Robert Penn Warren discussing Faulkner's modernity and relevance says:

As a kind of short-hand, we may say that literature may carry a sort of built-in rebuke to the hubris of its age, and that the more powerful the drives of an age and the more successful they appear, the more powerful, radical, and complex may be the literature of "rebuke". Furthermore, such a "rebuke" though it may be literal is more apt to be "mythic" and "radical" - that is, to take a form which, because of its distance from the literal, may give a drama at once more strongly focussed than life ordinarily affords, and more deeply suggestive. It is clear that Faulkner, though he gives a scrupulously faithful report of the real world, is "mythic" in the sense used above; he is dramatizing clashes of value in a root way.

Following the lead given by Warren's suggestive observations we may add that the Trilogy under consideration as a whole is a subtle comment on the various cliches like man is an economic animal, a social animal and a political animal. Though man is often defined as a rational animal, rationality alone cannot save him. The innerman or the self, that operates within the familial and social relationships, that lends value to action, that makes man move in realms of awareness, is a viable measure of action and survival. Those who would like to survive purely on the basis of logic or

single-minded devotion to their objects of worship like Jason Compson or Flem Snopes do not survive in any sense of the word. These men like the modern technocrats would like to exploit nature (including human nature) by manipulating it in ever so many subtle ways or by violating it. In most cases the result is not only the devastation of the self but a standing rebuke on the nature and roots of violence against man and nature.

Flem Snopes is not a monster but a calculating machine. Ever since he joined as Clerk in Varner's store every move of his has been characterized by this kind of machine-like activity. Instead of dramatizing this Snopesian tendency in terms of modern images, Faulkner employs the images associated with predatory animals. Jody Varner after noticing the behaviour of Saint Elmo, I.O.'s son says:

"Rat, hell, . . . . . . He's worse than a goat. First thing I know, he'll graze on back and work through that lace leather and then hame-strings and laplinks and ring bolts and eat me and you have him all three clean out the backdoor. And then he damned if I wouldn't be afraid to turn my back for fear he would cross the road and start in on the gin and blacksmith shop." 2

The passage, though it is not a direct comment on Flem Snopes, suggests fairly enough the omnivorous

lust for possession for its own sake that characterizes Flem. The name itself, as many commentators have suggested, induces contempt and disgust. Flem's capacity to use others to further his own ends can be noticed in his relationship with his wife, with Linda and with Montgomery Ward Snopes. Though he talks less and does anything directly himself, he is the most formidable figure in the history of Snopes family.

In The Mansion it is Linda who stoutly resists Flem and all that he stands for. Unlike her mother whose awareness of the power of love dramatizes itself in terms of impulse and passion, Linda's awareness channelizes itself in service and sacrifice. "As Bula's natural child and Gavin's spiritual child, (she) combines her mother's boundless capacity for love with her mentor's sensitivity to amorality and his determination to affirm moral freedom no matter what the sacrifice. Firmly grounded in the demands of the heart, her ideological commitment to human rights transcends social tradition as did her mother's sexuality and represents the culmination of the metamorphosis of love from its physical to its philosophical state."

Her participation in the Spanish Civil War and the World War II, and her tendentious support for human rights in Jefferson make her an opponent of not only fascism but Snopesism as well, symbolized by her foster father Flem.

In the Trilogy we have, apart from Linda, two other characters, Gavin Stevens and V.K. Ratliff who oppose Snopesism. Gavin's role in the Trilogy has been elaborately discussed in Chapters III and IV. But we may sum up his sense of commitment to the basic values of self, family and society as an awareness that one can do his best in any given situation. After reviewing the career of Snopes Ratliff says: So may be there's even a moral in it somewhere, if you jest knewed where to look, Stevens replies There aren't any morals. People just do the best they can.4 "The best" can be interpreted as one consistent with respect for man as man and for his rights and privileges within the context of the familial and the social norms.

V.K. Ratliff, on the otherhand, is a more subtle character and is easily the best of Faulkner's humanists. As Joseph F. Trimmer has brilliantly demonstrated, "he is an artist with the artist's ability to create and respond. Infact he is the "legend maker within the legend". Careful scrutiny of Ratliff's function in the

Trilogy demonstrates that his major contribution is not heroic action but aesthetic creation. Indeed, when one combines Ratliff’s desire to know, his addiction to watching anything “provided of course it had people in it,” his love of aesthetic strategy and narrative manipulation, and his ability to adapt to and understand the furious motion of experience, his function within the Trilogy can be seen as symbolic of Faulkner’s conception of the role of the artist.\(^5\)

All through we find Ratliff exploring, analyzing, interpreting, amplifying his subject, Snopesism. Jody learns about Ab Snopes barn-burning adventure from Ratliff. It is Jody’s anxiety to ward off the probable danger that gives initial advantage to Flem. But Ratliff seems to attach more significance to Eula’s loss of virginity. Thus according to Ratliff Flem’s success and advantage, or to put it in a different way Flem’s exploitation of the chinks in nature’s armour has created for himself and for others the problem of Snopesism. But Ratliff also provides certain insights because of his capacity to respond to the joys and sorrows of others.

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In section Twenty of *The Town* narrated by Gavin Stevens we come to know of Ratliff's relations with Bula Snees. Out of all his friends and acquaintances she alone knows the full name of Ratliff. But one thing that goes against Ratliff is the way in which he himself was duped by Flem Snees in *The Hamlet.* That this does not interfere with Ratliff's developing awareness of the dangers involved in the spread of Snopesism is amply demonstrated by the help he renders to Mink's family and his offer to help Mink himself with money.

Except *The Hamlet,* the other two novels, *The Town* and *The Mansion,* do not belong to Faulkner's "great years" of creative achievement. In his later novels, which include *The Town* and *The Mansion,* he appears to be groping towards a sort of affirmation of the self. This is, in *The Mansion,* implied in the prayer of Brother Goodyhay—"Save us, Christ, the poor sons of bitches"—and in the insight Mink gets on his pilgrimage from Parchman to Jefferson—"A man can get through anything if he can just keep on walking." Though Faulkner continues the use of some of the technical devices of his "great years" there


7. Ibid., p. 270.
seems to be a change in the tone of the novels comprising the Trilogy under consideration. As has been noticed by Hoffman, we find in the later Faulkner an "insistent" desire to make his characters speak for him.  

Frenchman's Bend and Jefferson are no doubt a part of Faulkner's mythic world, but they also symbolically stand for the kind of society in which man exists. The conflict between will and desire, logic and intuition, abstraction and experience, self and society that is dramatized in the Trilogy is a Perennial human situation with which we have to negotiate. The strategies that Bula, Gavin Linda and Ratliff evolve to combat the situation provide not a moral but a verifiable truth. Since no situation is simple and human motives are too complex to be reduced to a few formulas, Faulkner as an artist drives home the point that to survive with undamaged self in the world of Snopeses, is to practise endurance and sacrifice.