CHAPTER FIVE

A FABLE AS AN ALLEGORICAL MODERNISATION AND DISTORTION

Reality doesn't exist. Time doesn't exist. Personality doesn't exist. God was an omniscient author, but he died. The sanction of a creator, there is no guarantee of the authenticity of the received version. Chance rules, and all reality is individual experience.

Ronald Sukenick

5.1.1. Having been born and brought up in the Southern religious culture of the "Bible Belt" (Wilson 21), William Faulkner shows a preoccupation with the Christ story in a number of his major works like The Sound and the Fury, Light in August and As I Lay Dying. In A Fable he reconstructs the Jesus story as such in an allegorical mode. This novel is considered as an allegory as it has a Christ figure with a separate name, Stefan. In the process of reconstructing the Jesus story, according to Irving Howe, Faulkner follows Nathaniel Hawthorne's "multiple-choice" technique (Howe 278-79) in which the reader is allowed to interpret events as either naturalistic or miraculous. This method gives him the impetus to interpret the Bible story in a naturalistic vein. Still there are some inconsistencies in the development of the story. John Bassett attributes this to the attitudinal changes that occurred in Faulkner during the long time span taken for its creation (Bassett 199). He has been working on A Fable\(^1\) from 1944 to 1953 (392).

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\(^1\) Faulkner, William. *A Fable*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1969. All further references to this will be by page numbers in parentheses.
5.1.2. Faulkner initiated the story in 1943, during the II World War, as a film script for Hollywood with the assistance of William Bacher and Henry Hathaway (Blotner 178). By the time he developed it into a novel and wrote the last chapters, the environment had changed; the war had been won, prosperity had returned, his own life had been settled somewhat and during the final years of composition he was even a famous and successful Nobel Prize winner, who quoted large portions of this novel in his public speeches.

5.1.3. Faulkner might have adopted this theme of mutiny from Humphrey Cobb's 1935 novel, *Paths of Glory*, which narrates the execution of several French soldiers for mutiny in the I world war (Basset 200), and he adapted it to fit the Jesus story by creating parallels to the prominent events of Jesus' life. The original event upon which the story is based occurred in the spring of Nineteen eighteen, when there was a large-scale mutiny, principally among the French. Faulkner has extended the passive revolt to virtually all troops on both sides, the Allied and the German which may stretch history a bit, but it is considered as an effective use of poetic license (North 12).

5.1.4. To teach the modern world the thesis that the common man has the power to control his world, Faulkner imagines that the passion of Christ is re-enacted by a French Corporal who tries to stop the First World War through a revolt. He, along with his twelve disciples, preaches the Gospel of peace among both the Allied troops and the Germans. The action takes place in France, a few months before the end of First World War.
a Monday, in May 1918, their regiment has been ordered to make an attack, which the general staff and the local commander know is doomed to failure. But the regiment revolts and refuses to move from the trenches. The entire regiment is arrested and hurried to the rear for punishment and the mutinous thirteen are put in a temporarily constructed prison. The novel unravels the attempts made by the military authorities to hide the common soldiers' capacity to stop the war. The corporal is executed as he refused to cooperate with them, and later his body is interned with pomp and glory in the 'Arc de Triomphe'.

5.1.5. Keeping this story of war as his framework, Faulkner superimposes the pattern of the Christ story upon it by creating parallel events. A summary of the parallels will substantiate this argument. The corporal is born like Jesus in a stable somewhere in the Middle East at Christmas 1885 (262). He is brought up by a virgin mother (ibid). He has a public ministry of three years, during which he has spread the Gospel of Mutiny among the soldiers of the Western Front (118). He acquires twelve disciples (Ibid). He performs feats paralleling Jesus' miracles through humanistic actions like helping a marriage feast, a blind girl and an old destitute (254-55). He becomes victorious in the temptation, in which he is offered power, the world, freedom and life (307-330). He celebrates a 'Last Supper' with his disciples (299-305). He is betrayed by one of his disciples and denied by another (305). He is arrested and crucified to death with two culprits, one on either side (344-45). Judas returns with his thirty pieces (384). A crown of thorns is placed around his head (346). Some women attend his burial (356). His tomb appears empty (359). The height of the
irony is reached when, by a tragi-comical deception the corporal’s body is made to be interned, with pomp and majesty, as the Unknown Soldier, reputedly a defender of Verdun in the Arc de Triomphe (361-379) and ultimately there is a union with the father (390) A Paul - like character spreads the corporal's message zealously among the English troops. Faulkner adopts the Gospel chronology too The story moves from Monday to Sunday And his hero is a thirty three year old corporal

5.1.6.1. This unusual fusion of religion and state in a Christ story ensures this novel a prominent space in any literary study related to Jesus Christ What sets this novel apart from all other fictional re-constructions of Jesus Christ is the way in which Faulkner depicts the appearance of Christ in the modern world through the secular story of the French corporal. But the Jesus figure created in the novel is quite different from the Gospel Jesus. An analysis based on the reader response/reception, re-accentuation and interpretation theories establish A Fable as the product of a series of intersecting forces: social, racial, cultural and momental forces- race, milieu and moment Heidegger’s frame work of the fore-structures: fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception is used as the tool for confronting these elements

5.1.6.2. An in-depth analysis of A Fable as an allegorical modernisation and distortion of the Jesus story, with special reference to Bakhtin’s theory of interpretation, leads to the study of the animating impulses and determining elements of the writer’s consciousness, culture and age, which shaped the typical reconstruction of Jesus Christ in A Fable. It establishes an inside view of the textual process of reconstruction.
5.2.1.1. “Allegory is a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the 'literal', or primary level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events” (Abrams 4) Bassett quotes Cleanth Brooks, "A Fable shifts between realism, allegory, and fable without clear signals to the reader of changing relationships between episodes and their thematic significance” (Bassett 195) As already stated, literally it is the story of a French corporal who has sacrificed his life to end the I World War and the Biblical parallels make it the story of Jesus Christ But, symbolically it is the story of human existence Granville Hicks considers this novel as the story of the qualities in man that ensure survival and victory in a world of suffering and persecution (376) As Orville Prescott states, “The general thesis of it is clear enough and familiar a bitter lament over the nature of human beings which would doom Christ or any Christ-like figure to be crucified again if He should return and a particularly bitter protest against war and military organization, military tradition and military might”(15)

5.2.1.2. Though superficially it is the story of the protest against war and military organisation, underneath it is the story of the antithetical forces that exist in every man. The novel presents the picture of man at war with himself. It exposes the conflict between flesh and spirit, the practical and the ideal (Volpe 282). It focuses on the effect of the dualism in human nature upon the life and values of men. The supreme general admits this dialecticism: “I champion of this mundane earth... you champion of an esoteric realm of man’s baseless hopes...” (312). The corporal is depicted as
the living proof of man's unique worth. He is the emblem of Faulkner's faith in man's capacity to believe in hope. The corporal's belief in mankind is firm and strong; not at all relative. It can neither be helped nor hindered by chivalry or cowardice, betrayal or loyalty. This belief proposes that hope is necessary and fear is foolish. What "Faulkner means by believing in hope is clarified in *A Fable*. So long as there is belief in the hope of salvation, the lamb in man contends with the wolf. The novel, in effect, argues that man holds his salvation within his own being, but it also shows why man has failed and continues to fail of its achievement: the wolf remains ascendant over the lamb, the mundane over the humane" (Volpe 288). The corporal and the common soldiers, who support him, try to establish peace by bringing out an armistice through their revolt. "but symbolically, it is peace on earth, good will toward men that Jesus preached - a union of man with man in a universal brotherhood of the heart, which is to be achieved by a dissolution of selfish interests on all levels, from the aggrandisement of nations to the selfishness of individuals" (Volpe 285).

5.2.2. With an intention to produce ironic effect Faulkner planned the novel thematically in such a way that the Gospel imagery is silhouetted against the corporal's story. The First World War Europe is superimposed upon the Judaeo-Christian world of the Gospel story and a French corporal and his squad are given the role of Jesus Christ and His disciples. Just like Jesus Christ who had died to redeem the world from sin, the corporal is determined to redeem the world from war, which is evil. While Jesus Christ's mission was to establish peace on earth through the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the corporal tries to establish peace by stopping the
war (Stewart 8) Peace in the Gospel sense is Shalom$^2$ that implies the fullness of God's gifts. Wishing Shalom to people implies the hope that they will live in peace not only among themselves, but also with God. In *A Fable* Faulkner uses the word to refer to the absence of war.

5.2.3. The Christian parallels have equal place with the corporal's story in the process of understanding the novel. The negligence of either will destroy the effect of the novel totally. Both have an integral role to play in revealing the aim and objectives of the novelist. In the words of Bassett, "The Christ story offers a cultural shorthand that encourages the reader to globalise the act of rebellion at the centre of the text. and to Faulkner it is a means to universalise a series of thematic statements about man and men, grief and endurance, idealism and rapacity, war and peace" (199).

5.2.4.1. Faulkner consciously uses the Gospel allegory as a means of characterisation. To portray the elevation of human potential to its zenith, Faulkner elevates characters into archetypes by allusions to Biblical characters. Most of the major characters in *A Fable* are symbols: the supreme general is 'Man Conquering' or 'Man Ruling', the quartermaster general is 'Man Hoping', the English runner is 'Man Seeking Faith', Tobe Sutterfield, the Negro minister is 'Man Believing and Hoping' (Volpe 288). And a similar approach will enable the reader to view the English groom as the 'Man dedicated' and the corporal as 'Man Sacrificing'. The schematic parallels with Jesus are used as the primary means to place the corporal on a separate plane from the other characters who are depicted with 'concrete

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$^2$It is the Hebrew word for peace
recognisable pasts and even motivations. Another technique adopted to create this special plane is the suggestion of a tendency in other characters to connect the corporal to divine power. Captain Middleton confuses him with Brzewski, the Pennsylvania coal miner who died at sea of the flu, and Colonel Beale confuses him with Boggan, the Briton who died at Mons in 1914 (250-51).

5.2.4.2. The technique of ‘absence’ also is used for the purpose of drawing a halo around the corporal. “Faulkner seems to feel that the best way to suggest an attitude of reverence toward him is to have him be silent and suffer rather than act” (Beck 4) The corporal is never on stage during the action, except as an undifferentiated member of the gang of thirteen. He is present only in dialogues with the general and the priest. Little is given about his background. Although Marthe and Mary narrate the circumstances of his birth, they contribute nothing to his consciousness or personality. His educational qualifications, values, personal relationships—none of these are clarified as they are for the Runner or Gragnon or Levine. The corporal’s picture is conveyed to the reader mainly through the Jesus parallels.

5.2.4.3. Jessie Coffee states that the characteristics needed in the corporal to become a real Christ figure are divided among three types of characters. First there are the “high” characters, that is, those who present an ironic contrast to the corporal because they are above him in status but less heroic than he is. The old general, who is the father of the corporal, and the priest, who urges the young man to abandon his mutiny, are in this
class. Second there are the men who are lower in the social scale than the corporal. The grooms, and a Negro minister named Iobe Sutterfield, who abducted a crippled racehorse and an army sentry, are the "low" characters. And between the two classes is the message runner, who got himself demoted from the rank of officer so that he could share the deprivations of the enlisted men. The high characters, the low characters, and the message runner have characteristics which should have been embodied in the corporal in order for him to be a man who resembles Christ rather than a 'pseudo-Christ' who is incarnated in a man (48). Finally in the scene with the priest who kills himself with a bayonet wound in the side in an attempt to imitate the death of Christ, an iconoclastic description of the pattern of Crucifixion is produced "It was a spear... the left side" (John 19:34) "Like the Runner, the priest thinks that mimetic action, iconic repetition of the model, fulfils meaning"(Bassett 1989, 207)

5.2.5. Irving Howe considers the effect of the embedding of the Biblical allegory in the realistic text as negative.

Reading the book, readers have to constantly readjust their understanding as passages of vivid, but not meaningful, realism give way to Biblical echoes. A character is about to come alive, is almost created, but suddenly the reader is reminded that he is Peter or Judas or the devil tempting Christ, and the likeness fades, the allegory seems questionable, the reader finds himself objecting that Peter or whoever was almost certainly not like this (275).
5.2.6. Emphasising the fact that Faulkner himself regarded this novel, which is a profound story of man’s capacity for love, duty, suffering, honour, compassion, sacrifice and faith, as his major work. Dayton Kohler rates it as “The most unusual novel out of World War I. It may be the great novel of that war as well, a work of enduring power because Faulkner’s vision of the age and man’s predicament joins the twentieth century conditions of crisis to the Christian tradition of the living past” (378-79). Through this portrayal of war Faulkner intends to convey the general message that “Christ through the centuries has been made the symbol of fratricidal war” (Stewart 380). The scenes of the generals at Chaulnesmont, the murder of Grignon, the conversations between the Old General and both the corporal and the Quartermaster General, all these reinforce Faulkner’s main objective in adopting the war as the theme of this novel, which is to uncover the picture of a ‘self-interested extra-national military controlling and manipulating warfare with utter disregard for persons’ (Bassett 1989, 201-2) As Kohler states, “War, as Faulkner views it, helps to define the issues of a deeper conflict between those who collaborate with history, which is here the image of evil, and those who fight against it. .. in war, all men are crucified” (12)

5.2.7. A Fable can also be read as a fantasy in quest of some optimistic statement on our present predicament Faulkner says: “I am tired and bored and bewildered by the way you go about things: I am sick of your conferences and your bickerings. They don’t matter. They are little childish games. What matters is Love and Faith and Hope” (Podhoretz 249). To be sure, in A Fable Faulkner creates an allegorical representation of human
nature within the framework of the World War and the Christ story. Kohler comments upon Faulkner's use of allegory in *A Fable*, it is "an example of the totally planned novel in which events and characters take on an added stature because we see them in relation to some familiar story born out of the collective human consciousness and true to the fundamental problems of the troubled human condition" (quoted in 41). Faulkner's focus is not on the Christ myth as such but in the archetypal pattern of opposition to evil, which provides hope to the suffering humanity.

5.3.1. Abrams states the following specific features of modernism: It "involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general" (Abrams 119). It questions traditional modes of social organisation, religion and morality. In literature it inspires experiments with new forms and styles. Mythologization in theme and the subversion of the basic conventions in style are the specific characteristics of this approach. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is considered as the monumental example of modernism (ibid) Faulkner adopts the same approach in *A Fable*. Bassett states, "Joyce had had a great impact on Faulkner in the 1920's (Bassett 199). The comparison of this novel with *Ulysses* by Joyce is sufficient to substantiate *A Fable* as a modern fiction. "Both books are modern fables, moral by intent, ironic by execution. Where Joyce used a Homeric mythus. Faulkner's ground pattern is the most celebrated story in the Christian tradition. Both novels are over-long, too heavily populated with rather shadowy minor figures" (Baker 116). 

5.3.2.1. In *A Fable*, Faulkner handles the Jesus story as a myth. In the words of Howe, he succumbs to the fault one finds in so much recent writing which tries to lean on Christian symbolism that of regarding religion not as an absolute view of the universe, but as a "usable myth" to be appropriated in convenient portions for literary purposes (Howe 278). This mythologization itself makes it a modernised version of the traditional Jesus story. In fictionalising universal human characteristics, Faulkner utilises the universally recognised characters of the Bible to reinforce those he is creating. Relying on the fact that the Christ-myth, like all myths, prefigures certain universal qualities in a person, Faulkner reconstructs Jesus as the mythic figure or culture hero whose life consisted of a series of traditionally associated motifs: baptism, temptation, gathering of disciples, performing miracles, proclaiming a new way of life, a last supper, lonely agony, betrayal, trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

5.3.2.2. The sub-plot, the horse-groom story strengthens Faulkner's use of the New Testament story as a myth. "Both reveal man's "passion for unfact." His response to a personification of his own potential for love and sacrifice. Just as the corporal, on one level, unites the soldiers in a brotherhood opposed to the military hierarchy, the horse and groom, on another level, produce a similar unity among the country people against the pursuing authorities" (Volpe 288-89).

5.3.2.3. By interlocking these two appallingly contrasting stories, one high, noble and elegant, the other low, absurd and mundane, Faulkner shocks the expectations of a conventional reader. This method of binding
completely extraneous pieces of narratives together in the same novel can be seen as a significant result of his modernistic tendency to experiment with literary form of the novel. Similarly the symbolism adopted in *A Fable* is complex multilayered one and the narrative pattern is intricate.

**5.3.2.4.** Faulkner’s primary intention in doing this is to establish man as worthy of devotion, belief, and love, whatever his misdeeds and failings and whether or not he is God’s creature. Faulkner seeks to show that man is capable of goodness purely because he is human. Faulkner writes from a point of view that is radically modern precisely because it seeks to avoid the question of God’s existence so that a vision of humanity can be grasped which will be valid to readers of any and every shade of religious belief and disbelief. His attempt, it must be said again, depends only on the corporal’s reality as a human being, and then it is possible for all human beings to be noble (Schwartz 126-36).

**5.3.2.5.** Faulkner might have expressed this outlook of the Christ story as a myth due to the influence of modern philosophy. At the beginning of the twentieth century there arose the theory of the ‘Christ myth’, “with the suggestion that there had never been a real Jesus of Nazareth and that the basis of the Christ of the New Testament was a mythical, supra-historical figure to whom Christians had subsequently given a time and place, thus artificially historicizing him” (Anderson 15-16). But the New Testament scholars like Bousset, Jülicher, and Klostermann exposed the theory of Christ myth as a phantom (Anderson 16). James Frazer in his trend-making work, *The Golden Bough*, authoritatively broke
the argument regarding mythologization with the statement that "The doubts which have been cast on the historical reality of Jesus are, in my judgement, unworthy of serious attention" (412). Christian theologians considered mythos as antithetical to logos in that the former was equated to fictitious story or fabula and the latter to factual truth (1 Tim 1.4, II Tim 4.4, Tit 1.14, II Pet 1.16)

5.3.2.6.1. Hans Frei makes a discussion of different types of myths and shows how the Gospel story of Jesus is a demythologization of the Saviour myth. At the time of Jesus there were two kinds of myths pertaining to the dying and rising Saviour God: myth of 'mystery religion' and that of Gnosticism. The first was an orgiastic kind of religion in which secret rites provided a sense of "participation in the constantly reiterated rhythm of death and birth, a cycle that binds man and all organic nature together". The ritual killing of an innocent animal victim and being sprinkled with its blood established the story of the dying and rising saviour God. Gnosticism advocated a much more individualistic and sophisticated form of the dying and rising saviour myth. The mythical accounts were precise, detailed and allegorical involving the personification of abstract entities like "truth", "depth", and "creator". Though these two approaches show significant parallels to the Christ story, Frei points out some clearly discernible differences. "One is that the New Testament story deals simply and exclusively with the story of Jesus of Nazareth, whether it is fictional or real, and not with anybody else or with every man under the cover of Jesus' name. Another is the manner of the saviour's activity" (Frei 56).
5.3.2.6.2. Concerning the saviour’s activity, Frei states four interrelated distinctions between the Christian and other saviour stories. In the first place, the redeemer in the Christian story is a sinless one who undertakes vicarious suffering to redeem a sinful world and an alienated humanity, while the saviours of other myths are shown as an archetypal man, standing for all mankind who have to redeem himself and the others. Secondly, Christ’s powerlessness and helplessness appears far more drastic and complete than in the case of other redeemers. Thirdly, Christ’s death in the New Testament is a unique event having its own integrity which the organically linked dying-rising pattern of the other stories don’t have. Finally, Jesus redeems others through His perfect obedience while other redeemed-redeemers act individually.

5.3.3.1. The war theme of *A Fable* is overshadowed by the story of the Gospels, complete with a Messiah, twelve disciples, Mary, Martha, Magdalene, Paul, Judas Pilate, Satan and all other essential characters. It recreates all the mythical scenes related to Jesus, like His birth in a stable, His public life after thirty, His entourage with twelve disciples, the temptation, betrayal and denial by His own disciples, crucifixion along with the two thieves, resurrection and the union with the Father.

5.3.3.2. With the presence of all these Biblical elements and the chronological follow up of the Passion Week, the Gospel story of Jesus Christ in *A Fable* is only a modernised transference of the Gospel story Carlos Baker calls *A Fable* as “a modern ironic version of the ministry, the betrayal, the passion, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (115).
The virgin birth of the Gospel is depicted as an illegitimate birth. The Virgin Mother is transposed with the nine-year-old sister of the corporal. Jesus' public ministry in power and might from the Holy Spirit among the common people of Palestine is transformed to the corporal’s military life among the common soldiers of the French front in the 1 World War Jesus’ Good News of the Kingdom of God is reversed as the propaganda of revolt. Jesus' miracles are given a naturalistic twist. The tempter, Pilate and the Father converge in the same person, the supreme general. The ritual last supper is turned into a grotesque scene of obscene talk in which the disciples consider the fate of their excrement instead of their immortal soul. The leader of the Apostles, Peter is pictured as a mere stranger. Jesus the light of the world is substituted by the corporal who keeps a cigarette lighter even while preparing for execution. The hanging of Judas is represented by a feather on his hat. The women followers of Jesus are compressed into the corporal’s two sisters and his wife.

5.3.4.1. In characterisation too Faulkner introduces modernisation techniques. Most of the characters are lifeless and nameless without individuality. They are mere symbols. Critics do not consider his major characters as normal “breathing human beings. As mythical characters, they are supreme expressions of particular aspects of the human personality” (Volpe 287).

5.3.4.2.1. The Jesus figure in the novel, the corporal, too is a modern version of the Biblical Jesus. He neither knows ‘the Grace’ before meals nor ‘the Office’ of the last rites. In the words of Coffee, “The most
noticeable weakness of the book is that the main character, the corporal, is not convincing” (Coffee 47). She quotes Rice to clarify this statement: The Messiah-corporal “is scarcely better individualised than the beam of white light by which Christ is presented on stage and screen” (Ibid). In attempting to create a character consistent with the divinity of Christ, Faulkner failed to draw a character that would show His humanity. In the Gospel According to Matthew, on which Faulkner bases his Jesus story, Jesus is depicted with both divine and human qualities. He is pictured with all the common human reactions and responses like arrogance (11:15), impatience (8:11), playfulness (9.36) and the capacity to suffer (14:65). He is real and alive as a human being. His Godliness is not conveyed through distance or difference from flesh and blood human beings. In Coffee’s view, “the corporal is too perfect to be human. He is a static character, unrealised imaginatively, and cannot sustain the heroic role assigned to him” (48)

5.3.4.2.2. Similarly, Podhoretz argues “As for Faulkner’s corporal, the trouble with him is not just that he is monolithic, he simply does not exist” (Podhoretz 248). In the modern world of hero worship and super-humanisation, an author can not place a hero in the same plane with the common man. So Faulkner keeps his Jesus figure on a higher pedestal through the method of absence.

5.3.4.2.3. As Howe says “A Fable rouses, but does not satisfy, a desire for some detailed evidence that the corporal possesses at least some of the ethical power and charisma which all of Faulkner’s analogical
buttressing leads us to expect; that in some modest degree he shares the intellectual resources and emotional depths of the Jesus we know from the Bible" (Howe 274). In the words of Jessie Coffee, "...the young man is a pallid, negative Christ. We look for him to initiate some action; he has incited his mutiny before the book begins. We look in vain for some human reaction to the execution, even Christ had a Gethsemane. We look for some explanation that the corporal is like Christ in sacrificing himself for love of humanity" (52).

5.3.4.3.1. But the reader is disappointed. The corporal does not show any sign of the compassion of the Gospel Jesus. He is described as Looking down at the fleeing sea of eyes and gaped mouths and fists with the same watchfulness as the other twelve, but with neither the bafflement nor the concern - a face merely interested, attentive, and calm, with something else in it which none of the others had: a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of compassion, as if he had already anticipated without censure or pity the uproar which rose and paced and followed the lorry as it sped on (17).

5.3.4.3.2 In the execution scene, the corporal’s insensitivity contrasts with Christ’s compassion at his crucifixion. The young man is tied to a post between a thief, Lapin, and an idiot whom Lapin calls "Horse." Horse has only one desire, to see Paris. On their way to Paris, Horse accidentally kills an old woman, during a robbery. After arrest they are executed with the corporal. During the crucifixion Faulkner narrates the following scene:

Lapin was now straining outward against his cord, trying to see past the corporal to the third man [Horse].
"Look," Lapin said anxiously to the corporal
Load!
"Paris," the third man said, hoarse and wet and urgent.
"Say something to him," Lapin said. "Quick."
Aim!
"Paris," the third man said again
"It's all right," the corporal said. "We are going to wait. We wont go without you" (385).

In this reconstruction of the life-consoling words from the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"; the corporal shows no sign of compassion. Through this portrayal, Faulkner argues that behind every human experience there is a pattern of causation - events of childhood, the pressure of environment, the cruelty of people or the laws of society. So what is needed is not compassion but understanding.

5.3.5. In his depiction of the modern world in *A Fable*, Faulkner exercises the modernist critical attitude towards the socio-cultural situation in which one lives. This novel has some scenes of bitterest satire against stiff-necked and literal-minded righteousness, both in the military and in the Church. Scenes like general Gragnon’s execution, the attack against the German plane with blank shells, the Allied leaders’ secret meeting with the German general and the distraction of the British and German common soldiers’ union of peace, ridicule the military. Though Faulkner has lived in a section of the country where nineteenth-century pieties are more alive than they are in other regions of the United States, according to Rice.
His Christianity is not of the conventional sort ... nor is it an orthodox one, though it has much in common with certain types of neo-orthodox and existential theology. Neither can it bulwark the Church visible, which Faulkner with some allowance and exceptions assigns to the ranks of Caesarism and Rapacity. Faulkner’s is most likely a humanistic - or more accurately, a non-supernaturalistic rendering of the Christian symbolism, and it offers no theodicy and no otherworldly beatitude (Quoted in Schendler 41)

He exerts bitter satire on self-assured piousness in the Church. The prison chaplain’s role as the tempter, his kneeling before the corporal, and his suicide question church morality. The priest says that the conversion of the world to Christianity was accomplished by “pagan and bloody Rome which did it with His martyrdom” (326)

5.3.6. As stated in the introductory chapter, modernisation and distortion may result from the suppression of any of the three: the difference between the ‘represented world in the text’ and the ‘creating world of the reader’, the complex play of voices or the otherness of other cultures and worldviews. A Fable has all these three suppressions in it. Faulkner has substituted the first century AD Palestine with twentieth century France and the Judaeo-Christian culture with modern American culture. The author’s single voice that ‘man will prevail’ dominates the novel in the place of the polyphony in the Gospels.

5.4.1. Any attempt to lift a book of the Bible out of the historical context of its author’s intention and culture would naturally
lead to the distortion of the Biblical data in the light of uncritically accepted assumptions of the contemporary worldview. The result is an impoverished if not false image of Christ (Kereszty XV). In this novel Faulkner takes the Gospel narration of Jesus’ Life, Ministry, Death, and Resurrection out of its context and sticks it to the modern context. Still a superficial reading of *A Fable* may fail to notice the distortion that takes place in the Jesus story due to Faulkner’s reconstruction process. Schwartz speaks about the possibility of two kinds of misunderstanding in interpreting *A Fable*:

The reader who is a devout Christian may misinterpret the novel as a hideous parody, pacifist and sacrilegious in intention. The reader without religious belief may mistake the book for a religious affirmation, so powerfully does the Gospel pattern assert itself, and with so much of a magical radiance, that one overlooks, at first, the numerous points at which the Gospel pattern is ignored, avoided, contradicted, or modified (127)

5.4.2.1. In his re-working of the Christ myth, Faulkner consciously or unconsciously distorts the Biblical Jesus story. Primarily the distortion occurs in the theological dimension. So it may be hidden from the lay reader. In the Gospels Jesus is equally God and man. The Gospel Jesus is the incarnation of God (Matt. 16.16) and He is pictured as being focused on doing the will of God (John 4.34; 6.38). Christian theology proclaims the same: "...Faulkner distorts three crucial tenets of Christian theology: first, that Jesus was not a very good man but God incarnate. Secondly His death cannot be explained as an example of self sacrifice but only as God's unique remedy for human sin and thirdly that He resurrected on the third
day" (Anderson 17-18). The Church establishes a three layered theology that propagates the theory that Jesus is the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity through a hypostatic union. At the next level it states Jesus as having special gifts and sinlessness. At the third level it establishes that Jesus effected salvation by offering atonement for the sins of mankind.

5.4.2.2.1. But, in A Fable, there is no space for God. Due to the influence of modern nihilistic attitude, Faulkner interacts with the Jesus story with the 'fore-structured understanding' of a modern American which could not accept anything supernatural. Hence Faulkner adopts a theological stand in which there is no God and no after life. As he cancels God and other supernatural elements from his Jesus story, it produces a 'speculative' interpretation that is subjective and personal. The fictional world in the novel is a total negation of the Christian God-centred world of the Gospels. Leslie A. Fiedler Calls the Fable-Christ as “the most negative of all literary Christs. . his [Faulkner’s] religion survives without God.”(19). The supreme general says to the corporal. “You will be God ..” In Christian theology Adam and Eve, the first human beings sinned due to their desire to become like God (Gen 3.5) Christ redeemed the world by negating His Godhood (Phil 2 6-7). In all his books Faulkner speaks of the duty of the artist as to remind the world of the tremendous shape of our godhead and of our capacity for honour and courage and compassion and pity and sacrifice Faulkner places human hope and faith upon the individual human being. It is equal to the negation of God in Christian theology.
5.4.2.2.2. The Gospel proclaims obedience to God as the core of Jesus' kenosis and incarnation:

...who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8).

But in *A Fable* Faulkner shifts the place of obedience to God to the dedication to the fraternity. During the temptation, admitting the futility of his sacrifice the corporal says to his father repeatedly, "There are still ten" (311-316). So there is no Gethsemane in this novel. Since the corporal is self willed to die in the process of establishing peace, there is no possibility of conflict in his conscience regarding 'To be or not to be', which symbolises the greatest gift given to human beings, the free will or freedom of choice. The "thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42) of Gethsemane is changed into 'my will be done'. In Protestant scholastic theology Jesus' active obedience ends with the 'thy will be done' at Gethsemane and thereafter He passes on to a stage of passive obedience. His active obedience is in fulfilling the law and his passive obedience is in undergoing the sacrifice imposed on Him by God the Father (Frei 71). But in *A Fable*, there is no obedience at all. The corporal willed his own sacrifice himself. While the initiative in the Gospel story is in the hands of the Father, in *A Fable*, it is in the hands of the son.

5.4.2.3. In Christian theology Crucifixion becomes meaningful because of its redemptive significance. As St. Paul says,
For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1Cor 15.3-5).

In *A Fable*, the crucifixion itself is narrated as a mock event. The corporal’s death hasn’t effected any type of redemption other than the temporary armistice for one week. By describing the revival of war after the execution of the corporal, Faulkner confirms the meaninglessness of the corporal’s action. Even the disciples disappeared without any further action. Even if the corporal’s motive is taken as love, this is an obvious distortion of the original, because love is not the life-governing motive of the Biblical Jesus. His love is a function of His mission, but His mission is to enact the salvation of men in obedience to God. The very idea of a re-enactment of the Passion is considered by Howe as something desperate.

To conceive of a Second coming which is essentially a repetition of the original agony, to see the Christ figure again scorned by the crowds, again betrayed and deserted by his followers, again crushed by the state; and most terrible of all, to conceive of a Christ who knows he is doomed, who offers neither hope nor a belief in the idea of hope - all this, if not heresy or even blasphemy, implies a vision of despair that completely undercuts the assumptions of both our liberal culture and of Christianity itself. For Faulkner, Christ now seems to signify the Crucifixion without the Redemption; or perhaps it is that the Crucifixion has become a Redemption (279-81).
5.4.2.4 The foundation of Christian life is the belief in the person of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of the one and only God. But in this novel the runner says, “May be what I need is to have to meet somebody. To believe. Not in anything: just to believe”(184). There may or may not be a God, and he may or may not have actually given His Son to save the world, it does not matter to Faulkner. The myth is humanised removing its divine sense. Thus the foundation of the Gospel story itself is distorted by Faulkner in *A Fable*.

5.4.3. Actually, Faulkner is using the passion in a secularised form to present his own humanistic religion. So he negates everything that is divine and supernatural. The good thief’s spiritual desire for Paradise is changed to the earthly desire for Paris. The resurrection episode is pictured as the blowing up of the corporal’s grave by missiles. The ascent of Jesus into Heaven is reminded through the description of the placing of the dead general’s coffin in the Arch where the corporal was interned six years earlier Podhoretz comments, “Though Faulkner is a very religious writer, his work surely constitutes a paean to Man, not to God”(396). To be Sutterfield, the Negro minister, states that he bears witness to man not to God (163). In his Nobel Prize address, Faulkner quotes from *A Fable*: I don’t fear man. I do better. I respect and admire him And pride: I am ten times prouder of that immortality which he does possess than ever he of that heavenly one of his delusion Because man and his folly will endure. They will do more. They will prevail.”(318). Faulkner considers heavenly immortality, then, as a “delusion”. And he believes that man’s true immortality lies in his glorious career on earth. That is why the corporal
ignores the question asked by the old general regarding the immortality of the soul (314-15).

5.4.4.1. Faulkner rejects any supernatural elements from the miracles and makes them naturalistic in such a grotesque manner that critics equate them with some descriptions of D H. Lawrence in *The Man Who Died* which distorts the Jesus story to the point of blasphemy (Podhoretz 396). According to Van Der Loos, the scientifically educated modern human beings are unaccustomed and uncomfortable with miracles (3). He speaks about four ways of interpreting the miracles: first, the unbeliever approaches miracles from an aesthetic point of view and relegates miracles to the realm of fantasy. This standpoint is expressed in the following statement by him. "The Bible is based on miracles, and science does not recognise miracles, it therefore rejects .the miraculous birth of Jesus and Jesus' miracles. and accepts them at most as mythological fancies." The phenomenologist naturally studies miracles as phenomena and tries to reach an 'objective' elucidation of the phenomenon by searching for the resemblances between the stories of miracles and analysing them. This approach fails as the human mind reacts to material under examination quite differently from the instruments of a laboratory. The third interpretation is based on a philosophical insight into the Divine Being. This approach leads either to the rejection or to a rationalistically oriented explanation of the miracles. These radical approaches led to the rejection of the age-old dogma of the Church. The standards of this rational empiricism transformed the whole pattern of the culture of the time. This resulted in a focus-shift from the other world to this earth with its glorious reality and
surprising possibilities. The new sense of freedom originated from this attitude filled the spirit of Europe with revolutionary ideas, which denied God, miracles, and even the existence of Jesus. Modest thinkers explained the miracles of Jesus as natural events (Loos 9-15)

5.4.4.2. Due to the influence of these modern approaches to miracle as a phenomenon, in A Fable, the miracles of the Gospel are given a naturalised, materialistic and humanistic interpretation. The wedding at Cana where Jesus transforms water into wine (John 2. 1-10) is recreated as a sympathetic human action of the corporal. Out of sympathy for an American soldier who lacked financial support to celebrate his marriage to an orphan girl, the corporal enters the American soldiers' camp and inspires a group, who were playing a game of crap, to celebrate the marriage by buying up all the wine in the town (253). While Jesus gave sight to blind people the corporal collected money from the soldiers and helped a girl going blind to go to Paris to be treated by a surgeon there (253). He also helped a man, made destitute by war, to be reunited with his relatives (253). The way in which Faulkner uses these materials - transforming them from the imperious claims of religion into the loose affirmations of a stoical humanism appears to be exceedingly "literary".

5.4.4.3. The fourth approach is that of faith, where an individual understands and interprets the miracles purely out of faith. As Loos states, "Whoever believes that the God of Israel sent in His Son Jesus Christ the Lord and Saviour of the world will, on the grounds of this belief and profession, understand and interpret the miracles of the New Testament in a
certain way. It is the 'credo' which theologically speaking, gives the concept of miracle its final form and content" (Loos 34).

5.4.5.1. Faulkner fails in replicating the humanity of Jesus too. Instead of the non-resistant, gentle and meek lamb dragged to the slaughterhouse, the corporal is pictured as the leader of a mutiny. The corporal is a modern man of action who inspires a whole regiment to revolt. He believes in united action and revolutionary move. He is portrayed as a superman without any divine power. Even though Faulkner's corporal works no miracles and makes no claims of divinity, he achieves what Jesus achieved and expresses what Jesus expressed by personifying the potential inherent in all men. The corporal is an alien, and among his twelve disciples there are some that do not even speak French. The corporal does not, however, need to preach to the soldiers. His mere presence, even among the German soldiers is sufficient to bring to the surface their common desire for peace and unity (Volpe 286). Because the corporal personifies the repressed generosity and good will of the men, he can silently interrupt a group of gambling soldiers, take their money and give it to a young couple who must marry and inspire them to organise a wedding feast by buying up all the wine in town. The corporal is only a symbol used by Faulkner for the fictional incarnation of his faith in man's capacity to endure.

5.4.5.2. The corporal is "constituted as a man without any dogma or theology or even visible religion" (Howe 274). He is a man in revolt. He is just the symbol of the ethical possibility inherent in human beings, that is the freedom of choice or the capacity to will. *A Fable* is just one more proof
that an artist must either accept the religious view of the universe as a literal truth or leave its myth alone. Faulkner’s use of the Gospel story is quite unlike the prevailing mythical techniques of modern literature because it has only one purpose and meaning, the representation of supreme nobility, instead of the manifold meanings of contrast, simultaneity, analogy, and the like, which other modern authors seek through mythical reference. Faulkner’s sole purpose is to unite the theme of modern war with the theme of the appearance of Christ in the modern world (Schwartz 126-36).

5.4.6. This discussion proves that *A Fable* is just another example of handling a religious theme merely as a myth by a creative writer. While the Gospel depicts the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a God given divine vehicle for human salvation and redemption, the martyrdom of the corporal in *A Fable* aims solely at earthly peace. Ignoring the individuality of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour and God-man who lived and died as Jesus of Nazareth at a specific time and space, Faulkner establishes in this novel the thesis that “since God became man and man became God in Jesus Christ for a brief moment it is possible for man to become God again” (Inge 392) This is a serious violation of the Christian dogma that Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour through whom all can be saved (Eph 1.21-23). The saving individual and the saving pattern of this story are different from the Gospel story. The corporal is an individual different from the Gospel Jesus, and in the saving pattern of the Gospel, obedience is substituted by will power.
5.5.1. *A Fable* is an example of an entirely new manner of handling the Gospel story. An analysis based on the reader response/reception, reaccentuation and interpretation theory places *A Fable* as the product of a series of intersecting, social, racial/cultural and momental forces. The following part strives to locate these diverse forces and elements, which influenced Faulkner in reconstituting Jesus in this unique manner.

5.5.2. Faulkner's failure to present a character true to the Gospel Jesus was mainly due to his subject matter. As one critic said, "The life of Christ is not under any circumstances a subject for fiction: not at all because it would be irreverent, but because within the limits of literature it would be impossible" (Coffee 52). It is evident that the author's creative imagination was stifled by his attempt to write a book that would adequately portray the 'Son of God'. As William Van O'Connor states "Faulkner is a great writer, possibly the finest American novelist, but an essential simplicity of mind is a part of his genius ..When he undertakes subjects of a certain magnitude and order, as he did with *Pylon* and *A Fable*, he flounders badly" (O'Connor 38-39). Faulkner was more effective as a literary artist when he attempted to portray people, "the human heart in conflict with itself, with its fellows, or with its environment" (Coffee 52). with the accompaniment of Christian symbolism.

5.5.3.1. Another cause for the modernisation-distortion effect in *A Fable* is Faulkner's consciousness of the difference between the Judaeo-Christian context in which the Gospel had originally taken shape and the twentieth century conditions in which he has interpreted it. The Jews were
an introvert community with their specific God Yahwe and his commandments. They were uncompromisingly monotheistic. The worship of the Lord was centralised in Jerusalem. They were strict in religious discipline and rituals. They kept their own specific language, the Hebrew, and separate customs. They were a chosen people awaiting the birth of an already prophesied Messiah. There were recurrent conflicts between Jewish theocracy and foreign secular powers. At the time of Jesus the Jews and their oppressors, the Romans were at loggerheads (Krejqi 53-65). The first Christians lived in a world in which Simon Magus, Apollonius of Tyna, Alexander of Abonouteichos and similar miracle workers were revealing their powers (Loos 6).

5.5.3.2.1. The modern Euro-American culture of the South in which Faulkner read the Jesus story and reconstructed it has an entirely different theology, philosophy, worldview and values. Faulkner's generation which grew up between 1890-1920 experienced the agony of being on the defeated side, as the Southern states of the confederation was defeated by the Northerners in the civil war. In the 1930s the depression was added to its woe and led them to shout: “We are creatures not of God but of history, prisoners of history as surely as in the light of theology we are prisoners of sin” (Kazin 9). This outlook led Faulkner to establish the view that human beings are ‘pulled round and round by forces’ that he calls “Opponent” the “Player” (Kazin 12-13). This view of God as the opponent explains his reason for converging God the Father and Satan in the same person of the supreme general in *A Fable*. 
5.5.3.2.2. Though the dominant religions of the South were the Methodist and the Baptists, there arose a civil religion after the civil war. The Southerners made Robert E. Lee into a saint, Stonewall Jackson into a prophet, and the confederacy into a sacred memory. It turned out to be a cult of ancestor worship, with its own rituals of Confederate memorial day, monuments and reunions. These were the central cultural experiences of Faulkner’s generation of Southerners. Religion became more a way of doing and acting than of believing. Many Americans in the eighteenth century adopted a religion of reason in the place of traditional Christianity. Many of them accepted a non-institutional Deism, which denied traditional Christian teachings about Jesus, original sin, vicarious redemption, and special Biblical revelation (Benton 420-21)

5.5.3.3. Critics have disagreed on the importance of religion to Faulkner. Some have seen him as essentially an agnostic or atheist. Charles Glicksberg argues “For with an imagination as nightmarish and nihilistic as Celine’s, he carries to a logical extreme the definition of naturalism as pessimistic realism and portrays man as the victim of his environment and conditioning”(Glicksberg 361). But his explicit statements suggest he claimed a broad Christianity:

He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian background, especially the background of a country boy, a Southern country boy. My life was passed, my childhood, in a very small Mississippi town, and that was a part of my background (Coffee 2).
Faulkner was born in, grew up in, and wrote about the South, which H. L. Mencken called the “Bible Belt” (Wilson 21). He attended St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford after his marriage, read the Book of Common Prayer, and was buried with the rites of the church. The following inscription is there on his tomb, “Beloved, Go with God” (Wilson 27). But he himself speaks about the superfluousness of his religiosity too, “It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it’s just there” (Wilson 27-28).

5.5.4. Faulkner’s ignorance in theology is considered as another valid reason for his disparity with the Bible. “Although he often uses Biblical allusions with all the reverence of the Puritan tradition, frequently he shows an incongruity that is reminiscent of Chaucer and other early writers who reflected a church-centred society where people employed religious terminology so extensively that it became more secular than sacred” (Coffee 2). William Faulkner, according to H. L. Weatherby, “combines a more than common knowledge of traditional Christian images with a more than common ignorance of Christian doctrines and theology” (Coffee 1).

5.5.5.1. Another factor that caused in Faulkner a lack of concern for the literal Word is his philosophical approach to the Bible while adapting it for fiction. When asked whether his imagination was circumscribed by the Biblical story when writing A Fable, he made a statement, which sums up his critical theory concerning the use of Christian symbolism. He said:
I think that whenever my imagination and the bounds of that pattern conflicted, it was the pattern that bulged... that gave. When something had to give it wasn’t the imagination, the pattern shifted and gave. .... any work of art in its conception when it reaches a point where the man can begin to work has got to have some shape, and the problem then is to make imagination and the pattern conform, meet, be amicable, we’ll say. And when one has to give, I believe it’s always the pattern that has to give (Coffee 3).

In eighteen of his nineteen books, he adopts this same pattern: Imagination - Biblical pattern - pattern changed to fit imagination (Ibid). In the process of artistic creation Faulkner borrows biblical patterns as the skeletons of his stories, but when they do not stick with his imagination he makes certain changes in the Biblical pattern. As a result the reproduced work deviates from the original Biblical pattern.

5.5.5.2. According to Howe, Faulkner utilises the Christ story to express his own personal philosophy regarding human existence:

He is moved by symbols associated with his childhood, upbringing and region; he is moved by stories that seem to embody those human potentialities he has wished to celebrate in recent years; and above all, he is moved by the image of man as victim, man on the cross. Perhaps this last is Faulkner’s deepest “conviction” about the human lot - that finally each man reaches his cross (277-78).

In the story of Jesus Christ he sees the only consolation and hope for Man. His focus is not on heavenly reward but on the illusory comfort of man’s capacity to endure. He seems to convince the reader that one can
become victorious in life through a free and willing acceptance of one’s own cross. The father in *The Sound and the Fury* sums up Faulkner’s philosophy in the following lines:

A man is the sum of his misfortunes... A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity (*Sound and the Fury* 103)

5.5.5.3.1. To understand Faulkner’s philosophical stand in *A Fable*, it is necessary to know something about ‘nihilism’, ‘existentialism’ and ‘materialism’. Albert Camus summarises the focus of these theories in the following lines: “If we believe in nothing, if nothing has meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance” (5) In this philosophy God is dead and the superman rules the world. In this nihilist, existentialist and materialist philosophy where there is no God or heaven, the only way to salvation is the heroic death for a mad cause (Kazantzakis 1960, 21) Podhoretz says regarding Faulkner’s selection of the Jesus theme.

He has turned to the Gospels as the source of his affirmation not because he has suddenly discovered traditional Christianity but because he rightly sees in the Gospels the greatest tribute to man ever conceived: they tell how God became man and man became God for a brief moment, and it therefore presumably lies in man’s power to become “God” again even today (248).
Glicksberg calls Faulkner,

...an American Dostoyevski who exhibits the Golgothean progression of the lost souls of the damned, injured, the psychopathic, the doomed, but without ever introducing the catharsis of Christian faith. There is no redemption or by prayer or penitence, no providential salvation through the merciful mediation of God. His supreme task as a novelist is to focus his lens properly, to portray the truth of the precarious human situation as objectively as possible, undistracted by human, all too human shibboleths and illusions. (365).

5.5.5.3.2. Throughout A Fable Faulkner utilises polarities to convey the truth to the reader: authority against the common soldier; the supreme general against the corporal; war against peace; evil against good, selfishness against sacrifice, body against spirit and hope against despair. Following Sartre he expresses the belief that a man is responsible for himself, and that he is responsible for his own individuality as well as that he is responsible for all men. This is an extremist view that demands an individual to be responsible for all members of the human race. In Sartre’s view the existentialist thinks it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappear along with Him.

5.5.6. His main objective in adopting this existentialist-nihilism is to make the vision of humanity portrayed by him acceptable to all sorts of readers in a multicultural, multitemporal social context: non-believers as
well as believers of all denominations (Inge 408). And hence he pictures heavenly immortality as a delusion. Through the ironic parallels of Jesus and the corporal, Faulkner implies that man's only values are mortal ones. Glicksberg considers him a nihilist, "Having no philosophy of life to offer except one of absolute nihilism, Faulkner creates characters who reflect his baffled uncertainty, the torment of his unknowing"(Bassett 371).

5.5.7.1. The Southerners' attitude after their defeat in the 1932 civil war that they are not the children of God but of history (Kazin 9) has been an important formative influence on Faulkner. A Fable is just a literary projection of the perversiveness of the Southern civil religious culture of Confederate ancestor-worship cult. And he avoids the question of God, perhaps, just to be acceptable in the modern American Protestant culture with its option for John Locke's natural religion of reason and noninstitutional Deism The American president, Thomas Jefferson, had even produced a Revised Version of the New Testament deleting all references to miracles and making Jesus out to be nothing more than an extraordinary man and a powerful moral teacher. Their lineal successors propagated the idea that "man is not born sinful, but capable of either good or evil" (Benton 420).

5.5.7.1. And in the 1960s, a new school of 'radical' theologians, including writers such as Harvey Cox, Gabriel Vahanian, Thomas J. J. Altizer, and William Hamilton declared that "God is dead"(Benton 438) They concluded that the traditional religious beliefs and attitudes must be replaced by a completely secular system of values and truths. They urged
the contemporary Protestants to reject "Any system of thought or action in which God or the gods serve as fulfiller of needs or solver of problems". For the death-of-God theologians the main spiritual activities consisted in personal ethics, social justice movements, and cultural creativity. According to their view, "... the Christian emphasis must centre on Jesus of Nazareth as the model of human life and character in the world, or on Christ as the incarnate Word or spirit that is present in human existence and history ... The new radicals insisted on keeping a Christ without God" (Benton 437-38).

5.5.8.1. Bassett puts forward certain other 'contextual factors' that influenced Faulkner in producing this novel in a different mode from his other novels. First, it was conceived at a time of great personal pessimism due to his failure to enrol as a soldier in the I World War and the sense of personal loss. This mid life crisis led to a conscious decision to open up unshakeable questions and thus inspired A Fable (198).

5.5.8.2. Secondly, the World War itself, and America's involvement in it influenced Faulkner in determining the choice of subject matter and style. The meaningless slaughter committed by world's most 'civilised' nations during the First World War created widespread disillusionment with the idea of progress, and cultural self doubt in the twentieth century world. Faulkner like other modernist writers reflected it in the selection of theme and style (198). This is one way of explaining the apparently grotesque disturbances and distortions that also mark Faulkner's writing.
style. It is a style that dramatises the strain and repeated failure by received reason, nature and common sense to repress or at least grammatically to subordinate persistently outrageous horrors.

5.5.9. Like other writers in the United States during the early twentieth century, Faulkner was influenced by the assaults of its great rebels: Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud against accepted beliefs. Another gift of twentieth century was freedom in its widest extreme in all fields. One thing bequeathed by the nineteenth century, besides a suspect faith in the sufficiency of material progress, was the promise of more freedom: a willingness to blur or even dissolve all lines, restrictions, and taboos, in life as well as in art. Though Faulkner sought the rewards of progress and enjoyed breaking long-honoured rules, including several having to do with narrative fiction, he believed that freedom suffices only when people are spiritually sure enough of themselves to know what they truly want, and then only when what they want corresponds to their deepest needs and so matches their need for affiliation as well as attention, and their capacities for awe and wonder. A Fable also reflects the Modern novelists' belief that there was no such thing as objective reality, only each individual's sense of it (Weinstein 81).

5.5.10. V.S. Pritchett states that Faulkner has superimposed the Gospel allegory upon the story of the corporal just to affirm his Nobel Prize address: "I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and
endurance” (Pritchett 238). Jesus Christ being the highest example for this endurance and sacrifice, Faulkner adopted His story as his framework. *A Fable* is recognized as a fictional corollary to his speech. He used it, as an objective co-relative to express that man would prevail. He has admitted that he had made adjustments with the Biblical story while transforming the 'Fabula' into the 'Sjuzet'. He said, "I think that whenever my imagination and the bounds of that pattern conflicted the pattern shifted" (Coffee 3). This discussion could be concluded with an argument from Howe that “*A Fable* is an example of the yearning so common to American writers for a ‘big book,’ a *summa* of vision and experience, a final spilling-out of the wisdom of the heart”(Howe 269).

5.6. The preceding analysis confirms the assumption that *A Fable* presents a modernised distorted version of the conventional Jesus story in the allegorical mode. This reconstruction is a result of Faulkner’s unconventional approach in reading and interpreting the Jesus story. As an interpretation of the Jesus story, when *A Fable*’s exegetical process is analysed it shows that Faulkner has adopted Friederich Ast’s interpretive method of ‘the hermeneutics of the spirit’. The fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception formulated in the author by his existence in his particular race, milieu and moment provided the formative forces for its reconstruction in this particular mode. Faulkner approaches the Jesus story with a nihilistic involvement with ‘Being’ which anticipates a godless world in *A Fable*. Similarly he interacts with the Gospel story in a mythical perspective or fore-sight. The fore-structures of his understanding produced a ‘reading filter’ which sifted the traditional Jesus story and admitted only
the over all spirit of it: man could conquer the world through vicarious suffering and self-sacrifice. The variations occurred in this reconstruction of the Jesus story is a product of the total personality of Faulkner. *A Fable* proves Tonny Bennet’s theory that a text could be re-written into a different text in a different context, through productive activation. It also confirms Heidegger’s view that all attempts to reconstruct past meaning accurately are "doomed to failure since not just our texts but also our understanding are historical" (Hirsch 191) As Faulkner was born in a different historical context from the first century Palestine, his understanding of the Gospel differed from that of the original readers. Umberto Eco’s theory of a "reading filter" or screen existing between the reader and the printed page which may distort or alter the message during the process of reading (Rice & Waugh 210), also is substantiated through this novel: the reading filter organized in the mind of Faulkner due to the schema resulted from socio-religious and historical situation in which he was living produced the distortion and modernization effect in *A Fable*. Thus, this novel which is recognised world wide, as a reconstruction of Jesus Christ becomes a model highlighting Bakhtin’s interpretation theory of ‘modernization and distortion’.