CHAPTER IV
FROM PARCHMAN TO JEFFERSON

The Mansion, as Faulkner's prefatory note tells us, is "the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925". Like the earlier books dealing with Snopes Saga this one contains many repetitions. If one, after reading the book, poses to himself the question whether these repetitions do have any functional purpose, the answer is 'no'. Why does, then, Faulkner incessantly repeat many of the earlier episodes, characters, gossip of the Yoknapatawpha legend? In a way Faulkner himself answered this question in his letter to Cowley:

Art is simpler than people think because there is so little to write about. All the moving things are eternal in man's history and have been written before, and if a man writes hard enough, sincerely enough, humbly enough, and with the unalterable determination never never never to be quite satisfied with it, he will repeat them because art like poverty take care of its own, share its bread.1

From this it follows that Faulkner seems to emphasize that fact and fiction are not rigid categories but are complementary facts of a given situation. The givens of life which in Faulkner's terminology become "the human heart" and "its dilemma" seem to be

the overall theme from which other minor themes like bravery and cowardice, generosity and meanness, self-sacrifice and self-aggrandizement, self-awareness and self-devitalization and insensitivity follow as corollaries. The very title of the last novel dealing with Snopeses and Snopesism has a metaphoric implication. Born in Frenchman's Bend, it gradually develops till it reaches a non-human dimension symbolized by the mansion. Even in this novel Snopesism appears to be so ubiquitous in all Yoknapatawpha that the narrator interventionists seem to be perplexed and puzzled by its sustained upward movement. Towards the end of Chapter XIV, Gavin Stevens tells Ratliff:

"It's hopeless. Even when you get rid of one Snopes, there's already another one behind you even before you can turn around."

And Ratliff agrees with Gavin and says:

"That's right. As soon as you look, you see right away it ain't nothing but jest another Snopes."

But what is interesting here is that the struggle between Snopesism and the anti-Snopesism takes an unexpected turn in that it becomes political.

Clarence Snopes appears in Jefferson as one contesting for the congress. Of course it ends in the

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upproarious withdrawal of Clarence from the brougth congressional race brought about by Ratliff's subtle and imaginative devices. Orestes Snopes' attempt to occupy the old Compton acres brings in the resistance of old meadowfill. Gavin's prompt interference nips in the bud what would have been a major flare up. In analysing these episodes Gavin Stevens seems to extend the nature of Snopesism when he says:

"They'll always be wrong. They think they are fighting Clarence Snopes. They're not. They're not faced with an individual nor even a situation: they are beating their brains out against one of the foundation rocks of our national character itself. Which is the premise that politics and political office are not and never have been the method of we and means by which we can govern ourselves in peace and dignity and honour and security, but instead are our national refuge for our incompetents who have failed at every other occupation by means of which they might make a living for themselves and their families . . . . . . . . 3.

The kind of generalization that is embedded in the passage just cited and Ratliff's unusual but comic ways by which he brought about the defeat of Clarence Snopes suggest the comic aspect of Snopesism, while Mink, Linda, Flem and Gavin plot of the novel constitutes its melodramatic and tragic dimension. The entire

3. Ibid., p. 287.
plem section in which Faulkner largely uses the omniscient point of view leads us to the conclusion that without depending on his interventionist narrators he wants to clarify the main issues involved in what he calls "Snope's dilemma". Ratliff seems to have appraised the situation well when he says:

Fate, and destiny, and luck, and hope, and all of us mixed up in it - us and Linda and Flew and that durn little half-starved wildcat down there in Parchman, all mixed up in the same luck and destiny and fate and hope until can't none of us tell where it stops and we begin. Especially the hope.4

Ironically enough Ratliff's awareness and sense of hope were of no avail so far as Gavin Stevens is concerned because he has already committed himself to help Linda who is now a deaf widow. When Mink murders Flew, his death is presented as a climax to a significant career. He had achieved wealth and honour: he was President of the bank, deacon of the baptist church, owner of the De Spain mansion and was given a big funeral, which was attended not only by the people of the town but of the county.

Though there is a kind of poetic justice in Mink killing the chief of his clan because of vengeful motive in The Mansion, the other characters especially Linda and Gavin Stevens appear more guilty than Flew throughout his career. The avenger emerges as one

4. Ibid., p. 344.
who is brave, patient and demands sympathy as a victim of
Snopesism though a Snopes. But Linda not only suffers
physically but declines morally. This does not mean that
her involvement in the murder of Flam has its redeeming fea-
tures. She procures through the agency of her lover and
unacknowledged guardian. Gavin Stevens, Mink's release
knowing full well what would happen. She also helps to es-
cape after committing the crime. Gavin realizes this at
the time of Linda's departure from Jefferson when he sees
her new car, a British Jaguar, which was ordered even be-
fore her father's death. Later from Ratliff he gets a
clarification. When they were driving in his own Car
Ratliff tells him:

"She knew all the time that was going to happen
when he got out, that not only she knew but Flam did
too - "5

After reviewing the career of Snopes, Ratliff says:

"So maybe there's even a moral in it somewhere, if
you just knew where to look."

"There aren't any morals," Stevens said, "People
just do the best they can."

"The pore sons of bitches," Ratliff said.

"The poor sons of bitches," Stevens said. "Drive
on. Pick it up."6

From the concluding dialogue of these two friends
just quoted, it follows that Gavin's stand borders on

5. Ibid., p. 395.
6. Ibid., p. 393.
a humanistic awareness of good and evil in men, which
seems to be suggestive because of the repetition of
the vulgar phrase 'poor sons of bitches' which punctua-
tes the entire narrative. The human dilemma to which
there is a reference in The Town is dramatized in terms
of the social and the individual in The Mansion. The
human heart and its dilemma roughly comes to the heart
being more aware than man. It is the heart that has
the desire to be better than man is. It is man that
society values or tries to measure, but it is the
heart that measures the man. And between the two there
is always a constant and perennial tension which is
the staple material of Faulkner's fiction as a whole.

In book III of The Hamlet we have the episode in
which Mink murders Houston. Since the episodes are
arranged in terms of the pattern of love and barter,
it might not have been possible for Faulkner to bring
to a Central focus the motives of Mink in killing
Houston. When he was taken to Jefferson his wife
and children follow him. In Jefferson Ratliff with
his usual sympathy for those in distress makes them
stay in his home. Mink's wife works in a boarding
house and often sees her husband who is now behind the
prison bars. Mink's isolation makes Ratliff reflect:
That was when it occurred to him how not once had any of his kin—old Ab or the school master or the blacksmith or the new clerk—Come in to see him. And if all the facts about that business was known, he thought. There's one of them that ought to be there in that cell too. Or in another one just like it, since you can't hang a man twice—granted of course that a Snopes carries the death penalty even for another Snopes. 7

The passage amply conveys the impression that even among Snopeses all action is oriented towards self-preservation. When Mink stays in prison his wife and children often visit him which makes Ratliff think:

"Of the four of them sitting in the close cell rank with creosote and old writhes of human excreta—the sweat, the urine, the vomit discharged of all the old agonies: terror, impotence, hope. Waiting for Elem Snopes, he thought. For Elem Snopes!" 8

Even here we have a suggestion of what is to follow. When we read the first section of The Mansion exclusively devoted to Mink, we get an inside view of Mink's mind—his motives, his friends, his enemies and what he struggles for. In section I of The Mansion the narrator makes it clear that Mink confronts the society of which he is a member and from which he is isolated. In what seems to be the most crucial passage dealing with Yokna-

8. Ibid., p. 260.
patawpha stories of Faulkner it is made obvious that Mink takes pride in opposing the society to prove his own manhood and the implications of it in terms of the whole of Snopes's Saga. The passage is as follows:

He meant, simply, that they-it, whichever and whatever you wanted to call it, who represented a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs, or else a man might just as well call them what you like, which simply would not, could not harass and harry a man forever without someday, at some moment, letting him get his own just and equal licks back in return. They could harass and worry him, or they could even just sit back and watch everything go against him right along without missing a lick, almost like there was a pattern to it; just sit back and watch and (all right, why not? he-a man didn't mind, as long as he was a man and there was a justice to it) enjoy it too; may be in fact. They were even testing him, to see if he was a man or not, man enough to take a little harassment and worry and so deserve his own licks back when his turn came. But at least that moment would come when it was his turn, when he had earned the right to have his own just and equal licks backs, just as they had earned the right to test him and even to enjoy the testing; the moment when they would have to prove to him that they were as much a man as he had proved to Them that he was; when he not only would have to depend on Them but had won the right to depend on Them and find Them faithful; and They dared not, They would not dare, to let him down, else it would be as hard for Them to live with themselves afterward as it had finally become for him to live with himself and still keep on taking what he had taken from Jack Houston.

them they it which constitutes the social fabric of Frenchman's Bend where everybody knew everything about everybody else, doesn't treat Mink according to his deserts. Faulkner draws our sympathy for him by saying that, "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."\(^\text{10}\)

Through out the first section of the narrative we find the verbs "harass" and "harry" and the noun "man" so repeated that the cumulative effect seems to be one of recognition—the birth right of a man to defend himself. A criminal in the eyes of society, Mink has the pride of being a man who struggles for a code of honour which may be termed as that of the self. He doesn't want to get back his cow even though Will Varner pays Houston what was his due so that there may not be any violence in Frenchman's Bend. In Parchman Penitentiary he spends thirty seven long years. During the course of his stay there, he nurses slow revenge against Flem for not respecting the bonds of Clan and kinship. After his release he makes a long pilgrimage to Jefferson to take revenge on Flem. The scene in

\(^\text{10}\). Ibid., p. 16.
which the two men confront each other is one of the most remarkable scenes in the Trilogy.

In the last section of *The Mansion*, "Flem" we have a few details that help us to infer the kind of change that thirty seven years of imprisonment has wrought in Mink. As the narrator comments:

So he would have to change his thinking, as you change the colour of the bulb inside the lantern even though you can't change the lantern itself; as he walked he would have to hold himself unflagging and undeviating to thinking like he was someone who had never heard the name Snopes and the town Jefferson in his life, wasn't even aware that if he kept on this road he would have to pass through it; to think instead like someone whose destination and goal was a hundred and more miles away and who in spirit was already there and only his carcass, his progressing legs, walked this particular stretch of road. 11

The images of "the colour bulb" and "the Lantern" and the participles "unflagging", "undeviating" convey the sense of determination and will to achieve one's purpose. This may make Mink appear like a heroic character. But what we are interested in is not the heroic dimension but the self awareness that results from suffering and endurance. He seems to have developed a kind of faith and belief which are brought to a focus in chapter twelve of the book.

Sent by Beth Holcomb to Brother Goodyhay, Mink meets him and learns from him something that stands

11. Ibid., p. 365.
him in good stead in accomplishing the task of his pilgrimage. Goody hay was a Marine sergeant whose barges were bombed by the Japs during the war in the Pacific. He seems to have rescued a boy for which he was given a medal. (According to the Official version) But according to himself it was Jesus that brought him back to the line and gave him a new lease of life as a preacher. When Mink tells him that he would stay to have the money he desperately needed Goodyhay said:

"All right," "Kneel down," and did so first again. The other two following, on the kitchen floor beneath the hard dim glare of the single unshaded low-watt bulb on a ceiling cord. Goodyhay on his knees but no more, his head up, the coldly seething desert-henmit's eyes not even closed, and said, "Save us, Christ, the poor sons of bitches," and rose and said, "All right. Lights out. The truck'll be here at seven O'Clock." 12

The phrase "the poor sons of bitches" which is throughout used, in this context brings out the humanity and the spiritual equality of all. On his way to Memphis Mink thinks of his whole life from which stems the insight, "A man can get through anything if he can just keep on walking." 13 This might be interpreted as a recognition of the integrity of the self.

From what has been said earlier on the theme of "the human heart and its dilemma" the above analysis of Mink's character in The Mansion demonstrates the truth that the human heart is more aware than man. Man as a term is often used in sociological and political contexts

and thus has lost much of its specificity. On the other hand, it is the heart that can measure the integrity of the self. The heart has the desire to be better than man is. Mink would like to be better than what law and society have stamped him.
Even though the Snopes novels are distinct and separate constructs governed by different artistic principles and achieving different degrees of success, the trilogy is richer than any one novel, for it completes the saga and creates a sense of the comic variety and the alarming danger of Snopesism as no single novel can. While each novel is autonomous, it is enlarged by its placement within the larger context of the trilogy. The part contributes to the developing whole; the whole informs the part.

Joanne V. Creighton,
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S
CRAFT OF NOVEL (Pp. 152-153)
Wayne State University