knee-deep, bedded and fixed for
ever in concrete". The conflict is recorded at the
level of consciousness, in Harry's introspections" it
will only take two minutes to tell Mac what it took
one two months to discover" and that time exists "only
in relation to what little of reality (I have learned
that too) we know, else there is no such thing as time". The "two months" that Harry refers to here is the
time spent at the Wisconsin lake shore and to his act of
burning the calendar towards the end of his stay. Now
in retrospect he verbalises his experience thus:

You know: I was not. Then I am, and time begins,
retroactive, is was and will be. Then I was and so I am
not and so time never existed. It was like the instant
of virginity, it was the instant of virginity: that
condition, fact, that does not actually exist except
during the instant you know you are losing it.78.

His preliminary apprehension of the linear form of time
could only be assimilated through ritualistic abnegation,
symbolised in the burning of the calendar. But now he
believes that every individual experiences a moment in
which he is transformed into:

one single abnegant affirmation, one single fluxive
Yes out of the terror in which you surrender volition, hope
all - the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude,

78. Ibid., pp.126-127
the shock, the death, the moment when, stopped physically
by the ponderable clay, you yet feel all your life rush
out of you into the pervading immemorial blind receptive
matrix, the hot fluid foundation — grave womb or
womb-grave, its all one. But you return ... but forever
afterward you will know that forever more you have lost
some of it, that for that one second or two seconds you
were present in space but not in time. 79

The impassioned rhetoric encourages us to view this
revelation as an insight into Faulkner's vision. Yet
to conclude in such a manner, would fail to account for
the innate irony. The eloquence of language evoked by
such phrases as "the thunder of solitude", "the ponderable
clay" and "the pervading immemorial blind receptive
matrix" is not for elevating the state of awareness, but
for underlining the point of failure in an extending
consciousness. The failure lies in Harry's belief that
the answer is in isolation and not only that, but in his
very assumption that there is a solution at all. He
leaves for Utah under the illusion that this remote mine
shaft holds the clue to his perpetual enigma. The
language used in the dialogue between Harry and McCord,
its heightened rhetoric and ironic assonance, appears to
reflect the line of Harry's rationale. The facile
rapport between the two and the synchronization in dialogue

79. Ibid., p.128
suggest that the conversation is an intellectual exercise. One gets the impression that McCord ceases to be important as a character and is near to being projected as an extension of the individual consciousness. This dramatic dialogue represents that momentary stasis in ratiocination which is so integral to the crystallization of perception. The use of the dialogue to dramatize an awareness in accretion is further pronounced in the exchanges between Ike McCaslin and his cousin in *The Bear*, and Chick and his uncle in *Intruder in the Dust*. The description of the mining town at Utah, the routine act of burrowing into the mine shaft, performed by the labourers, rustic Poles, and the withdrawal at dusk endemic to the physical condition, together contribute to an experience in recession. The scene is an invocation to time, viewed as, "something out of an Einstein Bantel". Ritual is integral to this condition, it is spelt out in the periodic visitations of the ore train, it is expressed in Harry's religious visits to the commissary day after day, it is contained in the refrain "it will be better in the spring", and it is insinuated in the unabated and inexhaustible line of identical figures sporting, "that wild childlike innocence and credulity which they possessed in common - the same pale eyes, the same grimed unshaven face above the same filthy sheep-lined coat". Against this ritualistic activity is posed Harry and Charlotte's
frenetic love life, and the discovery of Charlotte's pregnancy. This moment of exposure is instinctively apprehended by Harry in the words, "Something is about to happen to me". A highly dramatic tone is adopted to create a tragic effect, heightened by the increasing assertion in Harry's monosyllabic response "No". But the tragic overtones are affected ironically, as in the mode of anti-romance novels. Harry's moment of tragic apprehension does not lie in the knowledge of Charlotte's pregnancy. It is implied in his increasing aversion to his role in time and in the awareness of his vulnerability. This perception is astutely insinuated in time, in the diminishing possibility of Charlotte's period and her advancing state of pregnancy in inverse ratio. In a similar manner, though the actual act of abortion is presented as the moment of resolution, the true act of assertion lies in the decision to spend the aftermath at the Mississippi coast. There is one brief scene in which we catch a glimpse of Harry at the Audubon Park, envisioning Charlotte's visit with her family, while he waits in attendance. Harry's experience at the park, though casually stated, contributes extensively to the realization of the movement. In the context of the dramatic events, this moment of stasis, is the interlude prior to the tumultuous enactment of the tragic end. In terms of
apprehension there is an effect of transition to a
state of becoming from a state of being. The proposed
visit to the Mississippi coast no longer seems to be
rooted in escape. The affirmation emanates from Harry's
cognition of existence as experience in time. There is
an artistic improvisation of time in this scene. It is
echoed in rhythmic cause and effect in Harry's
anticipation of Charlotte's return as immediate, and
in their presentiment of death as ultimate, in the instance
of waiting. The park itself unfolds in constant motion
in the flurried activities of the children 'like blown
petals' stalked by negro nursemoids, the sound of pram
wheels, and the cries of infants. On this surface
temporality is imposed the image of the palms. This time
the palms are evoked in a different context. As Charlotte
and Harry drive away from the park, the view from the
cab window reveals the line of palms. They appear to be
in motion for as the car proceeds in time, to Harry it
seems as though, "the scaling palms fled constantly past".
The timelessness of the palms underlines the timelessness
of Harry's experience in the park. The true moment of
crisis for Harry lies not in the repudiation of time as in
the act of elopement, it appears in the acknowledgement
of time in the act of abortion. Harry's response to the
palms at this stage indicates his recognition of time.
Being the moment of crisis for Harry, this scene appears to be crucial to the structure of the novel. It is up to this point that the two narratives run in alignment, the correspondence being mainly in a similar level of response. The distinction in the pattern of movement in the individual stories becomes apparent from this stage. Crisis in time, in each tale, denotes the growth of consciousness or the arrestment of it.

Human responses to time in the *Old Man* story appear to run parallel to that in *Wild Palms* up to a point. Harry is introduced in a state of arrested maturity, dissipating in virginity as if "his life were to lie passively on his back as though he floated effortless and without volition upon an unreturning stream". The imagery is deliberately drawn from the surface of water to insinuate an analogy with the convict. The bank robbery escapade which lands the convict in prison is indicative of his arrested state of consciousness. The focus on the stasis of the convict's condition is deliberate for it underlines the passivity of his response. Life in prison for the convicts is a daily drill in time. And the convicts as a community provide a sense of continuity to the scene that appears to run parallel to the motions of the flood. The references to the convicts evoke a sense of continuity,
for they are visualized, "in a line along the edge of
the platform like buzzards on a fence" or "with their
cummerbunds turned up and shackled in braces like dogs
at a field trial (they stood) immobile, patient, almost
ruminant, their backs turned to the rain as sheep and
cattle do", or as, "paired, twinned by their clanking
and clashing umbilicals". The line in progression
provides a sense of continuity. The words "immobile,
patient, almost ruminant" underline the condition of
stasis. The analogy with "sheep and cattle" is used to
convey the effacement of individuality. Irony is superbly
controlled in this story. The regimentation of life in
prison inculcates an innate sense of discipline and it
appears to be the most obvious reason for the tall convict's
rescue mission. But society prefers to alleviate it to
an act of repudiation in choosing to identify it as a bid
to escape. When the short fat convict reports alone from
their joint venture, the deputy at Parchman makes a snide
remark, "Well, your partner beat you. He's free".

The motions of the river in flood is used to
communicate an area of consciousness. The apprehension of
the three stratas in the water, which comes with the first
glimpse of the flood, has been interpreted by critics as
Faulkner's representation of three levels of consciousness. Yet it appears more likely to be artistic embellishments for an instinctive response. The ludicrousness of possible heroic elements in the convict's gestures is exquisitely stated throughout in the use of images. At the start it is conveyed in the image of the plantation house on fire. The backdrop is evoked in linear pattern in the "flat still sheet of brown water", the long line of hunched convicts, the muted motion of the train, and against this rises in upward incline "a clear steady pyre-like flame rigidly fleeing its own reflection, burning in the dusk above the watery desolation with a quality paradoxical, outrageous and bizarre". Once again when the convict has been exposed to the ravage of the flood in its "desperate and furious motion, and still leading its charging welter of dead cows and mules and outhouses and cabins and hencoops", it is the image of the skiff which rises in a vertical incline and not the man. As with Harry and the first image of the cabbage palm, the level of response in the convict is discerned in inversion, in the upward reach. The motif in the image of the skiff is defined in graphic outlines, in its act of repudiation:

For an instant the skiff seemed to stand erect on its stern and then shoot scrabbling and scrambling up the
curling wall of water like a cat and soared on above
the licking nest itself and hung cradled into the high
actual air in the limbs of a tree.

The convict is placed outside this act, "still
going through the motions of paddling though he no longer
even had the paddle now". The third image which projects
a similar stance is the vision of the buck, as the convict
approaches the shore line of the Indian mound. At the
first instance the man and the image are seen in horizontal
motion, the convict "still paddling with that spent
hypnotic steadiness" while the deer swam on immediately
before him. And then in an instance he found himself
watching the deer:

... begin to rise out of the water bodily until it
was actually running along upon the surface, rising still,
soaring clear of the water altogether, vanishing upwards
in a dying crescendo of splashing and snapping branches,
its damp scut flashing upwards, the entire animal vanishing
upwards as smoke vanishes.

In order to perceive the latent irony in this scene it is
necessary to place it besides the vision of the buck in

80. Ibid., p.145
81. Ibid., p.162.
Wild Palms. It is possible to gauge the level of response in the convict from the reaction it elicits. While the viewer in Wild Palms thrills to its motion in splendour, its witness in Old Man, hails it as the herald of safety for he assesses its disappearance as verification of the shore line - 'Land. Hold on!' he exclaims.

Another area of comparison lies in the response to the surface of water. While Harry seeks it out in his quest for solitude, the convict finds himself placed against it:

...as man always has been drawn to dwell beside water, even before he had a name for water and fire, drawn to the living water, the course of his destiny and his actual physical appearance rigidly coerced and postulated by it.

Though both the convict's and Harry's appears to be the rationalization of an instinctive response, the distinction lies in the effacement of individuality in the convict.

Just as McCord acts as the boxing bell in the scene at the railway platform, as that dissociated aspect of ourselves at which we sling our intellectualizations to test its efficacy, the short plump convict plays a similar role. His function is not merely as a foil for the tall

82. Ibid., p.143.
convict. He appears to represent that dimension of our consciousness, which impels an extraneous reconstruction of experience, in order to impose patterns of cause and effect. In Harry, the process of rationalization is continuous with the consciousness, and the individual moves towards it or away from it. For the convict, like his association with the short plump one, the process is so integral a part of his life that he is incapable of drawing the line between reaction and reason.

The alignment that these comparative studies reveal is implied in the level of consciousness which records a recurrent reversal to the preconscious. At the same time it is also apparent that there is distinction in the two stories enunciated in the attitude and extent of the response. Both stories represent the individual's strained effort to fortify himself against the onslaught of time, in an instinctive urge for survival. The distinction lies in the implication that the convict confronts reality precisely because he is incapable of comprehending its limits, whereas Harry tends to shy away because of his increasing awareness of its dimensions. The convict on three occasions volunteers to surrender the boat, the woman, the baby, and himself, to the authorities, but each attempt is revoked by threats, vituperatives or machinegun volleys. Harry's efforts
to escape from society invariably bring him face to face with its folkways and mores. Both individuals are exposed to reality and both experience frustration, yet it is the apprehension of time that decides the ultimate response.

From a structural analysis, *The Wild Palms* emerges as more effective in its narrative pattern. The *Old Man* story is an experience recounted before an audience and therefore it follows a chronological sequence at one level, and at the other, reflects a consciousness that responds to events rather than effect. *The Wild Palms* traces a developing consciousness and therefore the narrative line bypasses the incident to linger over the sequel. *The Wild Palms* opens with the scene on the Mississippi coast and then unfolds to rearrange the series, in flashback, to arrive at a hypothetical sequence. Towards the latter half of the novel, the opening scene is reiterated and rearranged in its assigned place in the chronological form.

The opening scene of *The Wild Palms* expresses a complexity in vision and control which indicates a greater maturity than the introductory scene of *Light in August*. The landscape is more powerfully sketched in the image of the threshing palms set against the "full sweep of the unimpeded sea-wind". It is evoked over and over again
in recurring chants. Though the landscape is so integral a part of the experience, it is placed beyond the line of visibility, for it always remains as "the invisible wind" which "blew strong and steady among the invisible palms, from the invisible sea". In chronological sequence this is the third reference to the palms and this is the image which is the most explicit. The palms are deliberately kept invisible to convey that their movement in time and space is apparent in the dramatic action. The tension in the image of the dark wind blowing amidst the dry clashing palms reflects the process of rationalizing an instinctive response. This is further substantiated by a reference to the recurring use of the wind in *Light in August*, *The Wild Palms* and later in *Intruder in the Dust*. Here the tension is projected in yet another dimension, in the condition, of Charlotte, as she sat all day facing the water, "not reading, not doing anything, just sitting there in that complete immobility'", while the man Harry was seen "usually walking barefoot along the beach at tide edge, returning with a faggot of drift wood strapped into a belt". There is great artistic virtuosity in the presentation of the condition not as statement but as a revelation in the life of an aging doctor, a provincial protestant, Baptist born, and his gorgon-like childless wife. The oleander bush acts as the screen which stands
between the two shacks separating Harry and Charlotte from their elderly landlord, and it functions as the veil that shelters the older generation from the truth. It is essential to distinguish that the use of the oleander bush is purely symbolic and does not extend to the time-significance in the use of the palms. The true exposure to reality that is discovered behind the oleander screen is not the fact of Charlotte's hemorrhage and Harry's role in it, but in the act of assertion implied in this last gesture of love. Even though Charlotte's eyes no longer record either pain or terror, the doctor perceives that 'the man was carrying that too just as he carried the firewood'. He recognises in the gesture Harry's heroic assaying to resuscitate their togetherness. The truth fails to register through that 'implacable and invincible morality', which the old lady envisioned in 'that grim iron-colour', had built around herself. But in the case of the old doctor, for a moment, his fortifications fall. His immediate wish is that he were once again young enough to hope for it for himself or already too old to desire it. The opening scene projects the old doctor moving towards a point of resolution, whereas the second reconstruction and follow-up makes a facile shift in focus to the fulfillment of Harry's experience. This telescoping of consciousness in itself is a tremendous technical achievement. The
old doctor is therefore presented in a dual function, for at one level he operates as a character, while at the other he represents an imaginative extension of Harry himself. There are certain features in personal background and profession and circumstances common to both, deliberately suggested to enhance the identification, while on the other, the distinction in commitment is exaggerated in fantasy. The confrontation between the two men, real and imagined, does contribute to an accretion in the individual consciousness. The old man refuses to respond to the new awareness and chooses to concentrate on the sequential events of Harry’s guilt and possibility of his escape, whereas Harry, sees some aspect of himself in the old doctor and that further strengthens his act of assertion. The moment of recognition for both lies in the instance when Harry offers his hand while stating, not admitting or confessing his guilt, and the doctor forces himself to reject in outrage, the extended hand, for the gesture to him appears as ‘something not violating so much as affronting that profound and now deathless dessicated spirit which has contrived to retire into pure morality’. On the second occasion, the stasis of the old doctor’s condition is underlined to magnify the growth of Harry’s
consciousness. The scenes shift in kinesthetic motion from the Mississippi coast and Charlotte's collapse, through the hospital and Charlotte's death, to the prison and Harry's act of acknowledgement. The movement may be traced through the reference to the palms in the enactment of each scene. Though the palms remain invisible while Harry and the doctor witness Charlotte's suffering, the movement of the palms is contained in the whispering and murmuring of the black wind which appears as though "coming from nothing". The inverse ratio of Harry's growing awareness of timelessness and Charlotte's gradual loss in death is subtly implied. The timeless is invoked in the image of "a fish rise in water", which Harry sees in Charlotte's eyes. The pace of response appears to be controlled by the act of "holding on", to life for Charlotte and to integrity for Harry, reminiscent of Harry's act of "carrying" the firewood, while she sat and looked on. The image of the shabby palms beside the hospital where Charlotte is rushed, reflects an effort at the containment of conflict. The serenity with which he earlier renders the old doctor's threat at pistol point into a mockery, now turns into sublimity at Charlotte's death. Her approaching end is a fact accepted by him long before and worded into a commitment at the Audubon Park, "I'am going to hold you. Haven't I held you so far?". All later scenes are not
an endorsement of his knowledge of death, but a 
revivification of his commitment in the context of a 
growing apprehension. Harry's state of awareness when 
he accompanies Charlotte to the hospital is most aptly 
projected in the image of the stretcher team consisting 
of one short nurse and a tall one. This disparity opens 
up for Harry a new area of realization, "how apparently 
all the stretchers in the world must be propelled not by 
two physical bodies in accord but rather by two matched 
desires to be present and see what was going on'1. The 
state of awareness is enunciated with clarity in the act 
of participating and the act of witnessing, in simultaneity. 
It records a distillation in response which could never have 
been achieved in the experience at the Mississippi coast. 
In the hospital scene, the palms shed the effect of 
intangibility and are actually placed at a distance not 
too far removed. He could now hear "the palms rustling 
and hissing again as if they were being played upon by a 
sand-blower and he could smell the sea still, the same 
black wind, but not so strong since the sea was four miles 
away''. Harry's experience at the hospital is an attempt 
to transcend an emotional level of response through a 
process of ratiocination. During the entire span of 
waiting for the end at the hospital, there runs a parallel
stream in the crystallisation of earlier apprehensions. At the jail, the palms appear, "just outside his window, bigger, more shabby". And yet this time the palm acquires a new form for this time even "with, no wind to cause it, it had set up a sudden frenzied clashing". The dispensation of the wind indicates that the level of tension here supercedes the process of ratiocination. At the jail, Rittenmeyer appearing in parabolic guise attempts to dissuade Harry from his stance. Harry's rejection of the options, including suicide, is not an outright rejection of ratiocination or emotion but a mature containment of the polarity in reason and intent through ontological fortifications. The experience is most exquisitely conveyed through the image of an abandoned structure of an emergency ship that "had never moved, the ways rotted out from under it years ago, leaving it sitting on a mudflat beside the bright glitter of the river's mouth with a thin line of drying garments across the after well deck". Juxtaposed with this image, in a rather obvious equation, is Harry's affirmation of existence. The assertion is imbued in the state of recall. There appears to be a shift from a negation of will, at the unconscious level as in a dream, to an act of will, within the conscious stream. Memory, for Harry, therefore begins to operate at two levels. At one, it is restricted to the old wheezing entrails for the sight of the palms "'clashing and murmuring'" is ever
reminiscent of Charlotte's hands "that liked hitching and making things". He now finds that his capacity for response overreaches this level of spontaneous empathy, and the ways of reason set in. But it is no longer a confusion in tension, but a sublimation in tension. The abnegation is implied in such a statement as:

... the old wrinkled withered defeat clinging not even to the defeat but just to an old habit, accepting the defeat even to be allowed to cling to the habit... if accepted in isolation, may probably be interpreted as conclusive despair, but when placed in the context of the palms and Harry's growing consciousness, it opens up infinite possibilities. In terms of stylistics the end of Wild Palms appears rather forced, for here the author too extravagantly implicates the palms into the theme, as in such a statement which seems to transform an insight into a resolution:

... and now it did stand to his hand, incontrovertible and plain, serene, the palm clashing and murmuring, dry and wild and faint and in the night, but he could face it thinking, Not could. Will. I want to.\textsuperscript{83}

It seems that the palms which have relevance to the story in the depiction of both theme and structure are most artistically woven in the texture of the experience.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p.299
Therefore this one to one conclusion at the end appears irrelevant to the design. The *Old Man* story terminates on an undramatic and yet far more sophisticated note, in conformity with the artistic intent.

In *Old Man*, the motif is more explicitly stated in the image, and it is obvious that the convict's experience in recession is traced in the motions of the river. And yet to draw direct dramatic inferences from the successive experiences to indicate a varying intensity, in keeping with the chronological account of the flood, would be too tedious and too limiting. Even to place the total events in the area of the preconscious would be too facile, for the story appears in the form of recounting and not the actual experience. The convict reconstructs the tale for the benefit of his mates, and the verbalisation and awareness of his listeners in the constant shuffling and reshuffling of experience, in itself becomes a stance. Though unlike the palms, the river is more directly associated with the convict, it is possible to sift levels of response within the entire experience. The earliest impression of the river he had lived beside but had not seen for seven years, is the river in its conceptual form appropriately projected with the capital R. This is followed by his actual confrontation with the river,
which he experiences as a physical force to be
contended with. The experience at the Indian Mound is
not a respite from this feat of endurance, but is a
physical confrontation with a varied surface. The
participation in child birth, the presence of the
threshing snakes and the synthesis of an oar from a slow
charring log all underline the level of an immediate
response in the convict. It has been most explicitly
defined in the passage, soon after he reaches the mound:

It was mud he lay upon, but it was solid under­
neath, it was earth, it did not move; if you fell upon
it you broke your bones against its incontrovertible
passivity, some times, but it did not accept you
substanceless, and enveloping and suffocating, down and
down and down.84

His decision to leave the mound, is not an act of will and
therefore he remains at the initial stage of response.
The experience at the Cajun settlement, operates as
stasis immediately before the moment of crisis, parallel
to the scene on the Mississippi coast in The Wild Palms.
The sketch of the Cajun, his mode of communication and
his accounting of the self in trade is a stylized one.
The act of hunting the crocodiles has been so powerfully
evoked because the witnessing and the participation opens

84. Ibid., p.213.
up for the convict a new area of response. The level of response acquires a dimensional perspective which could not have been present in his earlier confrontation with the river. The preliminary bout had left him conjecturing thus:

Time: that was his itch now, so his only chance was to stay ahead of it as long as he could and hope to reach something before it struck. Such a surmise provides an insight into the bounds of the convict's apprehension of time and space and the passage of the movement is clearly defined in its horizontal form:

He just knew from experience that when it overtook him, he would have to travel in the same direction it was moving in anyway, whether he wanted to or not. 85

His experience at the Cajun settlement, turns out to be more dynamic than the proven concept for it temporarily thrusts him outside of the mainstream of time. His brief sojourn is the moment of stasis which heightens the movement and at the same time holds the key to the dramatic structure. The convict's exposure to the primitive style of life is not an endorsement of the preconscious, but it is dramatized to accentuate the point of accretion through an exercise in identification and rejection. This

85. Ibid., p.156
experience, to a certain extent falls in tune with the encounter between Harry and the old doctor. Stasis in the convict's condition is implied in the image of a desert engulfing him "in which he was temporarily lost in peace and hope and into which the last seven years had sunk like so many trivial pebbles into a pool, leaving no ripple". And it is the impact of this realization that urges him to abandon this state of option. The new experience had helped him to review the past as time in which "he had been permitted to toil but not to work". At this point, the convict's decision "to move on soon" becomes the crux of the antithesis for it marks his failure to relate the conceptual to the metaphysical. The author has imposed the apparent cause in the form of a physical threat - the destruction of the levee and surrounding settlements with the use of dynamites - but this is obviously a mere structural device. The language used to describe the impending doom with such contrived references to "the wealth of cosmic violence and disaster" wrought by "the cosmic joker" and "instigated not by the blind potency of volume and motion but by human direction and hands" may be acceptable only when the sly humour has been accounted for. The depletion of intensity in his desire to leave the settlement stands in inverse ratio to the presaging disaster. The process of awareness, in its excruciating
limitation is satirized in its very mode of verbalisation; ... accepted by this environment and accepting it in turn (and he had done well here - this quietly, soberly indeed, if he had been able to phrase it, think it instead of merely knowing it - better than he had ever done, who had not even known until now how good work, making money, could be) yet it was not his life he still and would ever be no more than the water bug upon the surface of the pond, the plumbless and lurking depths of which he would never know, his only actual contact with it being the instants.

The convict's failure is dramatized in this instance as not a failure of apprehension but the failure to relate conceptual analysis to the empirical. Such a lack is inferred in the passage above "if he had been able to phrase it, think it instead of merely knowing it" and from this point the following events trace a recurring pattern. The concluding scenes find the convict once again drifting back to the land, and this time since his task has been satisfactorily accomplished, he uses his discretion in opting for his term at the Parchman prison. And yet his exercising of will in the choice for prison life remains an act of assertion only within a limited sense. The choice appears to spring from a surface response rather than a metaphysical reckoning. Though both stories end on a note of

86. Ibid., p.244
of analogy, explicitly stated in the image of Parchman prison, there is an important distinction conveyed through the apprehension of time. In Old Man the image is reinstated to its conceptual form and the experience is placed within the stream of sequential events thus:

When he saw the River again he knew it at once. He should have; it was now ineradicably a part of his past, his life; it would be a part of what he would bequeath, if that were in store for him. The experience becomes acceptable to him because for him, time is once again levelled down to the horizontal plane and visualised thus, "there would be the symmetric miles of strong stalks by July, purple bloom in August, in September the black fields snowed over, spilled". The story ends with a reference to the convict's first love, which, to a great extent, was responsible for landing the man in prison. It is relevant to the present experience for it draws a connection between the two acts of assertion in the life of the convict, the earlier being his participation in the train robbery to buy baubles for his girl. The ironic distinction lies in the fact that the earlier act is seminal to the affirmation of will, in a state of nascence, and that it is nurtured to become an act of abnegation in the latter. The end of The Wild Palms appears to be immanent rather than imminent. It seeks to achieve a mythic openness of experience at the close. The polarity is not resolved, instead

87. Ibid., p.254
dissonance is enhanced by its translation into metaphor.
This artistic containment of experience is suggested in
a scene, prior to the actual end. The hurricane which
occupied a central position in Old Man appears in a
casual reference in The Wild Palms, towards the end, not to
establish a point of analogy but to reiterate an image of
time. The hurricane itself is reduced to a shadow of
the real "just the tail of it, a flick of the mane in
passing" and it lasts over a period of twenty hours,
and moves "into the next town but with less fury, now
on across the flat land" exhausting itself in its very
motion. While Harry witnesses the movements of the
hurricane, he reminisces and there is note of affirmation
in his association of the present with his experience
at Audubon Park:

It would be even quieter inland, it would become
only a bright silver summer murmur among the heavy
decorous trees, upon the clipped sward; it would be
clipped; he could imagine it, it would be a great deal
like the Park. The implication of this reconnaissance of Charlotte's
grave, is enhanced by a passage which enunciates the
extent of awareness. The reference to the Audubon Park

88. Ibid., p.291
is not for the endorsement of a similar experience but to confirm Harry's final repudiation of time in the image of the spiral "the heavy decorous trees" on the temporal "upon the clipped sward". The analogy made here is not of the condition, but a reiteration of the sense of time and space which resuscitates existence. The line, "surely memory exists independent of the flesh", suggests that for Harry it is in time that he discovers a state of becoming. For him memory ceases to remain merely as a passive state but asserts itself as a conscious reckoning.

Most critics confirm that the landscape plays an integral role in The Wild Palms. But the tendency has been to reduce the scene to symbols and to infer a correspondence in condition between man and backdrop. Hyatt Waggoner's assessment is typical of this stance, when he claims:

... the setting in both stories expresses, through flood or the tail end of a hurricane, the same lonely and precarious and doomed situation of man, tossed, swept, overwhelmed by forces hostile to the values man thinks he alone conceives and cherishes.89

The significance of the setting in The Wild Palms is extended from mere landscape to an integral part of a metaphysical experience. The images here do not only

function as symbols but carry within them the pace of life in the onward move and the upward thrust, and in moments appear to transcend the controls of time. To derive only a symbolic sense of the setting would be to reduce *Wild Palms* to a romance novel and *Old Man* to an allegory. The complexity of Faulkner's vision does not permit the use of such staid forms. The inherent irony in the language, more apparent in *Wild Palms* and superbly controlled in *Old Man*, compels us to review landscape in a wider perspective. The natural setting in *Light in August* appears to be diverted from its artistic intent. The evocation of responses in the specific image remain in isolation. The landscape is too largely involved in thematic and structural functions. In *The Wild Palms* the image of the palms and the river are more directly involved in controlling the pattern of movement. The shortcoming of this novel lies in its use, as in *Light in August* of pedantic images for the projection of the t - t motif. Both the image of trees (palms) and water (river) have been outworn in literary usage. The language of *The Wild Palms*, though successful in irony, fails to cope with the artistic purpose. The central image of both stories is so heavily symbolic that it tends to reduce the impact of the author's evocation of time.