CHAPTER V

“Light in August” : The Burden of the Past

William Faulkner insists that we may not evade the now and that time-present necessarily carries within it the weight of the past, the possibilities and responsibilities of the future. Man can not disavow the past, nor should he wish to. In the interviews in Japan, Faulkner said that time has “got to go forward and we have got to take along with us all the rubbish of our mistakes and our errors” (LG, 131). That is what Quentin realizes in Absalom, Absalom!: “Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks” (AA, 261). Because events continue to reverberate throughout all time, no occurrence is ever lost. Sartre writes that for Faulkner “past is unfortunately never lost” [italic mine]. With Faulkner, the past is indeed an inescapable burden, but not an unfortunate one. On the contrary, in Faulkner it is dissociation from history, as with Jason Compson and the aviators and the modern industrial South which is unfortunate. To lose the past is to become “ephemeral,” substanceless; the past is a
burden, to be sure, but "anything worthwhile is a burden" (LA, 121). (Broughton, Panthea Reid. Abstraction and the Actual. Louisiana State University Press, 1974. 45-46)

Light in August was written in the heights of Faulkner's literary career. It is one of the strange and difficult novels of Faulkner's creation. A succession of isolated, brilliantly depicted characters and scenes revolve around to be finally blurred into an impenetrable centre—the character of Christmas. The dominating character Joe Christmas always remains a mystery: no one has the actual knowledge of the blood of his father. Alfred Kazin says he is a "compelling rather than believable" (251) character who remains as he is born an abstraction. Like an art image that has never had the privilege of being human, he is ever to be merely believed; yet at the last he is to "rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it...." (345).

In this several-stranded story the two modes, tragedy and comedy, are mixed. The novel begins with Lena Grove and ends with Lena, her child, and Byron Bunch. In this strand, in which Lucas Burch, a villain, is a supporting character, the mode is comedy. And in this strand the comic heroine, Lena Grove, is dominant, and the comic hero, Byron Bunch, subordinate. Between the first and last chapters, we encounter two other stories: first, at considerable length, the story of Joe Christmas, in which Doc Hines and Mr. McEachern, together with Lucas Burch and Percy Grimm, are subordinate villains, and Joanna Burden something of a subordinate heroine, and in which the mode is tragedy; and second, the story of Gail Hightower, in which the comic and the tragic are very much
mingled. As we see, first, the novel's dominant hero and heroine pull the strand in
different directions as a result of which they never meet, and second, in addition
to being counterpoint, the hero's tragic story and the heroine's comic story are
interlaced by the story of Gail Hightower.

The most important theme of Light in August is the relation of the novel's
three strands and particularly the success of Hightower's unifying strand, the
dynamics and the significance, the how and the so what, of Hightower's renewal.
While all the other major characters remain static—in the sense that they struggle
along without enlightenment—Hightower halts and goes into a deep introspection
leading to his transformation, although it comes to him late in life.

The mystery of Joe Christmas is the meaning of height in the novel, for the
impenetrability of Christmas becomes the only way Faulkner can articulate a truly
human wholeness of being of which the others, such as Lena, Hightower, Byron,
Joanna, Hines, Grimm, are the human shadows. They are recognizable figures
whom we find in novels; they explain Christmas in their freedoms from his special
agony of seeming not quite born. In reality it is he who explains them. They are not
only the visible, partial reflections of the wholeness which Christmas's suffering
embodies, but are the bright fragments of mystery in Faulkner's novel.

However Faulkner's nagging concern about the theme leads him to show
the crippling influence of the past to all the major characters of the novel re-asserting
the view that the past has its immediate impact on the present. In order to illustrate
this point he has given elaborate details of the past life of Joe Christmas, Gail
Hightower, Joanna Burden, Doc Hines and even Percy Grimm. Vis-à-vis this point
is the response of individuals and community that Faulkner tries to examine with
detachment as well as to focus on the fact that both community and individuals are guided by the stock responses that refuse to accept variation or even the reality. It is true not only with the victimisers, but also with the victims themselves. The complete disorientation and the consequent destruction of Joe Christmas, the focus of the study, illustrates this point in the novel. Unlike a character who internalizes the stereotyped response of the whites, he stands up and baffles them, but he does not have any space to grow to reach an acceptable position. Deeply perplexed on his lineal identity, he tries to live a life which defies any category as much as his origin does. He finds himself not readily fitting in any well-defined category. He can not reciprocate Mrs. McEachern's offer of maternal love when he is taken for adoption. Similarly, he rejects Joanna Burden's plan of educating him to become a respectable man and take charge of her farm later on.

Joe Christmas, the imagined mulatto is at the centre of *Light in August*. There is no clear indication about his origin, although at last he is lynched as a "negro" by the Jeffersonians. Unable to choose a single identity, Christmas chooses instead his doubleness. The only identity that will satisfy him is the one which is no identity at all, but rather an image of disorder. A kind of stable and consistent meaning is missing from him that the fictional characterization and the context of the novel insist on: a stability based on repression and commitment to a fixed pattern. Being neither black nor white, Christmas is doomed to indefiniteness. And yet he is more than blankness. On the one hand he is a life or a single structure that is difficult yet visible. He lacks the clarity of Hightower and Lena and Joanna, yet capable of being summoned up in our minds by the words
"Joe Christmas." On the other hand, he is the disorder that lives always near the surface of *Light in August*, the chaos of mixed bloods that brings forth from the life of Jefferson an inevitable violence. The mulatto becomes the Faulknerian symbol of something that is beyond comprehension. However Joe Christmas is as much a construct of the society as Joe's fatalistic acceptance of the myth of his origin. The history of Joe's birth clearly indicates that his father might be equally a non-black Mexican as he is believed to be carrying nigger blood in him. Even Doc Hines, the grandfather of Joe Christmas, has not seen the lover boy even though he kills him shooting in the head during that pitch-black night.

Jefferson, and for that matter any society, has a pattern of conviction that the individual can only become a member of a society by permitting himself to be classified according to race, colour, geographic origin, and so on. Created by man, these categories become creators of man insofar as they establish social identification as the necessary prerequisite to human to human existence. The sheer weight of generations, each in its turn conforming to and therefore affirming this process of public labelling, establishes the labels not only as a matter of tradition but as a kind of revealed truth. What starts as verbal pattern of classification thus becomes a social order not to be challenged or changed. And what starts as a category becomes a myth, for certainly the word "Negro" is a compressed myth just as the stock response to that word is a compressed ritual. The result is that men like Joe Christmas or Valery Bon who can neither fit nor be fitted into these categories, are either sacrificed to or driven out of the society whose cherished beliefs they threaten.
Certainly there is no one set of categories which can claim Christmas or be claimed by him. Yet he cannot ignore the concept of race which assigns men to one of two separate worlds, each with its traditions and modes of thinking and acting. The irony of Joe’s position is that what seems to be a choice is in reality a delusion: Negro or white – to choose one is to affirm the existence of the other. His awareness of this dichotomy makes him take up the role of antagonist in all situations. In the presence of whites he becomes Negro; among Negroes he feels himself to be white. The result is that series of tensions and conflicts for which he himself is at least partly responsible. The Joe Christmas who is finally lynched as “Negro” is the joint creation of his private world and of the larger public universe. Joe Christmas’s inability to accept his position as a supposed mulatto, on one hand and the society’s simplistic behavioural response finally lead to the tragedy. The story of Christmas challenges the public mind of Jeffersonians and exposes how naïve a community response may be.

In this respect Mrs. Hines’s account of his birth becomes significant, for it reveals that Joe is born into a myth created for him by others. Since Millie’s pregnancy is considered an unforgivable sin by Doc Hines, her father, he looks for a scapegoat who will bear the guilt and punishment. By calling her lover a “nigger”, he can transform a commonplace seduction into the horror of miscegenation. That is his justification—moral and religious—for the brutally inhuman treatment of his daughter, her lover, and her child. His reason for regarding Christmas with malevolence and hatred remains personal, but his actions and statements help formulate that confused and violent myth which is Joe’s particular agony. His brooding watchfulness having isolated Joe from the other children at
the orphanage, Hines then provides the three year old with an explanation: "why don't you play with them other children like you used to? ....... Is it because they call you nigger?" (285) the awareness of something strange or different about Joe is thus simultaneously impressed on Joe and on others.

The identification of Joe with Negro receives additional and unexpected support from the dietician of the orphanage. Surprised in the midst of her clandestine love affair, she lashes out at Joe calling him a "little rat" and a "little nigger bastard". In the day of frenzied uncertainty and fear which follows, she links the carelessly spoken invective with Hines's attitudes and with the meaningless taunts of the children. Though she had never considered Joe to be a Negro, "she believed that she had, had known it all the while, because it seemed to right: he would not only be removed; he would be punished for having given her terror and worry" (95-96). At cross purposes, each speaking a strange, private language, and each motivated by personal reasons, the dietician and Hines, nevertheless, combine to extend and intensify Joe's awareness of himself as a different kind of being and to force the matron to act on the assumption that he is indeed a Negro.

Joe's short-lived love affair with the prostitute Bobbie Allen again focuses another aspect of how myth may spring from man's selfish and opportunistic concern. So long as their affair proves satisfactory and trouble free, Bobbie simply ignores Joe's confession that "I think I got some nigger blood in me" (144). In a moment of crisis, however, and in order to save herself, she, like the dietician, finds it convenient not only to believe but to act upon that belief. All blame, all possible punishment is shifted to Joe as "Negro" who himself provides the material for this accusation. Suddenly conscious of her white blood, Bobbie not only
abandons Joe as a lover but also, without any remorse watches him beaten senseless by her white friends.

Although the taint of Negro blood is never revealed to McEachern, Joe himself is imbued with its possibility. For a time, however, it lies dormant in his consciousness while he endeavors to assimilate yet another aspect of his life. To the social pattern of black and white, the implications of which he is yet to realize, is added the religious pattern of the elect and the damned. His vague, emotional response to God is replaced by the creed and discipline of a particular church. And the spiritual relationship of father and son is submerged in an intricate and deadly game of good and evil, reward and punishment. McEachern's religious discipline is accepted eagerly by Joe because it makes his life completely predictable, relieving him of the necessity for self-judgment and responsibility. Accordingly he rejects Mrs. McEachern's awkward and uncertain attempts to establish a more purely human relationship with him.

Ultimately, however, he seeks and finds such a relationship in love for Bobbie, the waitress. It is this love which prompts him to rebel against McEachern's Calvinistic ritual of confession and penance and to resist the customary punishment McEachern seeks to inflict on him at the dance. But this achievement is short-lived, for Bobbie's later shrieks of rage signal the destruction of the last of Joe's natural, spontaneous emotions. Her betrayal, which impels him into the long, lonely street of his life, is not only sexual but religious and racial, for all three are involved in the idea of miscegenation into which their affair is suddenly transformed.

After the short love affair with Bobbie Allen followed by her betrayal and
the beating by her cronies Joe Christmas receives the physical experience of the antithesis of black and white with intensified awareness of it. His life becomes a series of episodes in which he provokes social violence from Negro and white alike, a violence which constitutes an almost joyful affirmation of the Negro-white pattern in which both Joe and his opponents are trapped. That someone could simply ignore that pattern fills him with an indignant amazement and outrage. He beats the prostitute who refuses to be horrified by his Negro blood, thus forcing her to initiate that ritual of violence which he expects. His reaction is understandable, for her indifference challenge the validity of the premise on which he has built his whole life. Whether or not he himself is a Negro may remain in doubt, but the fact that there is something called Negro which demands certain attitude and actions on the part of all white people must not he denied. During his relationship with Joanna Burden, Joe’s preoccupation with such categories becomes especially acute since he recognizes the same obsession in her.

Joe Christmas is clearly the key in understanding the novel: in a sense insufficiently developed as a character, he supplies the rest of the novel with significance. He is not merely a victim, but more than this. The conflict driving him towards a violent death is also the conflict he partly creates. Joe believes that he may be part black, part white. Blackness is for him what it is for the South in which he lives: an unpredictability, an abyss where life is a perpetual flow. Whiteness is the essence of design: cold, hard, manlike, as predictable as behaviour in the context of Simon McEachern’s iron laws of good and evil, or the cool and lonely street that stretches before Christmas.

Christmas is committed to design rooted in contradiction, a narrative
whose completion is impossible according to the terms of the world into which he has been born. His quest for order is fatally reconciliation of black and white. In one sense he is the inheritor of an externally conceived plot, yet there is a difference between the situation here and that of *As I Lay Dying*. Addie Bundren’s imposed funeral journey, despite the Bundren’s private motives, has much more of the structural priority common to narrative than does the identity of Christmas received from his various inventors. It is not Hines or the dietician but Joe himself who supplies weight to that possible identity, giving it most of whatever strength it comes to possess. Joe’s blackness, unlike Addie’s journey, does not function as an arbitrary pattern to limit consciousness; and the behaviour of Christmas is different from the Bundrens’ willingness to honour publicly and dismiss privately the given plot. Joe transforms this pattern into something larger than its origins. He at once obeys and enlarges its outlines, making it responsive to his own emerging identity. Plot in this novel is not the determinate poetic form controlling character energy but the unfolding fable that Christmas reinvents and transforms through a continuing act of consciousness.

Christmas is comprised of what Nietzsche called the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the will to destruction and the will to order. Nietzsche’s understanding of those concepts and his insistence on the dynamic of relationship between them captures the dynamic of Christmas’ character and the tragic conflict he epitomizes. Christmas is both the Dionysian force and its verbalization by an Apollonian force—a difficult fusion that Nietzsche said to be the focus of every Greek tragedy: the one true Dionysos appears in multiplicity of characters, in the mask of warrior hero, and enmeshed in the web of individual will.
The god ascends the stage in the likeness of a striving and suffering individual. That he can appear at all with this clarity and precision is due to .... Apollo. (66)

In the novel the characters depend for their identities, in the context both of society and the novel, on the existence of certain patterns: the illusions of order that allow them to live their lives. Each character inherits or creates a pattern that remains a defence against a reality not to be faced unarmed. These are Apollonian structures built to protect against a chaos too difficult to understand or bear, and thus the characters come to them in gratitude and relief. In Hightower’s words, they are the “shapes and sounds with which to guard [themselves] from truth” (356).

Such a use of illusion also characterizes the Jefferson society Faulkner sets up in the novel: a rigid system of white and black, where the black—symbolically the unconscious—is calmed into impotence by being locked within the confines of the society walls. The town has a name for its “reality”—it is called “nigger” and lives in Freedman town—and thus has stabilized it, believing like Hightower that it has bought its immunity. The black community in other words, has been drawn into the white-dominated Jefferson community and made subservient to it. If blackness is in this novel a Dionysian (or process principle), it has become clearly the servant of an Apollonian or product order. Blackness is in Jefferson an image of chaos and therefore its very opposite. A verbal and social prison for chaos.

Like Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden presents an insightful reflection of one aspect of the South. For though she is excluded from the community as a
Northerner, she too is obsessed with the myth of the Negro. Despite the apparently irreconcilable opposition between the North and the South which led them to actual war, both of them are concerned with the problem of the Negro, a concern which gives form and substance to a concept but which takes no cognizance of individuals as individuals. In both, this concept, supported by the legends of history as seen from their own particular perspective, engenders a set pattern of beliefs and actions. Eventually, these acts and beliefs involving the "Negro" are transformed into a kind of religion, a distorted version of Calvinism in which black and white replace or are identified with evil and good. Each holding this extreme view, Joanna Burden, the product of New England, is scarcely distinguishable from even Hines.

Joanna's increasing awareness of this myth parallels Joe's, though without his tormenting uncertainty as to his own relationship in it. As a child she simply accepts the fact that certain people have darker skins than her own. But this innocence or naiveté is not permitted to continue. Her father, Nathaniel Burden, slowly transforms the physical black and white she sees into a moral and religious order. She is made aware of "Negro" "not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which [she] lived, we lived, all white people, all other people" (187). The shadow becomes a "black cross" to which she is a martyr, a phantom priestess immolating herself on a phantom altar. Consequently, her whole life is devoted to perpetuating and giving substance to a metaphor: "You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you." (188).

To this belief in her martyrdom, Joanna Burden sacrifices all her natural impulses, thereby creating a bifurcated individual. Thus, Joe sees her as "a dual
personality: "the one the woman at first sight of whom in the lifted candle... there had opened before him, instantaneous as a landscape in a lightning flash, a horizon of physical security and adultery if not pleasure; the other the man-trained muscles and the man-trained habit of thinking born of heritage and environment with which he had to fight up to the final instant" (174).

His entrance into her life signals an overt conflict between these two aspects of her being. The sex-starved body conquers for a time the man-trained habit of thinking and expresses itself in a desperate need to experience every possible sensation and emotion that physical love can suggest. Acting out of a world of fantasies, she quickly passes "through every avatar of a woman in love" (192) the lover's pursuit, secret meetings, baseless accusations and jealousy.

Yet even in the midst of these exaggerated manifestations of her long suppressed desires, she is not entirely free of her intellectual heritage. She can only seek to postpone its mastery over her: "Don't make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while" (196). The implicit identification of sex with sin prepares the way for the corruption of her relationship with Joe and for her own final perversion in which he ceases to be the means of satisfying her physical demands and comes to symbolize the sexual superstitions associated with the Negro. In this last phase, she is not having intercourse with a man but with an image of her own creation, with the idea of "Negro" for which she has given up her life. Accordingly, she emerges from the affair by repressing her instincts once more as her former obsessions get crystallized and intensified again.
No longer driven by her desire to sin, Joanna is left free to brood over the fact that she has sinned. In retrospect she naturally sees all the facets of her relationship with Christmas in the light of her old man-trained habits of thinking and the result is a reaffirmation of Calvinism and rededication of herself to the black cross. However she cannot leave Christmas alone, for he is the Negro, the symbol of her responsibility, her sin and damnation, and most important, her salvation. Her pleading, bribes, and threats are her attempts to make him translate into living flesh and act her concept of the Negro. To fall in with her formula he has to ignore his own uncertainty, admit his black blood, his sinfulness, and his dependence for salvation on her and her God. Joe’s refusal to submit himself to that formula threatens that myth for the sake of which she has continued to live. She reacts to his rebellion, as the mob does later, by resorting to violence. Anyway she does not accomplish her mission of transforming Joe Christmas into a Negro; it is not surprising that she should die as a consequence of this failure.

Faulkner has repeatedly suggested that the consciousness of community often serves as a mask for some individuals to give vent to their latent or suppressed desires of the id, because social code is made up of the abstraction of archetypal behavioural patterns; it does not recognize or adjust individual variations. Social forces are the most powerful ones to draw the attention of common people with a particular behaviour pattern in a given context. For example the fire at Miss Burden’s and her decapitated body generate a tension in the milling crowd which needs only the proper spark to explode it into violence. That spark is supplied by Brown, a man whose parentage is as obscure as Joe’s own. The pattern made familiar by Hines, the dietitian, and Bobbie is repeated as the
cry of "Negro" and the suggestion of miscegenation channel the restless and undirected energy of the observers away from the accuser. Three times Brown repeats "Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free" until the crowd grasps the significance of that contrast and prepares itself for action. Once he pronounces the word "Negro," the actual guilt of Joe Christmas, the circumstances, and the motivation, all become irrelevant, because the connection between "Negro" and "murder" is part of the public myth. At the same time Joanna Burden loses all individuality, becoming simply a white woman and hence an innocent victim who must be avenged. Accusation, conviction, and punishment constitute a single simultaneous belief-act as "Joe, the son of Joe" becomes Joe, the son of a Negro.

The compelling nature of the pattern evoked by Brown is indicated by the fact that no one thinks to question his premise. The mob is, of course, wholly absorbed in the idea of revenge, but even those who sympathize with Joe never doubt that he is a Negro. Though he has ample evidence of Brown's character, Byron still takes his word and in his turn convinces Hightower. The intense shock felt by the latter is occasioned by his sickening realization that a public myth is once more demanding its victim, that the ritualistic sequence of the chase, the pursuit, and the final immolation is now inevitable. Even the cosmopolitan Gavin Stevens, with his Harvard and Heidelberg studies behind him, is not able to see Joe Christmas except through a filter of preconceptions. Though he recognizes that Hines is quite mad, he, nevertheless, accepts his contention that Joe's father was actually a Negro. More important: he explains all of Joe's final actions, in words and thoughts which are just as compulsively blinded by his environment as are the words of the ignorant country people. Gavin says: "... because the black
blood drove him first to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it" (334). Faulkner trusts to dramatic irony there, and it becomes clear if we apply the same kind of reasoning to the actions of Percy Grimm. Was it Grimm’s white blood which would not let him shoot the manacled Joe Christmas through the table? Was it also the white blood which would not let him use the knife to castrate Joe after Percy had angrily snatched up? But he used both. Then, according to the reasoning of Gavin Stevens, there must have been more black blood than white in Percy Grimm. It is not that Gavin, the District Attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa alone is prone to commit such ridiculous mistake. What Faulkner wants to say is that the best human reasoning has its inherent limitation in grasping the reality. Faulkner does not reject or condemn human reasoning, but he shows distaste to passionate commitments based on abstraction, because it is sure to produce people like Percy Grimm, Joanna Burden and Hightower in his early life.

While Joanna Burden dies as a martyr of her illusion, there is another important character who thinks he has purchased immunity from the flux of reality but who under the influence of the surrounding events manages to shed his illusion and participate into life again. Gail Hightower is the clearest version in the novel of the human desire to shun reality through protective fantasies. As with Christmas and Joanna Burden, Hightower reveals the particular forms he needs for order—his childhood memories of the Civil War experiences of his grandfather and his father. Referring to the horror with which the young Hightower first notices the patch of Yankee blue on his father’s black coat worn during the war, he associates
his father with the real world; the story of his grandfather, however, releases him from the terror of reality. The father's coat, with its array of patches — "Patches of leather, mansewn and crude, patches of Confederate grey weathered leaf brown now" (349) and the patch of blue—is the motley costume of comedy. But the story of the grandfather's raid on Jefferson and his subsequent death in a henhouse is of the single colour and clear line of an adolescent's notion of glory:

They were boys riding the sheer tremendous tidal wave of desperate living boys. Because this. This is beautiful. Listen. Try to see it. Here is that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes… It's too fine, too simple, ever to have been invented by white thinking. A Negro might have invented it. And if Cinthy did, I still believe. Because even fact cannot stand with it. (360)

Hightower presents the story as a magnificent artefact of colour and touch and sound, with the whole circumstance of the war, "with all that for background, backdrop: the consternation, the conflagration" (360). The death at its close, the disgrace of chicken-stealing, only enhances its beautiful unbelievability for Hightower: "It's fine so. Any soldier can be killed by the enemy in the heat of battle, by a weapon approved by the arbiter's and rule makers of warfare. Or by a woman in a bedroom. But not with a shotgun, a fowling piece, in a henhouse" (361).

Spurred by the story of his grandfather Hightower at first attempts to imitate its form by going to seminary, as if in church he can live in a context where, "truth could walk naked and without shame or fear", where life could be "intact and on all
sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase" (356). His aim is
to convert his life into the purity of the tale.

Hightower's sole link to a world outside himself is Byron Bunch, but through
Byron he becomes gradually involved with Lena Grove, with the grandparents of
Joe Christmas and finally with Christmas. It is an object lesson to Hightower that
reality is not easily put aside; Hightower's delivery of Lena's baby is the culmination
of his unwilling surrender to reality. It is as if he has been driven back into life,
tempted to think it can prove less violent, more manageable than before.

In his return however, Hightower cannot become completely free of the
imagination's embellishments. In the midst of the new sense of having put aside
his ghosts for the sudden realization of reality, Hightower still expresses happiness
over the fact that Byron has abandoned his courtship of Lena and left town. In this
respect he still holds to the concept of purity in the wake of new life caressing
uncomplex things: "If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It is
not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and
now wishes to renege that choice. It's not right, it's not just" (234-35).

Accepting the reality all of a sudden is difficult and one has to do it with a
painful transition. So we see him at the end of the novel confronting, one by one,
the darkest realities of his lifetime, only to conclude, as always, with the persistent
dream that puts realities aside. In chapter 20 he confronts everything: his horror
at a coat, his hypocrisy at the seminary, his service to a church that he believes is
a barricade "against truth and .... peace" (363), his misuse of his pulpit—"a char­
latan preaching worse than heresy" (363), the masochistic pride in his torment at
the hands of the townspeople— "that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr"
Then the most awful reality of all, that he has been the "instrument of [his wife's] despair and shame .... 'I don't want to think this, I must not think this, I dare not think this'" (365).

All the characters in the novel except for Christmas follow the model of Jefferson: they commit themselves to a clear pattern, designed to resist the complexity of actual conditions. It is a strategy of objectifying an inner reality, transferring fear or desire to an object outside the self. The imagination creates illusory patterns that identify and reject those parts of the self too difficult to bear. In several instances Christmas himself becomes the living figure of someone else's inner reality. So Doc Hines and Percy Grimm's identification of Joe as Satan or black rapist is a strategy of psychic survival.

The strategies of survival are Faulkner's strategies of characterization as well. Their inner chaos objectified, as it can never be for Christmas, McEachern and Grimm gain a certain fixity that allows us to see them. Christmas insists on a total self: he will not know himself, as the others do, in the image of that which he must eventually destroy. His remoteness from us, as opposed to the clarity of McEachern and Grimm, Hightower and Hines, is owing to his unwillingness to accept the pattern which falsifies the reality. In creating Christmas, Faulkner challenges an idea of consistency in character for the sake of an idea of change and movement. According to Kazin, Faulkner attempts "the tremendous feat of making us believe in a character who in many ways is not a human being at all – but struggling to become one" (264). Character's struggle towards being makes Faulkner follow subversive act in the novel of otherwise conventional characterization.
Lena, by the way, is the only one of the strangers—the outsiders who have come into the community—who does not suffer from frustration and alienation. The others suffer from the characteristic disease of modern life, its sick hurry and divided aims. One can recognize in the situation of Christmas or Hightower themes characteristic of other writers of our time such as Eliot and Joyce. To all of them one might apply John Crowe Ransom's telling description of modern man as a being unable to fathom or perform his nature. Since Christmas does not know who he is, he can express himself only in fits of compulsive violence. Gavin Stevens thinks that perhaps just before his death, Christmas did come to know who he was, and there are rather clear indications that Hightower fathoms his nature at the end, but this knowledge comes very late. Lena is almost alone in not suffering from this modern defect. She can perform her nature because she does not need to fathom it: she is nature.

Lena along with Eula of *The Hamlet* has sometimes been called an "earth goddess." It is more accurate to say that Lena is one of Faulkner's several embodiments of the female principle—indeed, one of the purest and least complicated of his embodiments. Her rapport with nature is close. She is never baffled as to what course of action to take. She is never torn by doubts and indecisions. There is no painful introspection. This serene composure has frequently been put down to sheer mindlessness, and Lena, to be sure, is a very simple young woman. But Faulkner himself undoubtedly attributes most of Lena's quiet force to her female nature. Faulkner may indeed have had a rather romantic idea of woman. He certainly had an old-fashioned idea of her. In the Faulknerian world men have to lose their innocence, confront the hard choice, and through a
process of initiation discover reality. But women are already in possession of this knowledge, naturally and instinctively. That is why in moments of bitterness Faulkner's male characters—Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, for example—assert that women are not innocent and have a natural affinity for evil. It would be more accurate to say that Faulkner's women lack the naïve idealism of the men, have fewer illusions about human nature, and are less troubled by legalistic distinctions and the niceties of any code.

In *Light in August*, however, the male-female contrast is stressed for in a rather different way. Here, the principal male characters suffer alienation. They are separated from the community, are in rebellion against it—and against nature. But Lena moves serenely into the community and it gathers itself about her with protective gestures. Its response to her, of course, is rooted in a deep and sound instinct: Lena embodies the principle upon which human community is founded. She is the carrier of life, and she has to be protected and nurtured if there is to be any community at all. Therefore she does not represent any special feature or idealism of the society, which, if examined in the form of individuals as units, reveals persons like Doc Hines, Percy Grimm, Gavin Steven etc.

In the novel like Joe Christmas, Lena herself is a centre for the actions and reactions of various characters and the object of a clearly defined public attitude. Each person she meets sees not her but an image of what he believes her to be, and that image is predetermined by the convention that identifies virginity with virtue. For Mrs. Armstid she is the fallen woman; for the men at the store, a foolish virgin to be treated with mingled pity and scorn; and for Byron, who loves her, she is the innocent victim of a scoundrel. Each of these images, grounded in a con-
cern with Lena's unmarried state, conveys more information about the observers and their society than they do about her, for unlike Christmas, she does not mirror or share the preconceptions of the community.

Though Lena is judged harshly, she is consistently treated with kindness. The reason is that she offends against the mores of society without challenging its foundations as contrasted to what Joe Christmas does. In a sense, the community's convictions and actions operate independently. Lena's arrival at Jefferson signals the breaking up to the old compulsive patterns which match action to judgement. Mrs. Armstid's tight-lipped offer of food, shelter and money prepares us for Byron's quick abandonment of his routine of overtime work and weekly trips to the country Church when Lena appears. He too acts contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country upbringing which demands in the object a physical inviolability. Hightower, despite his distrust of Lena and his fear of Byron, disrupts the pattern of his life and leaves his sanctuary to attend the birth of her child. The sheriff, momentarily overlooking the letter of the law, recognises her need and therefore her right to use Miss Burden's cottage. Even the anonymous truck driver shows kindness towards Lena and gives up his bed, though with some grumblings.

The fundamental irony which Faulkner explores to a greater or lesser degree in almost all of his novels runs through this novel: the gulf between appearance and actuality, the contrast between the public and the private self. There is the contrast between the outward force of Joe Christmas and the inner reality with which the reader becomes increasingly familiar as the book progresses. Another character Joanna Burden, inwardly a chaos of sensuality, outwardly a woman of
mature wisdom, dispensing "advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen Negro schools and college through the South" (173). Hightower and Byron Bunch are other characters in whom the same traits can be seen, while again and again the reader realizes that the characters themselves are seeing their fellow men and women not as they actually are but as they wish them to be: so Miss Burden sees Christmas as "Negro"; so Hightower discerns in his wife, as Joe Christmas discerns in Bobbie Allen, a non-existent quality of love.

These ironic patterns are clearly related to the major theme that the organized society and organized religion demand allegiance from individual members in strict accordance with prescribed abstract patterns. At the hands of religious authoritarians such as Hines and McEachern, Christmas suffers all his life from this demand, and it is in response to the same rigid requirement that he is finally hunted down according to the rules prescribed in Jefferson for the treatment of "nigger murderers". There is, however, little qualification or amelioration of the book's rejection of organized religion and religious fanaticism. The bigotry of several characters, in the past as well as the present, is closely examined and shown to be self condemned by its own rigidity and inhumanity, and it is a final astringent touch in Faulkner's treatment of this theme. Faulkner's characters, so assured in their narrow faith, are in contrast to Joe Christmas himself, a man engaged in unceasing introspections, a persistent and desperate search for personal identity and for a meaning in life. For all his confusions, however, it is Christmas who discovers one of the two forms of religious and moral
experience which Faulkner appears to offer as valid. The opposite but complementary figure in the novel is Lena Grove, who, in her simple and unquestioning acceptance of a kind of natural religion, seems to embody those simple and permanent values which Faulkner usually affirms—the values of endurance, patience, and simple faith.

The term "redemption" may seem to claim too much for Hightower. Yet by the end of the novel he has been powerfully changed. After he has successfully delivered Lena's baby, he feels "a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant" and thinks "I showed them!... Life comes to the old man yet" (301). And he goes home to read not Tennyson but Henry IV, "food for a man" (301). When he hears that Byron has left, he says to himself: "So he departed without coming to tell me goodbye" (308). And then, with a conscious and purposed inversion of the usual phrase, "After all he has done for me. Fetched to me. Ay; given, restored, to me" (308). Later, it is true, Hightower has to experience Christmas' attack upon him, the futile attempt to stop Grimm with a lie offered too late to save Christmas' life, and the blood-letting in his own house. But he has dared to take risk and told the generous lie, and in the long reverie which closes Faulkner's account of him he has admitted to himself that he "was the one who failed" (362), that he was responsible for his wife's death, that he has been "a charlatan preaching worse than heresy" (363), and that, bound by his romantic fixation on his grandfather's death, he has himself been neither dead nor alive. In this hour of truth he has his vision of the faces, and sees them for what they are, and he hears once again the phantom cavalry, the mystic experience with which he has sustained himself in the past, but this time he hears with a difference "the
clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves" (367), for he himself has finally dared something and has broken out of his self-centered dream.

Most readers have assumed that Hightower, old and exhausted with head bandaged after Christmas' blows, dies as he hears "the dying thunder of hooves." But Faulkner, in his discussions at University of Virginia, indicated that Hightower didn't die. This is obviously highly interesting; but as far as the larger scheme of the book is concerned, it hardly matters: whether Hightower died or lived on, he had broken out of the circle in which we find him at the opening of the story.

When we think of Byron Bunch, it sets us thinking whether he is also "redeemed" Can we say yes in view of the curious and somewhat ambiguous ending of the novel in which Lena has not accepted marriage with Byron but, with Byron following her in her ridiculous quest for the father of her child, the unspeakable Lucas Burch? An answer to this question brings up for consideration on Faulkner's attitude—not only to the characters in this episode but to all the happenings in the book. If Light in August were conceived to be the so-called well-made novel, there could have been a satisfactory ending in the culmination of the happy union of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch. What shall we call the predominant mode? But Faulkner prefers to give a kind of circularity to the ending of the novel with a clear suggestion of motion or dynamism that is the reality which he has again and again tried to capture within the framework of fiction.

Looking at the comical end of the novel a tender-minded reader may feel that Faulkner frequently uses a savage humor; but his is never a cynical and nihilistic humor. Its function is to maintain sanity and human perspective in a scene of brutality and horror. For example, we can cite the passage in which the countryman,
who has discovered the fire in Miss Burden's house, enters and finds her body with the head almost severed, a condition which presents him with a problem in getting the dead woman downstairs. He is afraid to try to pick her up and carry her out because her head might fall off. But the growing fire forces him to act hastily; so he picks her up and brings her out as best as he can. When he deposits the body on the ground, however, the cover in which he had hastily wrapped her “fell open and she was laying on her side, facing one way, and her head was turned clean around like she was looking behind her. And he said if she had known to look back when she was alive, she would have not met with his fate.

Eventually Faulkner considers the outsiders or impure elements to the Jeffersonians—Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower—as having the inherent weaknesses of human being. If they are under some severe illusions, they are so warped by time and situation, and it does not necessarily absolve the population of Jefferson of similar kind of vices. Percy Grimm, for example, is equally warped as Joe Christmas and the others, although the society rally behind him in lynching the latter. Whether it is Jeffersonians or the outsiders, the burden of the past may influence a person in the development of his present state. Faulkner, however, unlike Henrik Ibsen, does not want to say that the past is a burden that should be thrown away for the benefit of the present. Rather Faulkner wants us to be aware of this reality as one that accompanies everyone; and sooner we realize this truth, the better. We have at least chances to be a touch better once we realize it in our lives.

The cases of Hightower’s lose of contact with the present because of his obsession with the legend of the chicken coop tragedy of his grandfather, Joanna
Burden's dedication to black cross and the disoriented personality of Joe Christmas are as much the consequence of history as they are the contributors to the history. The value of history lies on what we want to learn from it. For Hightower the legend of the past becomes the only truth and the only reality, rendering his connection with the public world precarious at best. Trying to live the history instead of learning from it is the major blunder of Hightower, which, of course, he later realises and tries to correct. Earlier, to Hightower history was an escape route instead of being a lesson to learn. Unlike his father he cannot function as “two separate and complete people, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist. And since nothing can compare with his vision the people he meets and the tasks he is forced to perform become annoying interruptions of the commonplace and trivial. What destroys Hightower is not the fact that he has a dream, but that for the sake of the dream, he becomes insensitive and indifferent to the quality of his actual experience. Dominated by his vision, he stands in the pulpit fusing religion, the galloping cavalry, and his dead grandfather into one incoherent rhapsody, while he remains sublimely indifferent to the growing uneasiness of his parish and to the suicide of his wife.

Hightower deliberately provokes the violence which ensures his isolation. He tries to justify and safeguard his withdrawal by making it appear that he was being driven, uncomplaining, into that state which had been his desire even before he entered the seminary. Each of his actions becomes a defiance, a calculated incentive to public outrage and retribution. Thus he, like Christmas, is at least partially responsible for his own isolation and for the violence he suffers. In
his self chosen role of antagonist, he experiences a fierce exultation, momentarily revealed by his demonic grin hidden by the prayer book. As passive victim, he faces the K.K.K. "with that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr" (364) which confirm his contemptuous judgement of society.

Works Cited

—. *Light in August*. New York: Random House, 1959. All the quotations of the novel in this chapter are from this edition.


CHAPTER VI

**Faulkner's Technical and Stylistic Achievements:**

**Fusing the Personal and the Communal into one Aesthetic Whole**
This is one way of explaining the apparently grotesque disturbances and distortions that also mark Faulkner's writing style. It is a style that dramatizes the strain and repeated failure by received reason, nature, and common sense to repress or at least grammatically to subordinate persistently outrageous horrors, stubborn doubts, endless qualifications.


To discuss Faulkner's technical achievement we have to keep in mind three aspects of his work. One is the novelist's interest in Southern history and culture, and the presence of an imaginary Mississippi County as a setting for most of his published novels and stories. A second feature is Faulkner's psychology of characterization, in particular his creation of puritan figures who are dominated by obsessive desires to impose rational categories upon the rebellious facts of human experience. Finally there is the technical mastery by which stylized characters are made vehicles of moral and social analysis. Faulkner's psychological descriptions are different from those of Joyce and Woolf in the sense that Faulkner's mode is more for technical exploit rather than exploring the minute details of the character; so his approach seems to be unrealistic in the sense that they cannot be applied to actual human individuals without obvious
distortion. However this approach readily lends a mythical atmosphere to the entirety of his fiction.

Faulkner's experimental techniques lack a theoretical rationale and are not employed consistently. However this lack of consistency is deliberate and is intimately related to his philosophical bias, because he thinks rationalism and well-made things have their own limitations. All the same, Faulkner is an experimental craftsman of the highest order, and his use of the interior monologue and related forms deserves an honored place in the history of the psychological novel. A pragmatist in matters of craft, Faulkner likes to create forceful narrative effects than to achieve the greatest possible degree of realism or to speak philosophically about man and his social world. Occasionally he uses melodramatic situations, florid style, and overflow of sentimental elements in characterization, but, considering his quest for unique form and style, they cannot be called his weaknesses; rather they contribute to his achievement as an original artist with unique qualities.

The function of Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner's private narrative universe, can be described in various ways. From one point of view it is the aggregate of the characters, events, and social themes found in isolated County novels. By establishing a common environment, and by using elaborate cross references, Faulkner persuades the reader that each separate work deals with only one feature of a unified imaginative world. On the one hand Yoknapatawpha is a clear analogue or microcosm of the Deep South, sharing that region's history and traditions. On the other hand, it serves as a vehicle for moral and social commentary, enabling Faulkner to explain the South's tragic failure. In this way
underlying atmospheres both of social realism and of social allegory are supplied to novels where characterization is stylized and moral problems unrealistically defined. Thus the County novels may be said to comprise a single prose epic, in which the opposition between history and allegory is effectively resolved.

Although Faulkner's County novels by no means share a sharply defined "mythology," the term may be loosely applied to the stylization of Southern history and culture in novels and story collections from *Sartoris* (1929) to *Go Down, Moses* (1940). In these works the Southern aristocracy has suffered a moral and social collapse traceable both to the Civil War and to the presence of a destructive psychological flaw. The social vacuum thus created is partially filled by the rise of two formerly exploited groups—one is a class of back-woods farmers, who achieve bourgeois respectability, and the other is a new and proud generation of mulatto Negroes. In his early non-comic work Faulkner deals almost solely with themes involving the moral corruption of the Southern aristocracy, as revealed by its inhuman treatment of both poor-whites and Negroes. Negro characters either symbolize a moral stability which corrupted white Southerners are incapable of achieving or they represent a future South in which racial conflict will no longer exist. Faulkner's comic treatment of the ambitious poor-whites, mainly represented by the Snopes family, may be distinguished from his serious analysis of traditional white society. Flem Snopes's social triumph in Jefferson, as described in *The Town*, is only awkwardly related to the discussion of rural Snopesism in the more successful *The Hamlet*. Faulkner uses Yoknapatawpha mythology mainly as a device for enhancing the symbolic roles of characters that represent in some way the South's tragic moral flaw.
Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha mythology corresponds very closely to the South’s romantic legend of a proud society compelled to endure humiliating defeat by an external force. However, Faulkner protects his work from the charge of romanticism by keeping such themes in the background of particular novels. Moreover, he insists that the aristocratic South is responsible for its own degeneration, and that the ravages of war only symbolize the consequences of inward decay. At the same time it is implied in his work that past social ideals, however corrupt they might have been, are superior to the debased values of modern life, whether represented by the amoral Snopeses or by decadent aristocrats like Jason Compson and Horace Benlow.

In particular novels Faulkner locates the source of aristocratic decay within the personalities of individual characters, who are treated as archetypal representatives of Southern Puritanism. General references to the collapse of the South’s aristocracy have the primary function, as in Absalom, Absalom!, of establishing an atmosphere of social allegory, which is then focused upon the psychological obsessions of individual characters.

Faulkner’s ability to combine social theme with psychological analysis reaches its fullest expression in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! In the former novel Joe Christmas, the adopted son of a white farmer, becomes convinced that he has a Negro ancestor. His hatred of himself and his effort to expiate his real or imagined sin are symbolic, albeit ironically, of the white Southerner’s latent sense of responsibility for inhuman treatment of the Negro race. Unlike Joe Christmas, Thomas Sutpen never directs his moral and social pride against himself, except in the sense that his inhuman moral code proves
just as self-destructive. But Joe Christmas and the archetypal aristocrat both represent the dark puritan vein simultaneously strengthening and weakening the South. By the end of the novel Sutpen's characterization has blended with his role as representative of the South's inability to reconcile successfully democratic idealism and aristocratic society.

Faulkner describes the self-destructive moral rationality of Joe Christmas, Thomas Sutpen, and other archetypal white Southerners as essentially "puritan" in composition. The concept of Puritanism plays an important role in Faulkner's characterization, and the term is applied not only to religious and sexual obsessions, but to habits of thought residual from the South's long Protestant tradition. Virtually every white male in Faulkner's novels, from educated lawyers to escaped convicts, can be described, either directly or indirectly, as puritan. Such figures are committed to the rationalization of experience, or the effort to fit the ebb and flow of events into logical categories, usually but not necessarily moral. Characters insisting upon organizing and controlling human experience by rational means act in a puritan manner and are potential victims of the inadequacy of human reason.

Direct references to Puritanism as a psychological flaw appear most frequently in novels openly critical of the aristocratic South. In *The Sound and the Fury* Quentin Compson's suicide is traced to his puritan rage at the promiscuity of his sister, specifically to his effort to conquer, through exertion of rational will, the ravages both of nature and of time. In an explanatory appendix Faulkner traces Quentin's obsession to a destructive Presbyterian concept. In trying to convince himself that he has committed incest with Caddy, Quentin seeks an eternal pun-
quently in novels openly critical of the aristocratic South. In *The Sound and the Fury* Quentin Compson's suicide is traced to his puritan rage at the promiscuity of his sister, specifically to his effort to conquer, through exertion of rational will, the ravages both of nature and of time. In an explanatory appendix Faulkner traces Quentin's obsession to a destructive Presbyterian concept. In trying to convince himself that he has committed incest with Caddy, Quentin seeks an eternal punishment for them both, so that "he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires" (329).

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Thomas Sutpen's inhuman treatment of other characters, in particular his first wife, his poor-white retainer, and his part-Negro son, is traced to his puritan "innocence" or the belief "that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out" (263). The tragic consequences of Southern Puritanism also dominate the action of *Light in August*, where Joe Christmas's destiny is moulded by his response to a strict Presbyterian background. Throughout Faulkner's work puritan figures are described as able to deceive themselves by placing a dogmatic religion and an equally dogmatic social morality into separate compartments. Thus a Protestant church service in *Light in August* can be described by Gail Hightower as an ironic "declaration and dedication" (273) of the lynching of Joe Christmas on the following day.

Throughout his work Faulkner tends to create sharp distinctions between characters who function in the world as rational agents and those who do not. This psychological demarcation, with its consequences for style and narration, is related
to an equally sharp distinction between adult puritans and representatives of primitive nature: Negroes, idiots, women, and sometimes children. The structure of an individual novel usually depends upon a contrast between figures involved in social activity, or representative of social forces, and figures who symbolize a non-social primitivism or a moral awareness that cannot be translated into effective social action. Thus Quentin and Jason Compson, as representatives of aristocratic decay, are contrasted to Benjy, their idiot brother, and to Dilsey, the Negro servant. In *Light in August* Joe Christmas's tragedy is placed in psychological perspective by the presence of the primitive Lena Grove, who accepts the flow of experience and is not destroyed by puritan self-consciousness. Throughout his work Faulkner dramatizes his treatment of Puritanism by establishing such extreme contrasts, or by creating situations in which rational characters are conspicuously unable to control or even understand the forces of nature.

An important consequence of Faulkner's stylized characterization is the tendency for any social activity, inasmuch as it is rationally directed, to be inherently self-defeating. Faulkner's puritan figures are often motivated by socially oriented ideals which have become corrupted by personal will and thus prove disastrous, both for the would-be moral agent and for those around him. Even when the moral agent is not initially characterized as a puritan, his very involvement in the lives of others brings destruction. The Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* seem exceptions to the rule that social behavior must prove corrupting. But the incentives behind their gesture of carrying out the mother's wish to be buried in Jefferson are ultimately revealed as selfish and personal. Although their social action is apparently successful, the individual Bundrens undergo a series of personal tragedies. The
character least burdened by initiative, the father, is the only one who remains free of misfortune and who achieves his private aim. The absurdity of the family's social achievement, contrasted to the personal failures that accompany it, creates the comic or mock-epic tone which distinguishes the novel.

Just as Faulkner makes social action destructive and in this sense demonic, he locates human value in primitive characters who are generally free of social involvement as well as puritan rationality. The moral function given to Benjy and Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury, is in direct proportion to their dramatic and psychological removal from the puritan Compsons. The childbearers of Light in August and The Hamlet, Lena Grove and Eula Varner, have a similar role, although its moral aspect is much less pronounced. Through the exposure of the puritan rationality, Faulkner makes an attempt to explore and expose the limitation of singleness of meaning or the demand for homogeneity for a truth that is fluid in its actual state. If Faulkner targets Puritanism, it is only an archetypal representative for his premises: any institution or system demanding absolute allegiance is essentially wrong. With this premises he has created distorted characters such as Quentin Compson, Thomas Sutpen, Gail Hightower etc.

Irving Howe sees Faulkner as trying to place rational observers within each novel as intellectual guideposts to the reader. He sees Quentin Compson as an intended Hamlet figure, "a center of intelligence, an ethical agent and critic" (121). He also assumes that Gail Hightower is supposed to be an intellectual "reverberator," a witness-figure capable of appreciating the full meaning of Joe Christmas's tragedy. Particularly in his later works Faulkner tries to create both uncorrupted rational witnesses and effective moral agents. But his task is made
difficult by his concept of the moral inadequacy of reason. When Faulkner fashions a true spokesman-character, such as Gavin Stevens, the frequent result is a conflict of tone between the dramatic action and the moral commentary. In *Light in August* even the cosmopolitan Gavin Stevens, with his Harvard and Heidelberg studies behind him, is not able to see Joe Christmas except through a filter of preconceptions. Accepting the dubious contention that Joe's father was actually a Negro, goes on to explains all of Joe's final actions, in words and thoughts which are very ridiculous. His inference comes from the community prejudice that black is always associated with evils and rebellion, and white with goodness and moral restraint. He thinks the partially existent black blood in Joe drives him first to the Negro cabin, and then the other half of white blood drives him out of there, as it is the black blood which enduces him to snatch up the pistol but the white blood in him finally does not let him fire the weapon. Again in *Intruder in the Dust* and *Requiem for a Nun* Stevens is allowed to discuss at length redeeming actions that, as a rational adult, he is incapable of performing. These actions are performed instead by characters normally removed from social involvement who act intuitively, in a manner comparable to that of Faulkner's primitive figures. It takes a youth and an old woman, in *Intruder in the Dust*, to disregard logical evidence of guilt and help to free the innocent Lucas Beauchamp from being lynched.

The narrative structure in a Faulkner novel tends to be closely involved with the author's stylized psychology. In both *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury* the thematic contrast between rational puritans and primitive characters is reflected both in plot situations and in chapter organization. In *Light in August* Lena Grove's calm refusal to recognize moral dilemmas provides a dramatic
and psychological framework whereby the nature and significance of Joe's torturous self-hatred can be readily perceived by the reader. The presence of opening and closing chapters devoted to Lena's arrival in Jefferson before Joe's death, and to her subsequent departure, suggests a symbolic relationship between the two characters, even though they never meet. In *The Sound and the Fury* the narration of the first section is associated with the idiot Benjy and the last section with Dilsey, the Compson servant. Benjy and Dilsey are both social outsiders, and their points of view establish a perspective by which the Compson social failure can be viewed. In many novels where primitive figures do not play an important part, there still exists a structural opposition between socially oriented figures and characters who stand apart from the social framework. Both Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury* and Charles Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!* are sympathetic characters who are rejected by their families and forced into a condition of social isolation.

In contrast to Faulkner's primitives, his socially oriented heroes are generally described in terms of their rational obsessions or by their fanatical exertions of will, to the virtual exclusion of more commonplace qualities. Quentin Compson is characterized by a suicidal moral drive, Joe Christmas by his desperate sense of guilt, Thomas Sutpen by his ruthless ambition, and so on. Less important figures tend to be even more sharply drawn. The presentation of Jason Compson emphasizes his jealousy and avarice, and Percy Grimm in *Light in August* is described almost exclusively in terms of his overpowering racial hatred.

As a consequence of such stylized characterizations, Faulkner is forced to rely heavily upon features of style and narrative organization that illuminate not
so much the characters themselves as their significance. The development of a novel or story often emphasizes the gradual resolution of an initial conflict between opposed characters or between a character and his social environment. Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen first appear to Jefferson citizens as friendless and hostile strangers, but by the end of each novel they are associated symbolically with the Yoknapatawpha social world. At the beginning of Sanctuary Temple Drake is raped unnaturally by Popeye, a dehumanized Memphis gangster; but later in the novel she is revealed as sharing to some degree his morally stunted attitudes. Temple's responsibility for her own disaster is implied by her false testimony during the trial scene near the end of the novel. In order to salvage a last vestige of respectability she protects Popeye and allows the innocent Lee Goodwin to be lynched.

In his narrative techniques, and in his handling of social theme, Faulkner may be viewed as responding simultaneously to twentieth-century American naturalism, with its awareness of social issues, and to European technical sophistication, the tradition of Gustave Flaubert, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. Faulkner began writing in the middle of 1920's, when the European experimental novel, in particular James Joyce's Ulysses, was in great vogue among American writers. Such contemporary writers as Thomas Wolfe and John Dos Passos were also concerned with social behaviour as seen through the medium of individual subjective responses. However, Dos Passos was not content with the Joycean style in Manhattan Transfer (1925), and under the influence of a revived naturalism. He shifted his attention from the individual mind to the physical depth and breadth of American life. Wolfe also developed a more expansive rhetorical tech-
nique. And Faulkner among the earlier Joycean was able to reconcile effectively psychological interests and experimental techniques with the social spirit of the times.

The European tradition influencing Faulkner's work is associated with the elimination of the narrative voice as a distinct personality and with the substitution of symbolism as an author's primary means of establishing his moral authority. The effort to explore both tendencies to their logical end characterizes the interior-monologue technique, as developed by Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Such a technique, especially in Joyce's hands, directs the reader's attention to the pre-rational formulations of the active human mind, and in this way eliminates, at least in principle, the unwanted commentary of the omniscient author. The narrative eye may shift from mind to mind, but it avoids making comments of its own or seeming to provide information for the sole purpose of aiding the reader. Necessary information is provided indirectly by the content of the characters' thoughts, by physical details reported by the characters, and in some cases by stylistic suggestion. The author's aim is both to create an atmosphere of psychological realism, and to force the reader to become more thoroughly involved with the characters and their actions.

In Faulkner's hands the interior-monologue technique helps to establish a sense of psychological realism and thus counteract the extreme stylization of character and situation. Faulkner's work represents a kind of answer to what Lionel Trilling has called the paradox of the liberal imagination, the tendency of morally conscious writers to allow their conception of what society should be like to warp their view of how it actually is. However Faulkner is not as much interested
in taking up the sociological reality following the mode of realism as Theodore Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson did; Faulkner is more concerned with technical innovativeness built around a basic social or psychological issue. In this connection Lionel Trilling thinks if Faulkner succeeds in achieving the effect of profound social analysis, it is hardly through his recognition of "the full force and complexity" (299) of his subject matter but through his successful treatment of individual characters as archetypal social figures and by his mastery of sophisticated narrative techniques.

II

As a part of his attempt to examine the dual nature of deception and reality of language, Faulkner has persistently applied the various possibilities of language in his fictions. He has examined the verbal patterns that dominate the South and the ways that shape individual, his society and his tradition. Since language is the basic foundation as well as the product of social intercourse, it cannot be separated from the bases of personal and communal experience. Language has effect for physical, mental and emotional experience. The veterans of Soldiers' Pay, for example, find that they can talk only with one another; communication has completely broken down between them and the civilians who have not been touched by the actual fighting. Faulkner can see that the war has destroyed the "public" character of language and it has provided one group with a complex pattern of experience and the other group with (only) but a verbal pattern. Age itself also causes a shift in perspective and therefore in definition. Words derive their meaning both from the object or event to which they refer and from the sub-
jective reaction of the speaker or listener to that object or event. A single word may convey different things to different people as it reflects not reality but their own particular angle of vision.

Faulkner’s works show a kind of brooding fascination and amazement to the experiential foundation of language. Faulkner probes and traces its various forms in an effort to reveal why and how such a foundation is necessary in order for communication through language to be effected. Quentin Compson, for example, repeatedly asks in *The sound and the Fury*, “Did you ever have a sister”, as if that were the prerequisite for understanding his mental and emotional agony. Joe Christmas recognizes the words used by Bobbie’s friends, but they convey no meaning to him. The verbal counters employed by them are foreign to Joe’s own verbal experience, just as nothing could have prepared him for the old Negro’s resentment over Joe’s colour not being black enough to claim to be a nigger. Similarly, to break out of her silence and isolation Temple Drake in *Sanctuary* hires Nancy Mannigoe for the reason that an ex-doped nigger whore is the only animal in Jefferson that speaks Temple Drake’s language. In all these cases some community of experience seems to be the prerequisite for communication. This holds true not only for individuals but in the national and international contexts as well. The North-South immersion in linguistic solipsism, for example, can be seen in *Absalom, Absalom!* when Quentin attempts to convey to Shreve the particularly Southern qualities of his experience and language. The existence of such a problem indicates decisively that there is no direct relationship between the word and its referent. The object is itself involved in the process of change and the word is continually acquiring additional connotations, personal, social, and
historical, in order to make it conform to the speaker's view of that object. Even proper nouns have there clusters of secondary meaning and associations. Thus the ultimate meaning of the word "Caddy" in *The Sound and the Fury* involves the whole complex of private associations belonging to Benjy, Quentin, Jason, Dilsey, and the person who is Caddy. The concrete vocabulary of Benjy, the convolutions of Quentin, the logical precision of Jason provide an index to their own character rather than a reflection of their sister. Moreover their feelings and emotions are attached not to the real Caddy but to their self-created image of her. Communication breaks down as language becomes a matter of personal symbols, unrelated to objective reality. In the same way personal meaning attached to a proper name can be traced in the case of Thomas Sutpen or Colonel John Sartoris.

Since the proper noun has a concrete and specified referent, it possesses a certain unavoidable relation to reality. But when a more abstract level of language is employed, when words mean to represent categories and concepts, man, according to Faulkner, finds himself wholly in a verbal and logical universe. Because there are no objects exactly corresponding to the concept but only representatives approximating it, the number of associations the concept can carry is incalculable. Faulkner thinks once these secondary meanings are accepted publicly as part of its meaning, the concept assumes the substance and authority of experiential truth and reality. If the concept is then permitted to provide the incentive and generate the motive for individual actions, a vicious circle is completed. Language which should be used to communicate man's experience now controls it, and in the process, as Julius points out in *Mosquitoes*, men are reduced to "that species all of whose actions are controlled by words" (130).
The relationship of the concept to reality is readily demonstrated by the attitudes of various characters to virginity in Faulkner's novel. Only Mr. Compson recognizes that virginity is both a symbol and a physical condition and that each is subject to quite different laws. The former is eternal and immutable, the latter yields to time and change. Will Varner in The Hamlet adopts a thoroughly sceptical attitude about his daughter's virginity when he "cheerfully and robustly and undeviatingly declined to accept any such theory as female chastity other than as a myth to hoodwink young husbands with" (140). In contrast, Quentin Compson and Jody Varner are concerned solely with the symbolic value of virginity. But such symbols are continually threatened by the very object with which they are identified. Not only Quentin but Jody Varner and Byron Bunch are forced to see that Caddy, Eula, and Lena have their own qualities and drives. Thus the arbitrary identification of the symbol with a specific person is destroyed. As reality asserts by breaking the spell, we see the brooding despair of Quentin and the comic outrage of Jody; the humble acquiescence of the danger of confusing the generalized terms with the proper noun or the concept with the object is frequently illustrated in Faulkner's novels in connections with the word "Negro". A major part of Light in August, in fact, is devoted to Joe Christmas's painful exploration of the various implications and ramifications of that word. During the period of childhood, as Faulkner repeatedly points out, the word "Negro" carries no connotation except possibly that of strangeness or physical difference marked by dark skins. This difference of colours and physical features no doubt arouses curiosity but it does neither approbation nor disapproval while the emphasis is placed entirely on the individual and proper names. Bayard Sartoris and Ringo, Roth Edmonds and
Henry, Chick Mallinson and Aleck Sander—all these characters share a close personal friendship before yielding to a mutual recognition of colour and status.

Then we notice the word "nigger" being used reflecting some attitudes and elemental feelings. In The Sound and the Fury Quentin rightly gets to know "that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (86). Moreover distortion of word is always associated with emotion or feelings of a speaker. Hence the term "nigger" or Miss Burden "nigger-lover". The suggestion of resentment or disrespect by such distortion of word in the initial stage, however, opens up a process of transformation or extension of meanings according to the intension of the speaker. This way habits render language an autonomous authority in private and personal as well as social experience. The subtle and unconscious exaltation of language has the effect of diminishing the individual's sensitivity to words, their meaning and uses. This is exemplified by the dietician in Light in August who initially uses "nigger" as no more than a swear word hurled at the child Joe Christmas to relieve her own emotions. It indicates that words can be used quite arbitrarily to suit the mental state of the user, although such habit may involve far-reaching consequences.

As long as "Negro" and other similar terms merely specify a particular logical, verbal class, the word cannot possibly provoke any emotional response or elicit any action. If, however, they are regarded as accounts of the individual's nature, they become an instrument of division, destroying that communal brotherhood in which alone man can express his true nature. Confusion of a verbal category with experiential reality leads Roth Edmonds, like his father before him,
to reject and in turn to be rejected by his Negro foster-brother, causes Thomas Sutpen to deny his wife and child, and allows Carothers McCaslin to have sex with his own daughter. Even the intelligent Gavin Stevens ignores the character of Lucas Beauchamp and sees in his story to Chick the cliché explanation of any other Negro murderer. No matter how sensitive a man may be to the injustice perpetrated in the name of these categories, he yet tends to accept and perpetuate them in his own thinking. Isaac McCaslin, for example, renounces his patrimony in protest against slavery, but he still sees the relationship of Roth Edmonds and his Negro mistress as controlled by the traditional pattern of black and white. It is clearly suggested that linguistic categories initiate a policy of exclusion.

How the formal category of a word can be imposed on a person to his detriment can be seen in Faulkner's novels. No one certainly knows whether Velery Bon and Christmas are actually Negroes. Velery's mother is believed to be an octoroon by the various narrators in Absalom, Absalom! Sharing this belief, Judith Sutpen sends him into an inferno of conflict with both black and white worlds. Even after he commits himself to the black world through marriage, the uncertainty continues and even his wife is not really sure that he is not a white man. Similarly, Joe Christmas goes through a violent period of alternately affirming and denying his black blood, because of his uncertainty about his origin. In both cases the category of Negro is imposed on their consciousness by the convictions or actions of others. Judith and Clytie, faithful to their tradition, do so in all sincerity; the dietician and Doc Hines, however, force Joe into an ethnic and social category as a means of justifying their own actions.
Faulkner has shown that when secondary meanings begin to attach themselves to the category, it develops into a concept. "Negro" ceases to be a cognitive term and becomes a cultural idea encompassing a number of accidental associative implications that have little to do with the original descriptive definition. In the latter category, the word has acquired and continues to acquire historical, political, religious, and ethical ramifications. In short "Negro" or "nigger" is no longer a descriptive or generic term but a compressed myth to which the plantation system, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction have all contributed shades of meaning. In Southern context the term has evolved to become an actual and unquestionable sign of slavery, the mark of Cain and evil. For Doc Hines, Joe Christmas is the "devil's spawn" because he thinks of him as the son of a Negro. Both Wash Jones and Calvin Burden, the one a Southerner, the other a Yankee, use the Bible as authority and precedent for their attitude to "niggers". With this addition of religious as well as racial fanaticism, the word "nigger" is changed with a number of associated ideas and powerful emotions.

The final transformation of the word is from concept to precept. At this stage language ceases to be descriptive or logical and becomes rhetorical, persuading people into certain specific modes of feeling, thought and action. "Negro" begins to imply a pattern of behaviour as well as a complex of ideas. Eventually these patterns acquire an ethical significance. The "good" Negroes are the ones who fits into the role of faithful family retainers whose affection for the white master compensates for the expected laziness and petty dishonesty. Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury and Simon Strother in Sartoris provide the picture of the serious and the comic embodiments of this type.
The "bad" Negro, conversely, is not necessarily the one who has committed a crime; he is simply the individual who does not accept the role of the Negro as the South construes it. Caspey, for example, in *Sartoris* displays too much individuality to be regarded favourably by the whites or even by the other Negroes. Caspey returns from Europe with some highly radical ideas which would be dangerous if they were not essentially comic in their exaggeration. Significantly, both whites and Negroes unite in deflating Caspey's delusions of grandeur. In *Intruder in the Dust*, however, Lucas Beauchamp maintains his personal integrity by conforming to the pattern of Negro behaviour only when it is convenient for him to do so. Faulkner makes a sardonic amusement and contempt for the white man whose preconceptions of Negro behaviour is at fault.

When Joe Christmas or Velery Bon provokes white men by asserting their own Negro blood, the ensuing fight is not between two individuals but between the antithetical concepts of black and white. In such situations language is no longer a means of communication. Instead it serves as a way of circumventing the conscience of guilt by fixing a code which finally orders that experience as an imperative. The result is a kind of linguistic determinism inflicted on himself by man because of his desire for order.

The shift in language from the concrete and descriptive to the abstract and logical is accompanied by a corresponding shift in man's attitude to experience. As long as the individual restricts himself to the level of essential meaning and knowledge, language does not present a serious problem. Man's reasoning or conscious mind always attempts to articulate and so order its own reaction to experience. The process of generalization ultimately requires such mind to draw
an abstraction. On the other hand, Benjy Compson, Ike Snopes, and Jim Bond—the idiots, for example—are incapable of passing from the concrete object which they handle to generalizations, and consequently, they are bounded by the physical world in which they live. They are capable of working and of physical effort but have difficulty in finding word with which to express themselves. Byron Bunch is another whose mental activities are of a pre-conscious nature. He, however, represents the furthest possible development from that severely limited state which we find in Benjy. A mind that is complex and intuitive than that of Byron Bunch presents the conscious, rational mentality.

Women, children, and Negroes are not necessarily more limited in mental capacity than other people, but they are more interested, according to Faulkner, in practical affairs and in the non-verbal world of experience. In contrast to the intellectual sophistication and verbal sophistry of the man, they possess an intuitive knowledge of truth as it is manifested in the act. Thus Drussilla or Miss Jenny knows the plan of Bayard Sartoris as in The unvanquished because, as Faulkner comments that "they are wise, women are a touch, lips or fingers, and the knowledge, even clairvoyance, goes straight to the heart without bothering the laggard brain at all" (274). In the same way Miss Habersham instinctively understands what Chick fails to communicate to his uncle. Because they donot have to apply logical possibilities, women and children act quickly and decisively. In Intruder in the Dust, Chick Mallison says, "If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, dont waste yo time on the menfolks; get the womens and children to working at it" (71-72). And it is Nancy Mannigoe who makes the final distinction between rational and intuitive knowledge: "Jesus is a man too. He's got to be.
Manfolks listen to somebody because of what he says. Women don't. They don't care what he said. They listen because of what he is" (274).

Words and language constitute a particular kind of experience, namely, a linguistic experience. As such, it has in a sense of awareness and comprehensiveness embodied in a verbal medium. Isaac McCaslin's recapitulation of history, Gavin Stevens's analysis of the position of the Negro in the South, all are instances of a particular kind of truth.

Although Faulkner is aware of the inherent deceits in language, he does not suggest that truth can not exist in a verbal formulation. What he wants to emphasize is that it should not be taken as the only or the whole truth. In *As I Lay Dying* Addie Bundren observes, "the high dead words in time... lose even the significance of their dead sound" (167). Faulkner thinks that non-verbal experience should provide the ground or basis for truth, for truth consists of the inseparability of the word and the act. An excessive preoccupation with language tends to vitiate the capacity for action until, in Addie's words, "the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other" (165). Januarius Jones, Talliaferro and Anse Burden, for example, are so dominated by words that they are almost incapable of carrying through any vital action.

A few of Faulkner's characters such as Horace Benlow, Gavin Stevens, and C.V. Ratliff try to fuse the two modes (i.e. the word and action) in their own lives. But they experience difficulties in recognizing and clinging to truth which is not fixed although it is universally and eternally accessible. In one's actual physical experience truth can be known but not communicated adequately. In linguistic experience it can be shown to produce an immediate and intuitive conviction. In
Requiem for a Nun. Nancy Mannigoe offers to share, though she can not convey the truth which she herself has painfully grasped. It is Gavin Stevens who articulates and interprets the significance of Nancy's gesture, thus leading Temple to the point where she herself can comprehend and accept that truth.

It is difficult to express the comprehensive knowledge of truth with logic and words. Although a character can express for himself in his own idiom, his way involves groping for words; he struggles to fuse the word with the feeling and the act. It is in broken phrases that Lena Grove tries to tell Hightower why she is worried by Mrs. Hines's confusion of her child with Joe Christmas. Rosa Coldfield uses a valuable speech in the repetitive verbal circling around certain key points in her narrative. In each case this search for the word is rendered in both dramatic and stylistic terms. There is always a sense of feeling that language is not adequate enough to reveal the totality of truth. Addie Bundren, for example, finds that words obscure or even falsify the quality of experience. This problem of communication is intensified where there is an actual lack of vocabulary. Yet the inability to articulate does not mean limited experience or shallowness of feelings. Benjy Comson's wail may be just sound but his sorrow and a feeling of injustice are real and poignant.

Whenever the character is unaware of the problem of articulation or whenever he is incapable of expressing himself, the author's voice assumes control. In The Wild Palms, Faulkner clearly indicates his method. Repeatedly he comments, usually in parentheses, that this is what the convict would have said "if he had been able to phrase it, think it instead of merely knowing it" (266). Faulkner's most striking use of this technique is in As I Lay Dying where he gives a formal
lyrical representation of the unconscious minds and the subliminal selves of the inarticulate Bundrens without destroying the sense of their physical reality.

The authorial voice is heard when the communal consciousness or memory is to be articulated. The individual contributes to the mass consciousness, but when the character begins to talk, he tries to present his private world. So Faulkner finds it impossible to present the mass mind dramatically. Chick Mallison may describe the mob as it effects him, Gavin may explain its rationale, but it is Faulkner who conveys its essence through the play of rhetoric. Similarly, it is Faulkner's voice which expresses the thought, feeling, and impulses of Jefferson throughout *Light in August*. While all the characters are restricted by the dramatic context or confined to a single mode of expression, the author alone is not bound by a limited perspective.

Obviously Faulkner's technique demands wide range of style and vocabulary to effect factual description to lyrical revelation. Faulkner takes complete control over dialect and the nuances of common speech. The necessarily limited and repetitive vocabulary on such people as the Bundrens or the farmers clustered around Varner's store is enlivened by its absolute covertness and by the humorous turn of phrase. In *As I Lay Dying* the idiomatic language of the characters serves to relieve the genuine horror of the funeral journey, while in *The Hamlet* the mock-tragedy of Eula Varner's loss of chastity is heightened by her father's pithy comments.

To render abstract thought of his character Faulkner uses somewhat formal language; here his vocabulary is less concrete and individualized. There is a definite shift from the realistic and colloquial to the formal level of language which
expands the range of vocabulary thereby increasingly the flexibility of language
as an instrument of communication. On the other hand, all the vividness and
immediacy of dialect with its reliance on concrete nouns is lost. Furthermore,
language no longer expresses the individual personality but rather thought in
general. Faulkner deliberately resorts to this to adopt stylistic effect. Hence in
Absalom, Absalom!, it is almost impossible to tell when Quentin Compson stops
and his roommate Shreve begins. Similarly in Intruder in the Dust the speech of
Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallinson mixes up and it is difficult to say who is
speaking at what time.

Faulkner’s symbols are created out of his use of image which possesses
concreteness in the verbal universe. His images are suggestive rather than
definitive as is the characteristic of all symbols. His symbols provide an immediate
and incommunicable verbal and aesthetic experience in the same way that the
object or event provides an incommunicable non-verbal experience. A symbol
cannot be confined within any single system or formula of communication; it
provides a verbal stimulus to that totality of human responses to which we cannot
apply reason or logic. Its power to move human mind is illustrated by Hightower’s
reactions to Cynthie’s story of the Civil War. In effect, the symbol provides the
antidote as well as the antithesis to the habitual response and formula. And since
it does not depend on logic but on intuitive comprehension, the language of
symbols is the only one common to all men, to the lawyer and plantation owners
as well as to those whom Isaac McCaslin, in "The Bear", calls “the doomed and
lowly of the earth who have nothing else to read with but the heart” (260).
Faulkner's novels are filled with characters who are themselves unconscious creators of folk literature. The source of folk literature is man's capacity to use words imaginatively without conscious effort or deliberate technique. In the very process of using words, there is an element of unconscious fiction, if only because language is itself metaphoric. In addition, man's imagination and the desire for some recognizable pattern ultimately lead human mind from fact to fiction. We frequently use the tall story or the tales of heroes and war with a deliberate attempt to render the fabulous credible and it is uncritically accepted not that one totally believes them, but because he is stimulated by its evocative power. Gavin Stevens, for instance, finds no difficulty in continuously passing from the rational to the imaginative, from logical to aesthetic order. Fairchild telling his story of alligator-man, Will Falls and his legends of Sartoris, Cynthie and her stirring account of the Civil War, Ratliff with his casual anecdotes, all contribute to the growing body of folk-tales.

Faulkner knows the fact that literature preserves racial memory. The act or event becomes permanent in language and the physical deed and its repercussions gradually subside and become part of the lost past. Yet the reverberations of the act continue and become a part of the human consciousness; the act persists in the mental world whose co-ordinates are memory and imaginations. Language, when used creatively, is a pictorial presentation of the mental world. Thus, the three sections of The Sound and the Fury record Caddy Compson's reactions only as they exist in the mental world of her three brothers. Quentin and Shreve give verbal and aesthetic form not to the actual story of Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon but to the impact that the story has on them.
Since the deed persists only in memory, language constitutes the sole possible communal memory insofar as it denies the notions of uniqueness and privacy affirmed by the individual memory. For this reason, in *Absalom, Absalom!,* Judith Sutpen gives Bon's letter to Mrs. Compson in the hope that "at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark" (127). Similarly, emotion and thought acquire objective reality only after they have been stated. Jefferson forgives Mrs. Hightower because "no crime or transgressions had been actually named" (56-57). Conversely, Dewey Dell Bundren refuses to say that she is pregnant because, as Darl suggests "when you say it even to yourself, you will know it is true" (365). Mrs. Hines does not really know her past until she relates its story to Hightower, thereby simultaneously externalizing it and making it a part of the communal memory rather than of her own recollections. Language has made her memories public and therefore objectively real. Olga W. Vickery says:

The only way in which language can be private is through style which alone can render the individuality of the writer. In a sense, the author borrows his words from the communal language and make them his own through style. This, however, does not deprive them of the weight of communal memory and emotional associations that attach themselves to each word. The personal and the communal are thus fused into one aesthetic whole. (281)

Thus literature presents the reader with a language of memory. For this
reason literature has the power to catch the imagination of its readers. Author’s memory or imagination is only apart of the whole. Ultimately, it is through the word that man becomes aware of his knowledge; through language he projects his wisdom beyond his own mind. Faulkner has repeatedly tried to communicate this fact to the readers of his fictions.

William Faulkner makes as many demands on his readers as do our more difficult modern poets. His experiments—in perspective, in handling time, and in revealing character—make it extremely hard to tell what is happening in his stories. One also has difficulties in telling whether what seems to happen is a real event or merely the hallucination of one of the characters. Additional difficulties are created by Faulkner’s devices of withholding bits of information the reader needs to piece the stories together and of showing his characters in such a light that while their motives are perfectly clear to the other characters the reader is left completely in the dark. The majority of his characters seem driven by obscure obsessive neuroses and tortured by anxieties which the reader does not share and which lead to actions taking place outside the normal order of events and at abnormal speed. And at moments there is an absurd disproportion between the stature of the characters and the overwhelming horror of the things that happens to them.

The most important of Faulkner’s characteristics is his habit of seeing the action through the personality of one or several of the characters in the particular story, to whom another novelist would not entrust the point of view. Faulkner’s people are at once contemplated and contemplators—we see them through other characters and we see the other characters through them. Their presence is what
makes the great complexity of some of the novels. And it is also central to Faulkner's technique. For the characters who stand as Faulkner's agents essentially serve as vast recording machines of impression. Faulkner works through them very close to the physical level of consciousness. Sensations are reported with extreme immediacy. But sometimes we have to wait, through whole pages and chapters, to know their importance. Since the flow of sensations rarely decreases, there is seldom time for interpretation. There is a sense of speed and rushing movement.

It can be said that the style, and the unusual treatment of the point of view which the style permits, are originally related to the characteristic treatment of time which marks so much of Faulkner's writing. For in the following of impressions which comes to us through the mind of the character the ordinary distinction between past and present is frequently missing. The character lives in and focuses his attention on the present, but mixed in the surging sensations of his mind he reminiscences the past brought to the surface by the stimulus of present sensations, which impinge upon the present and become part of it. Conceiving time in such a way permits the existence of two planes of action—one present and dramatic, the other past and explicative but always influencing the present—which form the pattern of the Faulkner novels which are most original and most characteristically his. The present plane catches the action at the beginning of a crisis and follows through a catastrophe inevitable. The action of the present plane is likely to have the concentration and rapidity of good drama.

Faulkner's works were created by the hand of a poet. If we read Faulkner as though he were a tragic poet, many difficulties disappear. It becomes natural
now that he should withhold much that the reader wants immediately to know in order to prepare the recognition of the scene; that he should abandon the traditional time manipulation of the novel of one which turns the fullest, whitest light possible upon the moment of crisis; that characters should be driven to do things by forces which the reader understands only vaguely; that personal relations among the characters should be determined by their sense of the inevitability of the evil yet to come upon them; and that Faulkner’s effort should go into showing how the world looks to his characters rather than how it should look to us. “In this light”, says W.M. Frohock, “The novelist whom we honor as the finest writing in English today [1957] appears as a master of the ‘novel of destiny’” (155).

Works Cited


