The Fatal Arc: The Evolution of Tragic Image and Idea in Three Novels by William Faulkner

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THE FATAL ARC:
THE EVOLUTION OF TRAGIC IMAGE AND IDEA
IN THREE NOVELS BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

by
John L. Dodds

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of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
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VITA

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PART I
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FAULKNER'S TRAGIC VISION

At a press club interview during his 1955 trip to Japan, William Faulkner was asked whether he considered human life "basically a tragedy," and he answered: "Actually, yes. But man's immortality is that he is faced with a tragedy which he can't beat and still he tries to do something with it."¹ I intend to trace Faulkner's evolving perception of this unbeatable tragedy in three novels: Sartoris, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom!. In particular, I hope to demonstrate two things: that the pattern of ideas and images embodying Faulkner's tragic vision in these novels constitutes an effective unifying structure for each novel and that this pattern helps us account for the maturing of Faulkner's tragic vision from Sartoris through Absalom, Absalom!. Sartoris, I intend to show, is an ironic romantic tragedy, Light in August, a naturalistic tragedy, and Absalom, a tragedy along more classical lines.

Faulkner himself suggested in an interview at the University of Virginia that his tragic vision was the unifying principle of his art: "... everyone writer in a way is writing one story. That he--there's one thing in man's condition that seems to him the most moving, the

This most moving, most tragic aspect of man's condition is, as Faulkner put it time and time again, "the human heart in conflict with itself, with its fellows, with its environment." The source of this tragic conflict lies in the heart's "capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be." In other words, Faulkner believed that man's nobility lies in his aspirations and, against overwhelming odds, the very struggle to fulfill these aspirations; man's inevitable and unbeatable tragedy is that his aspirations drive him into conflict with himself, his fellow man, and the very scheme of things. In each of the novels I am considering, the basic pattern of this tragic vision remains essentially the same. Impelled by particular energies, the major characters of each novel choose a course of action to achieve a particular goal, but their energies, inevitably in conflict with themselves and their environments, bring them to tragic goals. Ambivalent, divided by their conflict, these men and women attempt to avoid the conflict and its source by seeking or erecting sanctuaries from what they understand to be the forces threatening them. In every novel, however, these sanctuaries fail; with their failure, the characters are forced out, exposed to the conflict they sought to evade, in a process that creates the tragic fates implicit in their energies from the beginning.

2 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 82.

3 Ibid., p. 88.

4 Ibid., p. 78.
I have divided my analysis of this tragic pattern into three chapters for each of the novels. The first chapter on each novel is primarily a study of characterization, of the energies driving the characters; the second, dealing with sanctuaries and social centers, is concerned with milieu and plot; and the third distinguishes the particular nature of fate and the final effect of each novel. In the chapter that concludes my study, I do two things: first, I consider several tragic images as evidence for the differing final effect of each novel, for the evolution of Faulkner's tragic vision, and for the maturing of his artistic technique. Second, I try to show through a brief examination of The Hamlet that Faulkner's tragic vision is in force even when his aims are comic, that tragic imagery in a comic context heightens the reality of the comedy and gives weight to comic themes.

With this brief introduction to the tragic vision embodied in these novels, I want now to make a closer examination of the key ideas which inform this vision. Attempting to describe the nature and purpose of his art, Faulkner once remarked:

You write a story to tell about people... It's man in the ageless, eternal struggles we inherit and we go through as though they'd never happened before, shown for a moment in a dramatic instant of the furious motion of being alive, that's all any story is.5

Many critics have rightly taken Faulkner's often-used term "motion"—whose opposites are "stasis," "nothingness," and "death"—as central to the meaning of his art, perhaps the best study of this term being

5 Faulkner in the University, p. 239.
Richard P. Adams' *Faulkner: Myth and Motion.* While much in his study and in the work done by others is useful, I hope to go beyond them and consider the energy which generates this motion and is spent ironically attempting to maintain a self-destructive stasis. The characters I will examine drive themselves against the motion of life. In many novels Faulkner employs the term "energy" with a series of qualifiers or he presents us with images of energy to set the nature of a particular character, to show what makes him move or behave in a certain way. In *Sartoris,* for example, we are presented with young Bayard Sartoris after he wrecks his automobile, his face "like a bronze mask, purged by illness of the heat of its violence, yet with the violence still slumbering there and only refined a little." In *The Hamlet,* we are shown I. O. Snopes's "furious already dissipating concentration of energy." And in *Absalom, Absalom!*, we are told that when Thomas Sutpen subdued the Haitian uprising, the natives fled in horror from the man whose "indomitable spirit should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have." I am calling this kind of energy primal energy: by it I mean a force beyond mere motivation, a ruling passion combining will, emotion, biological and psychological need, conscious knowledge about the self and one's world, and unconscious inheritances, dark and urgent, distorting this knowledge. Primal energy is that particular configuration which human universals (ambition, love, sex, identity, power, pleasure, fear) take in a particular personality.

Primal energy shapes and forces an identity.

Because a particular character's energies are almost always divided, the cause of the heart in conflict with itself, this primal energy becomes part of Faulkner's tragic pattern. In terms of the imagery in the fiction, this division and conflict are represented by the desires or aspirations of the tragic mind for an identity in opposition to the claims of one's common humanity, a humanity almost always symbolized by images of the body. In Faulkner's words, "man is trying to do the best he can with his desires and impulses against his own moral conscience, and the conscience of, the social conscience of his time and his place--the little town he must live in, the family he's a part of." It is a function of the tragic mind, of its desires and impulses, to want to be better, braver, or more splendid than man thinks he can be, to want to transcend the human and social condition. And these desires and impulses are for Faulkner the source both of man's nobility and, tragically, of his harmartia: "I don't have much confidence in the mind," he told a University of Virginia audience. "I think here [referring to the body] is where the shoe fits, that the mind lets you down sooner or later, but this doesn't." Denying the claims of their humanity and community and the energies urging them to life, following instead those energies driving them to one kind of transcendence or another, Faulkner's tragic heroes persist on a calamitous course which only further divides them within, isolates them from

7 Faulkner in the University, p. 59.
8 Ibid., p. 6.
their fellow man, and eventually denies them the very goals they seek. In the name of static dreams of ennobled humanity, these heroes come to oppose life, to resist in motion the kind of motion essential to life. This opposition and resistance is the ultimate cause, Faulkner suggests, of the particular Southern tragedy he dramatizes in the novels I am considering and in others as well.

The sanctuaries these figures seek—the Sartoris plantation (and the MacCallom farm), Joanna Burden's house (and Gail Hightower's), and the Sutpen plantation—either as emblems of or shelters for their dreams of transcendence, can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, their sanctuaries are, as Faulkner wrote in an essay in Harper's, the American dream: a sanctuary on the earth for individual man: a condition in which he could be free not only of the old established closed-corporation hierarchies of arbitrary power which had oppressed him as a mass, but free of that mass into which the hierarchies of church and state had compressed and held him individually thralled and individually impotent.9

On the other hand, their sanctuaries are also intended refuges from their divided natures; they are what Faulkner meant when he defined the title of his novel Sanctuary: "some safe secure place to which" one "can hurry, run, from trouble."10 They must inevitably fail their creators, seekers, or inheritors, however, because they are barricades against humanity and images of the divided self, divided land, and divided nation. It is here, in these sanctuaries, that the major recurring themes of Faulkner's tragic art becomes most evident: the curse

10 Faulkner at Nagano, p. 143.
of slavery, the Civil War, modern man's alienation, the stain on the
land. Far from being a protection from or shelter against threaten-
ing forces, the sanctuaries themselves become threatening places, both
to the tragic protagonists and to others. They are, in fact, the
final piece in what seems to the tragic figures the puzzle of their
calamitous fates. With the failure of these sanctuaries comes the
peripety; this failure is the peripety.

Rather than avoiding their fates, the tragic heroes have freely
created them. Faulkner said in an interview with Loïc Bouvard: "Man
is free and he is responsible, terribly responsible."\(^{11}\) Faulkner's
tragedies insist upon an ironic freedom by which man willingly commits
himself to a destructive course of action which is the only course he
could have chosen, given his character and environment. "A man's fu-
ture," Faulkner suggested at the University of Virginia, "is inherent
in that man. . . . That is, . . . there is no such thing as was. That
time is, and if there's no such thing as was, then there is no such
thing as will be" (emphasis Faulkner's).\(^{12}\) In other words, man dwells
in an almost unendurable present, the sum of his energies and of the
actions and choices those energies commit him to in a particular en-
vIRONMENT. Tragic man is condemned to freedom and condemns himself
with that freedom. This self-condemnation is the inevitable conse-
quence of man's divided nature; prevented from understanding his

\(^{11}\) James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., The Lion in
the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962 (New York:

\(^{12}\) Faulkner in the University, p. 139.
dividedness, he chooses to oppose himself. Thus it seems to the tragic hero—and Faulkner makes it seem so to us—that there is some malevolent force at work in the scheme of things, in the social and human condition, which opposes dreamers and their dreams, a force which will not permit mankind to be better, braver, or more splendid. In The Hamlet, Faulkner accounts for Ike Snopes’s idiocy by suggesting that he had once looked upon "the Gorgon-face of that primal injustice which man was not intended to look at face to face" (1964 Vintage edition, p. 85). It is this nemesis obliterating man, denying him the goal of his primal energies, which we sense in the fates of the tragic protagonists, which they protest when brought face to face with it in their moment of anagnorisis, and which the tragic structure of each novel enacts. This primal injustice is presented primarily through tragic ironies of image, character, and structure in Sartoris, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom! and primarily through comic irony (employing the same images in a comic context) in The Hamlet.

Faulkner's tragic vision and the pattern that embodies it evolves from novel to novel. Although it is certainly true that Sartoris is a lesser novel than those which follow it, I do not mean to imply that each successive novel I am considering is necessarily better than the previous one, only that it is different. My concern here is not primarily with Faulkner's growth as an artist but with the growth of his tragic vision. Faulkner's art, even when he was at the height of his creative powers, was uneven, lesser novels like Sartoris and The Unvanquished appearing almost simultaneously with masterpieces like The
Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! But however uneven Faulkner's art was between 1929 and 1936, one can trace the steady growth of his tragic vision, an evolution reflected in the images he chose, the themes he dramatized, and the narrative methods he employed. I have chosen Sartoris rather than The sound and the Fury to compare with his mature tragedies both because Sartoris makes for a sharper, more exact comparison with Absalom and because it presents more clearly and directly than The Sound and the Fury the essentially romantic tragic themes and images which absorbed Faulkner early in his artistic maturity. I have chosen Sartoris rather than Flags in the Dust because the greater prominence given the Mitchells and the Benbows in the original version obscures the tragic design. Faulkner himself had very definite ideas about the evolving pattern of his art: "... as I see it one never does tell the truth as he views it. He tries and each time he fails. And so he tries again. He knows the next time will not be good, either, but he tries it again until he does, and then he quits."  

He believed that each novel he wrote sprang from "a dream of perfection"; what varied was not the dream but the pattern that embodies the dream. "When something had to give," he told a University of Virginia audience, "it wasn't the imagination, the pattern shifted and gave. That may be the reason that a man has to rewrite and rewrite--to reconcile imagination and pattern."  

13 Faulkner at Nagano, pp. 10-11.  
14 Faulkner in the University, p. 104.  
15 Ibid., p. 52.
The evolution of this tragic pattern is most readily seen in the constellation of images which present it in each novel. In a particular novel a particular idea—primal energies, sanctuaries, social centers, or primal injustice—is given substance through a definite set of images. In later novels Faulkner expands, refines, or makes the same idea more complex by adding new images to the constellation and dropping others, by shifting the configuration of images in the constellation, or by developing new elements of images used earlier. In *Sartoris*, for example, Faulkner uses an ironic allusion to John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as well as other images of frozen movement or stasis to suggest the life-resisting energies of the Sartorises and the Benbows. In *Light in August*, the urn image is presented in a more complex fashion. Applied to Lena Grove it evokes, not stasis, but the quality of her motion, an energy very different from the Sartorises', and the wholeness of her personality. Linked with images of the circle not present in *Sartoris*, the urn image becomes the means to judge the wholeness of other characters and their misperceptions of the nature of human life: Joe Christmas and the world he gazes upon are a broken urn; the urn The Reverend Hightower imagines is a funeral urn, the image of his desire to escape corporeal existence. The central urn image is present in both novels, but associated images are dropped and others added as the idea evoked by the pattern evolves from novel to novel. Images and ideas evolve. Another kind of example of this evolutionary pattern is Faulkner's use of the Faustus story to generate images of primal energy in *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Hamlet.*
the tragedies the images advance the tragic design by revealing the extent to which Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen have cut themselves off from human life in the process of their very different quests; in *The Hamlet*, Flem Snopes becomes Faustus, besting the devil at his own game. Here the tragic allusion not only makes for some of the finest comedy in the novel but also defines Flem's energy and his relationship to the absurd world he comes to order and rule. A final example of this evolutionary pattern: fate, the shape of one's primal injustice, is evoked in *Sartoris* by the image of the Player, as it also is in *Light in August*, but in *Absalom, Absalom!* fate becomes the Creditor and in *The Hamlet*, the legal system and an actual Justice of the Peace. The reader should not assume, however, that fate as the Player in *Sartoris* is any closer to the idea of fate in *Light in August* than *Light in August*'s Player is to the Creditor of *Absalom, Absalom!* or *The Hamlet*'s Justice of the Peace. Ideas and images are alike in name only. The ways in which these and other images are elaborated make for a very different treatment of the tragic ideas in each novel and, thus, for novels very different from one another in final effect.

So much excellent criticism has been written about William Faulkner in the past thirty years, especially about these four novels, that anyone who now writes about Faulkner must feel at least a little presumptuous. We have Irving Howe's provocative general introduction, \(^{16}\) John Longley's humane study of Faulkner's tragic and comic heroes, \(^{17}\)


\(^{17}\) *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes* (Chapel Hill:
Olga Vickery's careful reading of imagery and theme,\textsuperscript{18} Cleanth Brooks's and Ilse Dusoir Lind's thorough analyses of the milieu of Faulkner's fiction,\textsuperscript{19} and Hyatt Waggoner's and Walter Slatoff's examinations of continuity in Faulkner's fiction.\textsuperscript{20} This brief list, of course, scarcely begins to identify those who have written usefully about Faulkner using a variety of critical tools and writing from a number of critical vantage points. But such is the art of a rich, deep, and complex writer like William Faulkner that the work of one hundred or one thousand critics cannot exhaust the possibilities in his fiction for analysis and interpretation. I trust that my study will advance Faulkner scholarship at least a small step. While I am deeply indebted to the sound scholarship of those critics preceding me, I try to correct what seem to me a few misreadings in their interpretations and, in other instances, to offer plausible alternative readings to their own. Most important, I try to pull together a number of critical approaches used elsewhere more or less in isolation and apply them to an analysis of Faulkner's tragic vision. To my knowledge, no one has


worked consistently at the levels of image and idea to account for the evolving patterns of this, the unifying vision of one of America's greatest writers.  

21 It is a curious fact that no doctoral dissertations on Faulkner appear to have tackled the problem of his tragic vision head on. Several dissertations do, however, explore subjects which I understand to be elements of this vision. Kenneth Richardson, for example, examines what he calls destructive and creative force in Faulkner's fiction, terms which come close to what I mean by primal energies ("Quest for Faith: A Study of Destructive and Creative Force in the Novels of William Faulkner," Claremont, 1963). Emil Bricker explores the duality I understand to be the result of a character's divided primal energies ("Duality in the Novels Of William Faulkner and Fyodor Dostoevsky," University of Michigan, 1972). Edward Corridori examines setting in a way that parallels in some respects my consideration of the ironic quest for sanctuaries ("The Quest for Sacred Space: Setting in the Novels of William Faulkner," Kent State University, 1972). And Bill K. Addison studies the use of the past in Faulkner's fiction as a determinant of behavior, of fate ("The Past in the Works of William Faulkner," University of Minnesota, 1971). Again, however, the primary concerns of these dissertations are subordinate to my primary concern. They do not focus on the relationship of the imagery to Faulkner's tragic vision.
PART II
While at the University of Virginia, William Faulkner remarked that *Sartoris*, the first of his Yoknapatawpha novels, "has the germ of my apocrypha in it."¹ Since then, almost every critic of this novel has felt obliged to use his remark in one way or another in his criticism; not all of them, however, seem aware of just how apt Faulkner's metaphor is as a description of the novel and its place in his canon. As I understand it, the quotation refers to more than the characters Faulkner was to recreate again and again in later novels and short stories and to more than the setting, his "own little postage stamp of native soil,"² the scene of so much of his writing. In this organic metaphor are implied the themes and images appearing in *Sartoris* which grow, develop, and evolve in the different structural environments of later novels. In *Sartoris*, as in many of the novels to follow, Faulkner dramatizes various individuals' search for an identity acceptable to them, driven by the primal energies inherited as compulsions from the past. He describes these characters as they wrestle at length with or easily submit to these compulsions and then as they attempt to under-

¹ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 285.

stand or protest the fate they have created for themselves. Here as later, Faulkner traces the causes of certain Southern failings to illusions his characters inherit and hold about themselves and their world.

Many readers, while granting the obvious Southern elements of Sartoris which place it at the head of the progression of novels to follow, nevertheless deny that the themes so prominent in the later novels find early expression here. Cleanth Brooks, in William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, argues "that of all Faulkner's novel's Sartoris most resembles, on the one hand, a novel by Ernest Hemingway, and on the other, an old-fashioned Southern novel of the turn of the century." The trouble of young Bayard Sartoris, the novel's protagonist, "is in great part referable not to his family or to his blood but to his experience as a war time aviator. . . . the fact that he has Sartoris blood in his veins would seem to make very little difference." In essential agreement, Melvin Backman suggests that "despite the nostalgic evocation of the Sartoris past," the novel "is not a family

3 James Gray Watson, in "'The Germ of My Apocrypha': Sartoris and the Search for Form," The Novels of William Faulkner, New Views: A Mosaic Series in Literature, No. 17 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1973), pp. 15-33, complements my argument of the germinal character of Sartoris by demonstrating that Sartoris may be seen as a germinal novel not only in terms of the Yoknapatawpha material which it introduces but equally in terms of the methods by which that material is presented. Yoknapatawpha County is not only a place to tell a story—a modern world—it is also a formal structure within the context of which human affairs accrete meaning" (17). While I do not entirely agree with Watson's analysis, especially his generally sympathetic portrait of Narcissa Benbow and his belief that the novel concludes optimistically, still his study of the novel's imagery and structure is perceptive and useful.

4 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 114.

5 Ibid., p. 103
chronicle." For Irving Howe, as well, all of young Bayard's "concerns seem to be immediate ones, brought on by his time in the European war." And for Floyd Watkins, too, young Bayard's "confusion is . . . a product of his time," not of his past. Walter Brylowski carries this line of reasoning even further with his caution that "to inflate the presence of a family legend into a dominating myth does no service to an understanding of the novel nor to an understanding of myth." As Brooks implies with his allusion to Hemingway, these critics understand the true subject of the novel to be not the relationship between past and present nor the downfall of the old South but the alienation of young Bayard Sartoris, a member of the "Lost Generation" of the post-World War I years, "one of the pilots who 'died' when the war ended," an "offspring of the world-weary young men in the fin de siècle tradition." Young Bayard's plight, Brooks suggests, "reflects the stunning effect of the war rather than the decadence of the Southern arist-

6 "Faulkner's Sick Heroes: Bayard Sartoris and Quentin Compson," Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (1956), 95.

7 William Faulkner, p. 35.


tocratic tradition or the burden of a family curse."12 For Irving Howe, "Bayard's inability to achieve a sustaining relationship with the tradition of his family and native region forms a central theme of the book."13 For Melvin Backman, too, Bayard is "essentially the alienated and helpless man whose primary accomplishment remains the cutting of the bond that once united him to family and nation and God."14 Elsewhere Backman argues that "when Faulkner attributes Bayard's violence to the 'glamorous fatality' of the Sartoris heritage, he strikes a false note. Intentionally or not, he confuses malaise with doom. . . ."15 Given such readings of Sartoris, it would be unlikely for these critics to find much irony in Simon Strother's question to old Bayard Sartoris when they first learn of young Bayard's secret return to Jefferson after the war: "'Cunnel, you reckon dem foreign folks is done somethin' ter him?'"16 Nor would these readers find much irony in a remark by Colonel John Sartoris, the forefather of the Mississippi Sartorises: "'In the nineteenth century,'" he said, "'genealogy is poppycock.'" But, he continued, "'I reckon a Sartoris can have a little vanity and poppycock, if he wants it'" (92). I suggest, however,
that we can and should hear ironies in these speeches, and that when we
do, we will understand this novel in ways quite different from those
suggested by the critics I have mentioned.

Not only the war or foreigners have harmed young Bayard, as Simon
and many readers of the novel suppose. By the time the family identity
has descended upon young Bayard, genealogy is no longer a little vanity
or poppycock. As Peter Swiggart helpfully suggests, "In Sartoris the
theme of Sartoris spiritual death is uppermost; the war is not so much
its cause as its symbol. The responsibility for Bayard's doom lies
somewhere within the Sartoris way of life,"\(^{17}\) within "the connection
established between young Bayard and his male ancestors."\(^{18}\) The prob-
lem for young Bayard and the rest of John Sartoris' relatives and heirs
is that, like it or not, want it or not, they have inherited their ge-
nealogy and the identity, way of life, and myth that come with it.
They must accommodate themselves to this heritage, or at least attempt
to, even though the twentieth century may not be as receptive to it as
the nineteenth, even though their family identity threatens to destroy
any autonomous sense of self, and even though such family identity may
be figuratively and literally killing its inheritors. Properly under-
stood, young Bayard Sartoris is not, as we shall see, as alienated from
his family, heritage, and world as many readers suppose. If he were,
he might not suffer as he does. His problem is that his family and
family heritage are too much with him--everywhere and all the time.

\(^{17}\) The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 35.
He would be just as driven and pained whether there was World War I or not. The attempt by the earliest Sartorises to make a name for themselves and by their descendents—especially young Bayard—to live up to it is the primal energy governing their acts, gestures, speech, judgments, and dreams. To comprehend the nature of this energy is to understand not only Faulkner's attack on the Southern antebellum myth and its illusory dream of a particular social order but also those attitudes toward his fateful Southern heritage that most attracted him early in his artistic career.

Colonel John Sartoris and his brother, the first Bayard, founded this family genealogy, giving their name shape and substance through their images of themselves and their world and through their Civil War exploits. They conceived themselves, each in his own unironic way, at the center of a social order whose first principles were gentlemanly gallantry and heroism. On the one hand, as gentlemen, Bayard and his commander, General Jeb Stuart, were willing to risk death for themselves and their men during the course of a raid so that a captured Yankee major would not have to ride double (16). Colonel John's significant action was to build the Sartoris plantation, the social center of a young Jefferson, Mississippi, where he threw elegant balls in his parlor, "surrounding himself with a pageantry of color and scent and music against which he moved with his bluff and jovial arrogance" (59). On the other hand, the brothers were both truly courageous men. The "heedless and reckless" Bayard returned alone to a pillaged Yankee encampment to prove the lie of the captured major's declaration that "'No gentleman has any business in this war... He is an anachronism,
like anchovies'" (16). With the same self-abandon, as well as a cool resourcefulness uniquely his, Colonel John captured a whole troop of Yankees singlehanded. His most important displays of courage, however, occurred not on the battlefield but after the war when, from its ruins, he attempted to recreate his antebellum social vision. He rebuilt the Sartoris plantation. He began, but did not complete, a railroad to link what was still the frontier to the Gulf and Great Lakes. And he became a politician in an attempt to suppress the social upheavals of Reconstruction. From such attitudes and exploits was a family name and myth created, one descendants could be proud of—providing they did not examine their heritage too closely.

If their heirs did, they must confess that much of their pride was grounded in what Faulkner shows were, after all, pretty senseless exploits, senseless not simply because they did little to advance the South's cause during or after the Civil War, but because their forefathers' energies were spent in folly and the pursuit of illusions. The first Bayard, for example, went to war, not to help the South's cause, but on a "holiday" (10), "in a spirit of pure fun" (10). Neither he nor Jeb Stuart "had any political convictions . . . at all" (10). This Bayard's attack against the Yankees, as recounted by his sister, Miss Jenny Du Pre, was carried out, not with any military objectives in view, but in "a state of savage nostalgia" (12) for the taste of good coffee before the war. Shortly thereafter, when he rode back into the enemy camp for the anchovies, not munitions or prisoners, "a cook who was hidden under the mess stuck out his arm and shot Bayard in the back with a derringer" (17). Hardly the death for a man attempting to prove that
war is a place for gentlemen. On his part, Colonel John was apparently an ineffective commander, voted out of office by his men because, in the words of old man Falls, one of his men, "'he wouldn't be Tom, Dick and Harry with ever' skulkin' camp-robber that come along with a sal-vaged muskit and claimed to be a sojer'" (20). Apparently the Colonel would allow no one into his under-strength unit unless he fit the Colonel's image of a soldier. Yet after being deposed he ironically ended up leading a "bunch of red-necked brigands" (230). He later showed much courage when he captured the Yankee troops single-handed, but this courage served no useful purpose. He stumbled on the troops in the middle of a horse race with one of his men and kept, not the troops as prisoners, but the plunder which he and his men carried home, leaving the war for a season to plant their crops. Colonel John was a gentleman, too, but there is little that is admirable in the gentlemanly way he killed the two carpetbaggers except his wry, self-conscious recounting of it. Again in the words of old Falls: "'Madam," he says, "I was fo'ced to muss up yo' guest-room right considerable. . . . My apologies again, madam, fer havin' been put to the necessity of exterminatin' vermin on yo' premises. Gentlemen," he says to us, "good mawnin'"" (236). Apparently, however, Colonel John was unable to hide what he had really done behind such an arrogant pose, because a short time later, after a bitter fight had won his election to the state legislature, he said, "'Redlaw'll kill me tomorrow, for I shall be unarmed. I'm tired of killing men . . .'" (23). But until this moment of recognition by John or the moment of his brother's death, the Sartorises played romantic roles they had created for themselves in a world not at all shaped
to their illusions. This theatrical quality of their lives is best suggested by the largely ceremonial heirlooms left behind in the Sartoris attic, especially Colonel John's "delicate" and "fine" Toledo rapier:

It was just such an implement as a Sartoris would consider the proper equipment for raising tobacco in a virgin wilderness, it and the scarlet heels and the ruffled wristbands in which he broke the earth and fought his stealthy and simple neighbors. (91)

The Sartoris genealogy, then, is founded not so much on past accomplishments as on past illusions of a world that never was.

There is, however, an even more significant irony that attends the attempts of the first Sartorises to make a name for themselves. Those energies they and their heirs believe to be life fostering were ultimately life-denying. It is not simply that in pursuit of his ante-bellum dream Colonel John ironically acted against life, growth, change, that he was more than radically conservative. Nor is it that, like his derringer and dueling pistols which lay together in the family attic, "a cold and deadly insect between two flowers" (91), the ceremonial violence of the gentleman hero was finally inextricable from the expedient violence of a desperate man. Rather, it is that so many of these first Sartorises' deeds were governed by an obsession with death. Old Falls, reminiscing about Colonel John's confrontation with the carpetbaggers, describes the primary compulsion underlying the Sartoris creed this way:

"Ever' now and then a feller has to walk up and spit in destruction's face, sort of, fer his own good. He has to kind of put a aidge on hisself, like he'd hold his ax to the grindstone. . . . Ef a feller'll show his face to destruction ever' now and then, destruction'll leave 'im be 'twell his time comes. Destruction likes to take a feller in the back." (234-35)
On the one hand, to confront destruction is to make a man feel his life more keenly, to define life. On the other, confronting death is also a way to master it and, apparently, one's fear of it. For the Sartorises to confront death is for them to evade it. Their courage and sense of identity result in large measure from fear of the death that annihilates identity. And this ambivalence in the lives of the first Sartorises brings us to still other ironies. For, whatever their fundamental motives, Colonel John and Bayard were courageous and gallant. Both men's lives had a social value in spite of their illusions. Bayard's death, for whatever foolish reasons, was capable of instilling "a renewed belief in mankind" (17) for those who witnessed it, and although John never fulfilled the dream of his railroad, still he began it, possibly hastening the very social changes he sought to forestall. Whatever the senseless or abortive character of their actions, they did achieve an identity for themselves and their descendants, one which in the identity it conferred on their descendants and the ambivalent energies it provokes is both a blessing and a curse.

Once dead, the first Sartorises are transfigured. Through memory and imagination, they and their dream of a name are denied the complexities they possessed while the men were alive. The "stubborn dream" of Colonel John, "flouting him so deviously and cunningly . . . had shaped itself fine and clear, now that the dreamer" (113) was dead. So potent is this dream that Faulkner gives the shaping energy to it rather than to its transmitters, the Colonel's son and sister, old Bayard and Miss Jenny. Not only are dream and dreamers purified and simplified in their inheritors' minds; the brothers are aggrandized until their names
become synonymous with their original illusions of inspirational gallantry and heroism. As Olga Vickery suggests in The Novels of William Faulkner, "the passing of time not only removes the confusion which accompanied" their lives "but permits and even encourages poetic license until, at last," the lives of the first Sartorises are "formalized and expressed by a series of significant gestures or words."¹⁹ Thus does the first Bayard's "hairbrained" ride for the anchovies become "a gallant and finely tragical focal point to which the history of the [Sartoris] race had been raised from out the old miasmic swamps of spiritual sloth" (9). The first Bayard, "garlanded with Fame's burgeoning laurel and the myrtle and roses of Death" (10), is an inspiration to all who come after, his brief career sweeping "like a shooting star across the dark plain of their mutual remembering and suffering, lighting it with a transient glare like a soundless thunder-clap, leaving a sort of radiance when it died" (18). Colonel John's contribution to this heroic dream is best epitomized by his tombstone epitaph, in which he seems to be a kind of complete Renaissance man:

Soldier, Statesman, Citizen of the World  
For man's enlightenment he lived  
By man's ingratitude he died  
Pause here, son of sorrow; remember death (375)

With a transfigured inheritance which would tempt the pride of many families, old Bayard and Aunt Jenny naturally attempt to preserve it and revel in the after-glow of its glories, especially since this myth makes the world they presently inhabit seem "an earth shaped and furnished for punier things" (2). They name sons after the first

¹⁹ Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 17.
Sartorises, retell the stories of the past, and, most important, attempt to live the antebellum life their name and family code demand. Above what Simon calls the "commonality" (25), Jenny governs the Sartoris plantation as firmly as her brother ever did when alive, and old Bayard, the Colonel of his era, runs the family bank, riding there in a carriage driven by Simon "in a linen duster and ancient top hat" (3), in scorn of what Bayard calls "paupers . . . in automobiles" (4). Aristocrats, they receive deference from Jefferson's commoners who salute old Bayard "with a sort of florid servility" (3) and greet Miss Jenny as they would a "martial queen" (93). So intensely do they live their heritage that the past often overwhelms the present's power to impinge upon their sensibilities. The novel opens at such a moment, when old Falls brings, not the memory, but John Sartoris himself into old Bayard's bank office, "fetching, like an odor, like the clean dusty smell of his faded overalls, the spirit of the dead man into that room . . . a far more palpable presence than either of the two old men who sat shouting periodically into one another's deafness" (1). So close is Aunt Jenny to the past that it takes only a few old tunes on the piano to stir her memories and return her to her "own vanquished and abiding days" (201).

Captivated as the Sartorises and their retainers are by their transfigured heritage, they, like their forebears, fail to recognize how little correspondence there is between their dreams of a name and their actual identities, how little legitimate stake they have in their dream. It is natural, perhaps, but also ironic that old Bayard, born
"too late for one war and too soon for the next" (374), should perpetuate the Sartoris myth. It is ironic also that Simon, a former slave, should find his whole identity in the "genu-wine gentleman tone" (231) which the dream represents for him. And it is most ironic that Aunt Jenny should become, as Peter Swiggart puts it, "the priestess of this essentially male tradition,"20 since she is most critical of the excesses of the dream—especially Sartoris hubris—and has the least stake in the dream's perpetuation. "'They ain't my Sartorises,,'" she tells Narcissa Benbow; "'I just inherited 'em'" (53). But it is just possible that she, with a "bold use of metaphor that Demosthenes would have envied" (38), began the transmutation of life into dream in her story of the first Bayard. In successive retellings, this story "grew richer and richer, taking on a mellow splendorlike wine" (9). The only character with legitimate claim to the dream is the Confederate soldier, old man Falls, yet when asked why the Civil War was fought, he answers, "'Be damned ef I ever did know'" (227). All claim the dream despite their own common sense because of the colorful light it reflects on their own lives.

Having laid claim to identities not fully their own, the Sartorisises misdirect their energies. All too often they do not live authentically but merely posture, living out illusions of their forebears' heroic illusions, dwelling, in other words, at two removes from reality, playing roles assigned by genealogy in the theater of their imaginations. Old Bayard, a Colonel by inheritance not election, plays the

20 The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 35.
gentry, driven to his bank at which he does no work by Simon—himself
with a "fine feeling for theatrics" (3). He spends many an afternoon
riding across his plantation, "a stage set for the diversion" (113) of
Colonel John, farmed now not by slaves but sharecroppers. Miss Jenny
plays the matron of the manor, but instead of a host of slaves to do
her bidding, she has only Simon and his fractious family, each member
laboring in several capacities. When not playing "Sartoris," Bayard
and Jenny fuel their illusions, Bayard preferring his well-worn com-
plete edition of Dumas and Jenny, "the more lurid afternoon paper"
with its "accounts of arson and murder and violent dissolution and
adultery" (40). Both prefer "lively romance to the most impeccable
dun of fact" (40), romance at odds with the reality of both the past
and the present.

Self-seduced by their second-hand illusions, old Bayard, Aunt
Jenny, and their retainers act out a past which is not simply dead,
but deadly in its effects upon the living. Alive, a man like Colonel
John Sartoris was, as I have said, rich with complexity, a "clumsy
cluttering of bones and breath . . . the frustration of his own flesh"
(23). Both the man and his dream were "impure" because of this com-
plex life, "the grossness of pride with that of flesh" (113). But dead,
putrified of flesh, committed to the imaginations of his descendants,
Colonel John "could now stiffen and shape that which sprang from him
into the fatal semblance of his dream" (23). Thus are both the living
and the dead dreamers often evoked for us with iterative images of
rigor mortis and stone. Old Bayard remembers his father as a prehis-
toric creature, his "ineradicable bones" preserved in "enduring
stone" (2). And for every time that Colonel John is described as a "presence," we are reminded by contrast of the "florid stone gesture" (304) of his effigy in the graveyard. Having shaped their identities on such dreamers, the present Sartorises cannot help but take on their fatal attitudes. If the first Bayard and Colonel John's energies were fundamentally conservative, Jenny and Bayard's are almost entirely static, symbolized by the rigid, stiff backs with which they resist time's flow and changes. Olga Vickery describes the ossifying effects of the dream this way:

... the dream becomes progressively more destructive as it takes on all the force of a categorical imperative for Colonel John Sartoris' descendants. Spontaneous reactions to experience are replaced by imitative rituals in which form becomes more important than meaning. The final result is apt to be either an outbreak of violence or complete paralysis. At its most extreme, devotion to the dead and their design can mean a complete denial of one's own life.21

Like the frozen lovers in Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" to which Faulkner so often alludes in this and other novels, Colonel John and the first Bayard are forever young and forever brave in the vessels of their descendants' imaginations, who themselves have become frozen lovers as the price of their devotion to the dream.

There is, however, even further irony here; for although a simplified dream controls Bayard and Jenny's lives and although they have submerged their own identities in a family identity, neither the ambivalent complexities of the past Sartorises nor their own are finally purged. On one hand, Bayard and Jenny have inherited both the simple dream and the complex energies which gave rise to it. Like the first

21 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 19.
John and Bayard, they have the same fascinated attraction to and dread of destruction. For all their fears that young Bayard will kill himself in his new car, they are as attracted by what it symbolizes as he. Aunt Jenny is one of the first to ride in it when it arrives from Memphis. And when she returns from this ride, "her eyes shining and her dry old cheeks ... flushed," almost her first words are, "'Is that as fast as it'll go?'" (78). Danger brings her to life, as it does old Bayard as well. He condemns automobiles, tries to prevent his grandson from racing about the countryside in his, but he is thrilled by speed and the confrontation it represents. Even hearing about the auto's speed is enough to make his hands tremble in anticipation and his heart beat "a little too light and a little too fast" (83). Later, after he has begun to ride with his grandson, supposedly to keep him from killing himself, Aunt Jenny accurately observes, "'You don't waste your afternoons riding with him just because you think it'll keep him from turning that car over. You go because when it does happen, you want to be in it, too'" (89). Like their ancestors, they would master their fears of death and the annihilation of identity by confronting death.

On the other hand, although old Bayard and Jenny have surrendered their lives to the compulsion of the simple dream and have thus refused the change necessary for survival, their lives are shown to be ennobled by this simple, dead thing they possess. If Aunt Jenny, for example, can be condemned for her almost rigor mortis rigidity, her attitude "erect as a crack guardsman" (200) as she blocks time's flow, yet we admire her because she remains "erect still, indomitable" (56), un-
broken though she has seen "the foundations of her life swept away" (357). With her "indomitable spirit" (357) she stands far above the weak-spined twentieth-century Jeffersonians passing her by, commanding a respect which is not merely ceremonial: "Young people liked her, and she was much in demand as a chaperone for picnic parties" (29). What this pattern of accumulating or compound ironies suggests is a fundamental and intentional ambivalence in Faulkner's portrayal of the novel's aristocratic social order, an ambivalence made even more pronounced by the narrative method employed in this novel, one similar to what Henry James called the "reflecting consciousness": the narrator expresses what are obviously the thoughts and images of his characters. In effect, the narrator participates in their perceptions, distorted or otherwise. Thus, the ironies become diffused, implicating the narrator as well as his characters in their noble follies. In other words, through this double point of view Faulkner involves himself sympathetically in the very excesses the novel's action condemns; the heritage he attacks yet has a value he would not surrender.

With young Bayard Sartoris III, however, Faulkner appears to move away from this ambivalent stance, perhaps sensing kinship with his young protagonist trapped at the confluence of the dead, glorious past and the non-heroic present. Born almost in the twentieth century, Bayard does not have the luxury enjoyed by his grandfather and great-great aunt of turning his back on the present. Yet he is unsuited for life in the twentieth century because he has been defined by the values and energies of his family's nineteenth-century dream. His identity is further divided by guilt and shame. He is not only a Sartoris but an
identical twin who blames himself for his brother's death. His past will not help him here. In fact, far from ennobling or enriching his life as it does for old Bayard and Aunt Jenny, the past intensifies his pain, loss, and sense of failure.

Even if Bayard were not a Sartoris, he would have problems aplenty adjusting to life after the war. Believing he is responsible for his twin's death, he is torn by guilt. His very first words when he arrives home are: "'I tried to keep him from going up there on that goddam little popgun'" (43). Almost a year later he is still blaming himself for what in his mind is a severe moral offense: "You did it! You caused it all; you killed Johnny" (311). It does not matter that he could not prevent his brother from going up against the superior German aircraft and that once up Johnny shot across his nose to prevent him from intervening. He knows only that he has failed to save the only person whom, according to Aunt Jenny, he ever loved--his double (56). They had the same features, were raised alike, dressed alike, given the same gifts, sent to school together, and were finally separated in college only when, "in the young masculine violence of their twinship" (47), they involved each other in too many adolescent escapades. They were so close that now, lying in the bed he shared with both brother and first wife, Bayard feels his brother's presence more acutely: "the spirit of their violent complementing days lay like dust everywhere in the room, obliterating that other presence" (48).

Johnny's death is for Bayard a wound which makes him incomplete; his failure was not only the failure of his brother but the failure of himself. Compounding this guilt is the family tradition which made him
responsible for the upbringing and protection of the ever-so-slightly younger Johnny. When he once more confesses his failure, Aunt Jenny goads him with, "'What did you expect, after the way you raised him? . . . You're the oldest. . . .'" (46).

Complicating Bayard's life even further is his shame, his sense of dishonor and disgrace provoked by his failure of family myth and his Sartoris identity. He failed the family by failing to protect, not just his brother, but the Sartoris favorite son. It was Johnny who was the more warmly thought of by relatives and the citizens of Jefferson alike. "'Tell us about Johnny'" (45) are almost Jenny's first words of greeting to Bayard. She, as well as Bayard, is proud it took Ploeckner, one of Germany's best pilots, to shoot Johnny down. It is he whom she later remembers approvingly—in contrast to Bayard's "bleak arrogance" (356)—as "the merry wild spirit . . . who had laughed away so much of his heritage of humorless and fustian vainglory" (374). Such difference in temper explains in part why Narcissa Benbow loved "the warm and ready and generous" (356) Johnny before Bayard and why the MacCallums remember him so fondly: 

"'That 'uz Johnny, all over,'" approves Jackson MacCallum, "'Gittin' a whoppin' big time outen ever'thing that come up'" (332-33). Johnny had the heedless energies necessary to embody the Sartoris's heroic myth. It was the theatrical Johnny who dared death in the family fashion: He went up in a balloon at a county fair just to please the farm folk and landed three miles away, "on his scratched face that look of one who had gained for an instant a desire so fine that its escape was a purification, not a loss" (73). War, as it did for the first Bayard, just gave him "a good excuse to get him—
self killed" (31); like the first Bayard on his ride for the anchovies, Johnny flew into battle with all the odds on death's side. The sky was filled with clouds, he was outnumbered, his Sopwith Camel was inferior to the German Fokkers, and he would let no one aid him. At the moment of death, he went defiantly, waving to the German who had shot him and thumbing his nose at his brother. As Ronald Walker suggests, Johnny's perfect imitation of Bayard I forces young Bayard to "cope with both the remote and immediate pasts which repeat one another in their examples of death 'achieved' during battle." Unfortunately, the concatenation of past and present ensures that young Bayard will never live successfully in either era. It becomes an insistent reminder of the extent to which he has failed all along to be a true Sartoris. After all, he has lived up to the family name only fitfully and then at his brother's insistence. Reversing responsibility, it was Johnny who kept Bayard out of a "bloody rut, with a couple of old women nagging" him, kept him from being "good" (127), tried to raise him as a true Sartoris, controlled him as the myth of Colonel John controls the whole family. Because this reversal of roles and Johnny's exemplary exploits have denied Bayard his rightful place in the family hierarchy and the pantheon of heroic Sartorises, it is certainly possible that much of his shame, as well as his guilt, is due not just to his failure to prevent Johnny's death but to envy and the repressed desire that such envy may


23 Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 16.
have provoked for the death of the favored brother. Whatever its ultimate causes, however, Bayard feels dishonor so acutely that he informs no one of his homecoming and, when his train arrives, flees to the cemetery to make peace with ancestors and brother. It is Simon who must tell the family of Bayard's arrival:

"Wouldn't even git off at de dee-po . . . de dee-po his own folks built. Jumpin' off de bline side like a hobo. He never even had on no sojer-clothes. Jes' a suit, like a drummer er somethin'. . . . I mean, him sneakin' into his own town. Sneakin' into town on de ve'y railroad his own granpappy built, je's like he wuz trash. Dem foreign folks done done somethin' ter him. . . . " (22)

But, of course, it was not the foreigners who set Bayard running, caused him to shed the uniform symbolic of the family's identity, and made him sneak about like "trash." As Adamowski suggests, much of young Bayard's behavior after his return to Jefferson is shameless: his drunkenness, his brawling, his driving and riding habits, his rude treatment of old Bayard and Jenny. Still, Simon's description above is of a man ashamed. Bayard can behave shamelessly before relatives and townspeople because they are not understood as the source of his shame, as his trip to the cemetery reveals. The source is his near and distant past.

Young Bayard's resolution of the conflict explicit in his guilt, shame, and divided identity is made even more difficult by his personal identity, the source of whatever alienation we might see in him. It is


not true, as Ronald Walker asserts, that apart from the Sartoris myth Bayard "simply is not." In fact, were it not that Bayard has the potential for an autonomous identity apart from the Sartoris myth, as so many of Faulkner's later heroes have the potential for life apart from their tragic compulsions, he might have fewer troubles. If he could have submerged himself in the family myth as Johnny did, he might have joined his brother in mythic apotheosis in the skies over France.

While more fully conscious than any of his relatives of the mythic meaning of the family name, he yet possesses energies which, in part at least, are in opposition to those celebrated by the myth. When he attempted to rescue Johnny, he was compelled by survival instincts foreign to other family members, as well as by life-fostering love, however ambivalent that love might have been. In contrast to his undomesticated brother, Bayard marries not once but twice, perhaps seeking freedom through love from a family heritage not of husbands, wives, and children but of men acting heroically and alone. In Sartoris we never learn the names of old Bayard's wife, of Aunt Jenny's husband. Love in this family is expressed only indirectly, in exasperation, rising voices, and anger. Bayard's search for love is commendable, even though it is ironically doomed by the heroic-romantic trappings of his first marriage.

26 "Death in the Sound of Their Name," p. 275.

27 Melvin Backman suggests in The Major Years that Bayard's struggle is "between the will to live and the desire to die" (p. 8); and Olga Vickery notices in The Novels of William Faulkner that there is a tenseness each time he takes a chance and risks his life that is foreign to Johnny's casualness" (p. 20); Bayard "forces himself to become 'a Sartoris' in despite of his nature" (21).
to Caroline White and by his partner in the second, the life-denying Narcissa Benbow. Furthermore, Bayard's unique energies urge him not only to the potential nourishment of domestic life but to the life-sustaining earth. During the summer after his return, having fallen into the routine of farm life, he becomes "almost civilized again" (200). The earth holds him "in a hiatus that might have been called contentment. He was up at sunrise, planting things in the ground and watching them grow and tending them . . . with the sober rhythms of the earth in his body" (203). In a curious image which suggests his communion with life as well as the extent to which Sartoris energy is imimical to such communion, we are told that Bayard is "so neatly tricked by earth, that ancient Delilah, that he was not aware that his locks were shorn" (204). Earth is the betrayer of Samson-Bayard because communion with her is a sacrifice of the self-destructive energies which are the strength of the Sartoris identity. Bayard stays betrayed for a season, until he can no longer quell the energies of his heritage stifling him, "stopping his breathing," making him forever feel "like a man who has been submerged and who still cannot believe that he has reached the surface again" (48). A part of Bayard does not want to submerge himself in the Sartoris myth which demands as the price of his deification the annihilation of the personal self. He does not want to die, but guilt and heritage seem to demand it.

The result of the conflict among self, twinship, and family is a destructive primal energy which expresses itself first by driving Bayard from all that is life-fostering. He can maintain "the temporary abeyance of his despair" (289) "in a monotony of days" for only so long.
Then sowing-time was over and it was summer, and he found himself with nothing to do. It was like coming dazed out of sleep, out of the warm, sunny valleys where people lived into a region where cold peaks of savage despair stood bleakly above the lost valleys, among black and savage stars. (205)

His quilt and shame awaken him from the peaceful sleep of life and its dream of community, compelling him to what seems the more real but deadly, sterile, rarified atmosphere of his family destiny, to "the lonely heights of his despair" (288) which not even marriage long forestalls. Now images of the near and distant past haunt him, separating him from life: "and in the yellow firelight of their room [Narcissa] would cling to him, or lie crying quietly in the darkness beside his rigid body, with a ghost between them" (297). At the same time, Bayard's potentially unitary self, a harmony of flesh and mind, is riven, and he comes to see his body, as so many Faulkner heroes do, as a burden hindering his attempts to realize his tragic identity and so purge himself of conflict. The evening after he is thrown by a horse, he lies in bed, feeling "as though his head were one Bayard who lay on a strange bed and whose alcohol-dulled nerves radiated like threads of ice through that body which he must drag forever about a bleak and barren world with him" (160). As the imagery here suggests, such a division between the compulsions of a controlling tragic mind and the body is fatal, robbing Bayard of the warmth of life. In his desire for a "cold sufficiency" (324) independent of the claims of the flesh and community, Bayard grows cold in body and spirit (289). In "leashed cold violence" (75) he suffers moments of repose or human communion, which he understands as the frustration of his attempt to fulfill the destiny frozen in his imagination.
Separated from community and self, Bayard is driven by his primal energy "alone in the bleak and barren regions of his despair" (218), searching for the self-destruction which will earn him absolution for his failure of Johnny and stature as a true Sartoris. He buys a car guaranteed to "run eighty miles an hour, although there was a strip of paper pasted to the windshield, to which he paid no attention whatever, asking him in red letters not to do so for the first five hundred miles" (77). All that it takes, however, to show him the tawdry insufficiency of this gesture of self-definition is a brief glimpse of his great-grandfather's statue as he roars past the cemetery. Then he feels "savage and ashamed" (119). Later Bayard attempts to ride the stallion which seems to symbolize for him the energy of his family. He first sees it in the livery stable door, "a motionless bronze flame," along whose coat "ran at intervals little tremors of paler flame, little tongues of nervousness and pride. But its eye was quiet and arrogant, and occasionally and with a kingly air, its gaze swept along the group at the gate with a fine disdain, without seeing them as individuals at all . . ." (130). Once up and galloping down Jefferson streets, Bayard momentarily feels the rush of exhilaration familiar to those who know life by confronting death: "The stallion moved beneath him like a tremendous mad music, uncontrolled, splendidly uncontrollable" (133). Unable, however, to control the horse any more effectively than he has his destiny, he soon feels his exhilaration replaced by a "sharpness of rage and energy and violated pride" (134), and he is thrown.

Bayard finally commits what he believes to be a sufficient act of
expiation and self-definition when, a few months later, he turns his car over in a creek bed. After he is carried home, he will not permit his broken ribs to be attended until he performs a ritual symbolizing his hard-won equality with Johnny and membership in the Sartoris pantheon. Although he recognizes that his injuries are nothing compared to Johnny's death—"And this, this wasn't anything: just a few caved slats... Not like Johnny" (213-14)—he gathers up the symbols of their twinship, his brother's independent identity, and Johnny's initiation into Sartoris manhood: a torn canvas hunting jacket, the paw of John's first bear and the shell he killed it with, Johnny's New Testament exactly like Bayard's, and a picture of Johnny's Princeton eating club. After carrying these outside, he burns them, "prodded and turned them until they were consumed" (215). But this ritual of propitiation to the demon-gods of his near and distant past are as unavailing as his other gestures of Sartoris manhood.

Perhaps the saddest irony of Bayard's life is that he has given absolute credence to a dream identity which, as we have seen, has always been little more than a figment of the imagination conjured up to dignify the behavior of ones who feared dying. Bayard believes he will never possess his family identity and be truly heroic until he masters the fear of dying he unwittingly shares with his ancestors, the fear he and his brother felt as children when they peered into the musty parlor where Colonel John once lay in state (60). Twenty years later and returned from the war, he dreams of dying, of the "old terror. Then, momentarily, the world was laid away and he was a trapped beast in the high blue, mad for life... Not death, no; it was the
crash you had to live through so many times before you struck that filled your throat with vomit" (203-04). Unlike other Sartorises, the divided Bayard sees death not as life-defining but only as annihilating. And though he may seek the same temporary sense of purification from his fears that his ancestors sought, he never feels as purified and so released from fear as they did. Thrown by the stallion, Bayard feels a "cool serenity and something else--a sense of shrinking, yet fasci­nated distaste of which he or something he had done was the object" (136). Only briefly is his head "as cool and clear as a clapperless bell" (150). And after his auto accident, his face is "a bronze mask, purged by illness of the heat of its violence, yet with the violence still slumbering there and only refined a little" (244-45). The only way Bayard can master his fear in the apparently unheroic twentieth century is through acts as ironically foolish and pointless as many of those committed by his ancestors in the supposedly heroic past. He drags Simon along with him in his car, and when the old man kneels in panic on the floorboards, Bayard glances "the cruel derision of his teeth at him" (116). Later the same day he runs a Negro in his wagon off the road to Jefferson, running so close by him "that the yelling Negro in the wagon could see the lipless and savage derision of his teeth" (119). He finally ends this folly only after literally fright­ening his grandfather to death as he forces another car from the road in "swift amusement" and watches the other driver, "his Adam's apple like a scared puppy in a two sack" (303). Through such acts Bayard externalizes his fear, trivializing it by projecting it to the de­fenseless, not realizing that at the same time he reveals his own
vulnerability. In less than a year he wears himself out without ever mastering the fear at the root of his guilt and shame: "His spent blood, wearied with struggling, moved through his body in slow beats, like the rain, wearing his flesh away" (324). Static like his grandfather and Miss Jenny for all his furious activity, he is "taught in a senseless treadmill, a motion without progress, forever and to no escape" (212), until he finally forces a meeting with the death which disgusts and fascinates, defines and obliterates.

The Benbows, the other aristocratic family in Sartoris, appear to owe their presence in the novel to Faulkner's desires for an ironic counterpoint to the novel's title family, especially young Bayard, and for a means to elaborate and extend the denial of life theme. As Olga Vickery has observed, the Benbows, unlike the Sartorises, have no strong ties to the past. Horace and Narcissa have no living relatives and appear to have received little directly from the past. Their mother, for example, "died genteelly when Narcissa was seven, had been removed from their lives as a small sachet of lavender might be removed from a chest of linen, leaving a delicate lingering impalpability" (179). But their freedom from the past is not necessarily the boon it might seem to be, for they come to us as less substantial, weighted, and complex than the Sartorises. There is something ephemeral and abortive about them. They lack Bayard's passion and energy. At the same time, as Olga Vickery further suggests, their rootlessness has not freed them from illusions. Like the Sartorises, they have myths, but personal

28 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 22.
rather than family ones. Both families play roles and cannot stop
playing them. With the Benbows, Faulkner reveals that the malaise
of the aristocracy is due not only to heritage but to the age, not
only to the seeds of destruction sewn in particular families but to the
seeds of self-destruction growing in a particular way of life.

Narcissa, Horace's "'unravished bride of quietness'" (182), has
apparently chosen to play the role of Southern belle, hiding her denial
of life behind a mask of gentility. She dresses in whites and pallid
grays, is quiet, demure, polished, and radiates publically an attitude
of "grave and serene repose" (30). A frozen if not frigid woman, she
does not understand that her serenity is, like Keat's urn and its "cold
pastoral," the expression of a stasis and lack of life rivaling the
Sartorises'. As Cleanth Brooks suggests, there is "something incor-
rigibly virginal" about Narcissa. She believes for a time "that
there would be peace for her only in a world where there were no men
at all" (245), having repressed her sexual energies just as Bayard has
denied those rhythms he has in harmony with the earth. She believes
Belle Mitchell is "so dirty" (201) chiefly because Belle is so fully
and blatantly sensual. But she cannot repress her sexuality entirely.
It makes its presence felt in a corrupt fascination which parallels
Bayard's fear of death. She saves Byron Snopes's mash notes, for exa-
ample, hiding them in a bureau drawer beneath her underthings (300-301),
but shows them to Aunt Jenny so she will not feel "so filthy" (69).

With "her nature torn in two directions and the walls of her serene garden cast down" by Snopes "and she herself like a night animal or bird caught in a beam of light and trying vainly to escape" (258), she projects her fears of defilement as Bayard does his fears.

If Byron Snopes elicits Narcissa's ambivalence toward her biology which her genteel role would deny, Young Bayard forces her to reveal a broader and more profound ambivalence toward life itself. Although incestuously preferring the almost pathologically detached Horace to the tortured but still alive Bayard, she finally marries Bayard, not because she yields to the motion of the life within her, but because "lean and tall and fatally young" (279-80), Bayard reminds her of her self-destructive first love, Johnny Sartoris. Not only does Bayard permit her to envision him on a heroic pedestal as tall as her genteel one, he also answers with his destructive energies her own "ghost-ridden dream" (301) of life without flesh. This is not to say that she can admit the meaning of this dream to herself. After Bayard's first auto wreck, "the intactness of her deep and . . . inviolate serenity" (301) once more violated as it first was by Byron Snopes, she cries to Bayard, "'You beast, you beast, . . . why must you always do these things where I've got to see you?'" (218). Bayard is a beast precisely because he dramatizes a tortured ambivalence like her own. When with him she has a "shrinking" and a "distaste" (205), and at the same time "a sense of anticipation and dread" (259). On the one hand, his suicidal gestures force her to confront with disgust her own death wish implicit in her chosen role and repressed sexuality. Like Bayard, one half of her nature, though corrupt, is still drawn to the fullness
of life. She shrinks before the dread knowledge that the death re-
quired by the dream annihilates the dreamer. On the other hand, de-
siring as Bayard does transfiguration and thus escape from "mutable 
things" (260), she is unwilling to surrender her dream of Grecian Urn-
like stasis, purity, and freedom from mutability. She anticipates that 
Bayard's violent quest will permit her to fulfill her desires at least 
vicariously.

Unlike his sister, Horace is not divided, but he is not any bet-
ter for his wholeness. In fact, if any character in Sartoris can be 
said to be alienated, it must surely be Horace, a man, Cleanth Brooks 
suggests, who has taken for his models "Eliot's deracinated young men 
among the Boston teacups, or the protagonist of The Wasteland walking 
along the autumn-stricken Thames." But so completely has Horace de-
luded himself with his belief in his clear-sighted skepticism that he 
does not begin to comprehend his alienation from life, community, true 
vocation, even family. Narcissa is not so much a person to him as a 
place where he can hide himself: "'The meaning of peace,' he said to 
himself . . . releasing the grave words one by one within the cool bell 
of silence into which he had come at last again. . . ." (176). Be-
lieving he is fully involved with life, he does not recognize that he 
is only a poseur, a "child" (31) as Miss Jenny accurately perceives, 
playing an isolated child's version of adulthood. In his "clean, 
wretchedly-fitting khaki which but served to accentuate his air of 
fine and delicate futility" (161), he plays being a soldier. He plays 
being an artist, blowing "chastely serene" (182), brittle, flawed glass 

31 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 106.
vases which by naming he imbues with a kind of life and identity of their own. But Venice, where there is both great art and much life, he conceives to be a "voluptuous dream, a little sinister" (163). He plays being a poet but uses language not to order reality but as "flaming verbal wings" (172) to escape it. As he dreams at night, that wild, fantastic futility of his voyaged in lonely regions of its own beyond the moon, about meadows nailed with firmamented stars to the ultimate roof of things, where unicorns filled the neighing air with galloping, or grazed or lay supine in golden-hoofed repose. (179)

Finally, Horace plays the unillusioned lover with Belle Mitchell. Here it at first appears that he has managed to touch ground, the one member of the aristocracy who breaks the confining traditions of the past by running away with a real, if decadent woman. Closer inspection, however, reveals that he is only playing with the shrewd, opportunistic Belle, and she with him. She is just one more means for him to escape the necessity to live: "And then.Belle again, enveloping him like a rich and fatal drug, like a motionless and cloying sea in which he watched himself drown" (257). Cleanth Brooks is right to observe that Bayard and Horace "constitute a neatly opposed pair of romanticists,"32 but while Bayard at least swims intermittently against the tides of heritage pulling him down, Horace willingly drowns in another sea, submerging himself in the gestures of the bourgeoisie, a life that is presented so that it increases the value and vitality of Bayard's engagement.

32 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 102.
CHAPTER III

DREAM HOUSES:

SOCIAL CENTERS AND SANCTUARIES IN SARTORIS

Most readers of *Sartoris* soon realize that Faulkner examines the relationship between the nineteenth century Southern past and the early twentieth century present not only by exploring young Bayard's fatal bond with his family's heritage but also by contrasting two societies which Walter Brylowski defines as "the bucolic, backward-looking society symbolized by the horse, and the new machine society symbolized by the airplane and Bayard's automobile."¹ These readers see that while Faulkner is primarily concerned with tracing the decline of the old aristocratic order and revealing the flaws inherent in its vision of the world, he does not spare the rising bourgeois society supplanting the aristocracy. For Peter Swiggart, this new order is "an alien society";² to Robert Scholes, it is "the sordid present."³ The modern world of this novel is, as Robert Penn Warren sees it in so many of Faulkner's novels, one "in moral confusion," suffering "from a lack of discipline, of sanction, of community

¹ Faulkner's *Olympian Laugh*, p. 52.
² The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 34.
³ "Myth and Manners in *Sartoris,*" *Georgia Review*, 16 (1960), 201.
values, of a sense of mission." While all these observations are at least partially accurate, still it seems to me that they drive a larger wedge between the old and new orders than Faulkner intended. One cannot help but feel that these critics are making Sartoris bear their own sense of the great distance separating these two cultures, a distance which the novel does not always maintain. This new order may often be alien, sordid, and confused, but it hardly does justice to this new Jefferson to leave it at that. We must try to discover why this new order is alien to the old, where its confusion lies, and how it is sordid.

The new Jefferson is alien to the old aristocracy primarily in the character of its primal energies. While old Bayard and Aunt Jenny may be characterized by stasis and rigidity in their preoccupation with their frozen dream, the twentieth century seems to be all motion and flux. Old Bayard may have "a testy disregard for industrial progress" (3) and scorn the "paupers" who "sped back and forth in their automobiles" (4), but they are leaving him and his world in their dust seeking a new social center. No longer does the aristocracy come to glittering festivities in the Sartoris parlor; now the new bourgeois aristocracy, founded not on caste and the energies of its preservation but on money and the energies of upward mobility which it liberates, gathers at Belle and Harry Mitchell's to play tennis. While the Mitchells represent the social energies of this new order, the Snopeses, the other rising family in Jefferson, embody its

acquisitiveness. Like the builder of the Mitchell home, they are hill-
people from Frenchman's Bend, but unlike their diffident predecessor
who, feeling the barriers of class, returned to the hills, they have
come to stay—to do business and "gain money" (172). Flem Snopes, the
leader of the clan who began his career as a short order cook in a side
street restaurant, has gradually accrued responsibility for the main-
tenance of a society not founded on a heroic model. He soon became
manager of the city light and water plant, and for the following
few years he was a sort of handyman to the municipal government;
and three years ago, to old Bayard's profane astonishment and un-
concealed annoyance, he became vice president of the Sartoris
bank, where already a relation of his was a bookkeeper. (172)

As old Bayard recognizes without necessarily understanding why,
all this social progress is clearly not for the better. Perhaps the
Sartorises are partially justified in responding to the new order in
much the same way Colonel John Sartoris' statue stands to the world,
with their backs to it. For while the Sartorises have misspent their
energies in pursuit of dead illusions, the new Jeffersonians have
been constructing dream worlds of their own; in large measure they
are debased parodies of the antebellum myth. Perhaps the new Jeff-
erson reaches back to the antebellum myth as a means to steady itself
and forestall confusion as it rushes madly towards whatever unknown
future, but rather than providing a foundation for this new community,
the myth only serves to rationalize or hide the new Jefferson's moral
barrenness. Its tragi-comic romances are, unlike the old romantic
tragedies, "peaceful tragedies" (119) of the domestic, not moral or
social kind. The subjects of these new romances are not the Sar-
torises in their glittering parlor but Belle Mitchell and Horace
Benbow, bound in a backstairs and homewrecking affair, and Byron Snopes's social-climbing and voyeuristic post office love affair with Narcissa Benbow, consummated only in mash notes of desiccated lust and saccharine *mal d'amour*: "Your eyes shine with mistry, and how you walk makes me sick like a fever all night thinking how you walk... Your lips like cupids bow when the day comes when I press it to mine." (258). At the same time, the old dream of martial romance has become corrupted. Caspey, one of the Sartoris' servants and a black man supposedly liberated from his heritage of servitude, has returned from Europe and World War I with "two honorable wounds incurred in a razor-hedged crap game" (62). He and Horace Benbow, the YMCA soldier who rather fancies himself in khaki (164), are the new breed of soldier.

Belle Mitchell expresses the cynicism which inevitably follows this decay in spirit and values when she remarks of her husband: "'I had to listen to Harry for two years. Explaining why he couldn't go [to war]. As if I cared whether he did or not" (186). But although Harry could not go to war, still he is willing to fight and kill on principle. But instead of killing to maintain his heroic vision of what a land should be, as Colonel Sartoris did, Harry, with his smaller, domestic vision, would "kill the man that tried to wreck my home like I would a damn snake" (191). That he does not, even when Horace provokes him, reveals the extent to which he and the Colonel are men of different natures, the one a nation-builder who gambled on his dream, the other a cotton speculator who gambles on the commodities market.

What we see in Faulkner's portrayal of this new South is a new confusion of old values, a descent into disorder epitomized by the
nameless, sightless black beggar young Bayard once passes in Jefferson:

he too wore filthy khaki with a corporal's stripe on one sleeve and a crookedly-sewn Boy Scout emblem on the other, and on his breast a button commemorating the fourth Liberty Loan and a small metal brooch bearing two gold stars, obviously intended for female adornment. His weathered derby was encircled by an officer's hat-cord, and on the pavement between his feet sat a tin cup containing a dime and three pennies. (120)

The moral and social confusion of this new Jefferson is most clearly revealed, however, in the description of its houses, the new social and economic centers of the novel. Involved with the present as the Mitchells are, their house is "a huge brick house set up well to the street" (24), and when we first see it, it is fronted by a row of motor cars whose owners are at one of Belle's teas. It is ironically appropriate that since the Mitchells are supplanting the old order they should choose a house built by a hill man from Frenchman's Bend on the burned out ruins "of a fine old colonial house which stood among magnolias and oaks and flowering shrubs" (24), this new home "an architectural garbling so imposingly terrific as to possess a kind of majesty" (24). Near it are the Mitchells' pool and tennis courts on the site of the hill man's log and chicken lots, which had earlier been "a mazed and scented jungle" (26). Through such images, the newcomers' gauche home reveals its inhabitants' unstable identity, confusions of values, and lack of a coherent vision of the meaning and nature of life.

Similarly, the several residences of the Snopeses reveal their threat to the stability of the old order and their debasement of the old values. Ironically recalling the tides drowning Bayard and Horace, the Snopeses have "for the last ten years . . . been moving to town
in driblets from . . . Frenchman's Bend" (172), slowly rising in the
economic life of the city. Flem, in a parody of Colonel Sartoris'
creation of a family genealogy, "appeared unheralded one day behind
the counter of a small restaurant on a side street, patronized by
country folk. With this foothold and like Abraham of old, he brought
his blood and legal kin household by household, individual by individ-
ual, into town." (172). He began city life behind the restaurant
in a canvas tent, which now serves "as an alighting place for incoming
Snopeses" (173). Byron Snopes, Narcissa's coy lover, lives in the
Beards' rooming house. In debased contrast to the ghosts of the
Sartorises, the yard behind the Beards' is "desolate with ghosts;
ghosts of discouraged weeds, of food in the shape of empty tins,
broken boxes and barrels; a pile of stove wood and a chopping-block
across which lay an ax whose helve had been mended with rusty wire
amateurishly wound" (107). Inside, Byron's room evokes his corrupted
romantic ideal:

Upon the wall above the paper-filled fireplace a framed lithograph
of an Indian maiden in immaculate buckskin leaned her naked bosom
above a formal moonlit pool of Italian marble. She held a guitar
and a rose, and dusty sparrows sat on the window ledge and watched
them brightly through the dusty screen. (108)

Lacking the stable identity which class and heritage can confer,
these twentieth century Jeffersonians reveal a capacity for playing
at life which easily rivals the Sartorises'. While the aristocrats
spend their days playing genteel roles assigned by the past, the
Mitchells, when not playing tennis, play roles assigned by the latest
melodrama advertised outside the movie house, "its lobby plastered
with life, episodic in colored lithographed mutations" (166). Harry,
with his "bewildered pugnacity" (187) and new repeating rifle, plays the wounded and dangerous cuckhold; his wife and Horace play the romantic leads, the former building for herself

a world in which she moved romantically, finely, and a little tragically, with Horace sitting beside her and watching both Belle in her self-imposed and tragic role, and himself performing his part like the old actor whose hair is thin and whose profile is escaping him via his chin, but who can play to any cue at a moment's notice while the younger men chew their bitter thumbs in the wings. (194)

When not at play, these like the Sartorises spend much of their time with words, but instead of reading romances or spinning heroic tales of the past, the Mitchells and their guests gossip about servants, men's looks, poets, and sexual affairs. Such decay in values, morals, and manners represents a fundamental loss of human stature which the novel's imagery insists upon: Belle is "like a butterfly," with a "warm, prehensile" hand and eyes "like hothouse grapes" (29, 182); elsewhere, she is described as "like a great, still cat" (193-94). Harry, with "squat legs and his bald bullet head and his undershot jaw of rotting teeth," is as "ugly as sin" (187). Mrs. Marders, the Mitchells' ever-present dinner guest, seems clothed with flesh "draped loosely from her cheekbones like rich, slightly soiled velvet; her eyes were like the eyes of an old turkey, predatory, unwinking; a little obscene" (184). Finally, there is the red-haired Byron Snopes who crouches almost nightly beneath Narcissa Benbow's window, "darting from beneath his hidden face covert, ceaseless glances, quick and darting, all-embracing as those of an animal" (156).

When contrasted with this new South, the Sartorises regain much
of the stature denied them by the ironies attendant to their dead
dreams. They may not survive the depredations of this new era, but
they do not sacrifice their humanity to it. They retain an identity
apart from their possessions, hold values beyond expediency and
acquisitiveness, express emotions other than lust, envy, and jealousy,
and practice decorum out of more than hypocrisy. Given the character
of the new order, the Sartorises are not wholly unjustified in making
a sanctuary for themselves out of their plantation. But as he does
with the houses of the social center, Faulkner uses the Sartorises'
house and grounds to comment ironically on the lives lived and dreams
dreamt there, further revealing thereby his ambivalence toward the
materials of his heritage.

In contrast to the chaos, complexity, confusion, and instability
evoked by the houses of Jefferson, the Sartorises' mansion evokes
their dream of a transfigured and simplified past and the ambiguous
stability it affords for some members of the family. When, early in
the novel, old Bayard arrives home after having passed the brief part
of a spring afternoon reminiscing with old Falls, he "stood for a
while before his house. The white simplicity of it dreamed unbroken
among ancient sunshot trees" (6). He sees not just his house but its
enduring simplicity alive and dreaming, just as the simplification of
the Sartoris dream is its most potent feature. On another afternoon,
while Aunt Jenny and Narcissa work in the garden, "the fine and huge
simplicity" (55) of the house rises above them, dominating the scene
even as the dream of the past dominates their lives. And on still
another afternoon, now months later, young Bayard and Narcissa return
home, seeing through the trees "the white house simple and huge and steadfast" (280), almost seeming in its attitude to mock both Bayard as he struggles to come to terms with his family dream and the new Jefferson which tries to adopt the old romance of the dream to sanction its behavior. Just as the dreaming old Bayard and Jenny have turned their backs on the present, deriding time's flow and the twentieth century's confusions, so does the Sartoris house in "all its spacious and steadfast serenity" (112) seem to stand with them in their illusions of permanence.

Largely a projection of their dreaming imaginations and their satisfaction with the dream they have created, the Sartorises see their plantation almost wholly in terms of the past. It is their Grecian Urn, a "foster-child of silence and slow time," a kind of objective correlative evoking complex emotion through associations with the past, emotions they do not fully understand. Simon and old Bayard drive by the salvia bed before the house, and suddenly they are "where a Yankee patrol had halted on a day long ago" (6). Once inside and upstairs, old Bayard pauses by the stained glass surrounding the balcony door and in the "richly solemn" (19) light which it casts is transported back to Aunt Jenny's first telling of the story of the first Bayard. Still later the same day we see Simon with the Sartoris silverware and are told how Simon's grandfather had buried it beneath the barn floor to keep it from the Yankees. That afternoon, Jenny looks down upon her garden and sees not the flowers now blooming there but "shoots and graftings from the far-away Carolina gardens she had known as a girl" (42). In the evening, old Bayard
sits on the veranda and hearing the whistle from the railroad, "arrogant and resonant and sad" (43), recalls how John Sartoris used to sit, watching "his two daily trains" (43). Days later in the parlor, it takes only a few chords from Narcissa at the piano to roll "the curtain back upon the scene" in Jenny's imagination, evoking "figures in crinoline and hooped muslin and silk; in stocks and flowing coats, in gray too, with crimson sashes and sabers in gallant, sheathed repose" (61). And weeks later, while Simon stands on the Sartoris veranda, watching

Sartorises come and go in a machine a gentleman of his day would have scorned and which any pauper could and any fool would ride in, it seemed to him that John Sartoris stood beside him, with his bearded and hawklike face and an expression of haughty and fine contempt. (112)

For each of these characters it is as if the years 1860 to 1876 had collapsed into one great present moment in which the real present intrudes scarcely at all.

But while the images of the Sartoris plantation evoke their vision of the heroism, stability, and equanimity of the old order, they also criticize the family's illusions of the enduring value of their way of life and their retreat from the present. Oblivious to the present world beyond "the impalpable veil of the immediate, the familiar" (55), the family cannot hear the mockingbirds crying in symbolic scorn of their isolation and attempts to live in the past. One calls as Jenny remembers her childhood. Another sings at young Bayard's homecoming; two more call after he tells of Johnny's death. And another sings in the spring a year later when Miss Jenny speaks of Johnny, her name for Bayard and Narcissa's as yet unborn son, "con-
fusing the unborn with the dead" (358). Nor in their oblivion can Jenny and old Bayard see the extent to which their transfigured sanctuary represents the dream as not just "still and serenely benignant" (7) but doomed to die. Dreaming alone among alien things, the Sartoris mansion has become a mausoleum, an ironic monument of the family's attempt to live a dead past. The image of the rose—romantic and odorless—on their veranda, choking the ordinarily hardy wisteria with which it is intertwined, presents Faulkner's irony, the "roses of Death" (10) sapping the Sartorises' ability to live in the present. As they dream of a past now extinct because those who lived then could not adapt, so "the shrouded furniture" in the seldom-used parlor looms "like albino mastodons" (60). Most of all is the Sartoris attic a place of the dead, "cluttered with indiscriminate furniture—chairs and sofas like patient ghosts holding lightly in dry and rigid embrace yet other ghosts—a fitting place for dead Sartorises to gather and speak among themselves of glamorous and old disastrous days" (89–90). As if to suggest the hopelessness of their attempts to stop time, the house is suffused with a funereal gloom. On that first day when old Bayard returns home from his bank, the house is "silent, richly desolate of motion or any sound" (7), in contrast to the noisy, motion-filled Jefferson he has just left. To make the contrast between the dead past and the living present more complete, any light which penetrates the house serves only "to increase the gloom" (8). The parlor, too, is in "gloom," with an "atmosphere of solemn and macabre fustiness" (60), "where even time stagnated a little" (248). As a place of the dead, dust is everywhere: in the parlor (201), in
young Bayard's room, and in the attic, "smelling of dust and silence and ancient disused things" (89). Given the aura of death surrounding the Sartorises, it is fitting that the novel closes soon after Jenny's trip to the cemetery, where all Sartorises are finally gathered "in solemn conclave about the dying reverberation of their arrogant lusts, their dust moldering quietly beneath the pagan symbols of their vain-glory and the carven gestures of it in enduring stone" (376).

The Benbow house, although in Jefferson and closer to the emerging new social center, partakes of many of the same images as the Sartorises' house and so helps to generalize Faulkner's indictment of the Southern aristocracy. It, too, is a sanctuary from the complicated present and life itself, "a brick house among cedars on a hill" (70). "Set well back from the street and its dust," it emanates "a gracious and benign peace, steadfast as a windless afternoon in a world without motion or sound" (169). Like the Sartorises' house, the Benbows' is a place of the dead. It was built "in the funereal light Tudor which the young Victoria had sanctioned," and among its cedars, "even on the brightest days, lay a resinous and exhilarating gloom" (169). A "brick doll's house" (170), it is the perfect sanctuary for those who would play at life but avoid life's complexities. Here Narcissa can read "lost from lesser and inconstant things" (176), but never Shakespeare because, as she tells Horace, "'he wasn't a gentleman ... he doesn't have any secrets. He tells everything!" (177). Here, within his "cool bell of silence" (176), Horace can give himself up to his imagination, "voyaging in safe and glittering regions beyond the moon" (180). Neither, however, pays the slightest attention to the mocking-
birds who love the Benbow's cedar trees (169) or the one singing in the oak tree beneath which Narcissa sits.

Young Bayard, of course, finds little peace in these aristocratic sanctuaries except for the few weeks when he falls into harmony with the earth. His family plantation is too imbued with his projection of the serene dream of the distant past, both seducing and mocking him, and with the nightmare of the nearer past, his memories of his failure of Johnny and his family name. And so he tries to escape his family's threatful sanctuary, seeking in alcohol and the common people of Jefferson a moment's release from his apparently insoluble conflicts. But Bayard is not permitted either to drown his guilt and shame or to forget the family identity mocking his inadequacy. After he is thrown from the stallion and entrusted to V. K. Suratt, the itinerant sewing-machine salesman, and Hub, a young sharecropper, it first appears that he might find a little peace drinking with these two simple men "in a small bowl of peacefulness remote from the world and time" (139) on Hub's farm. Instead he is isolated in the very family identity he seeks to escape by the class distinctions his friends insist upon, and we are presented in a series of epiphanies with the social and natural offenses committed in the name of the Sartoris dream, epiphanies which contradict Cleanth Brooks's belief in the "stability" of those characters who represent the novel's "folk tradition--still sane, vigorous, and very much alive."5 As Bayard rides onto Hub's farm, he "removed his hat and held it before his face"

5 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 107.
(136) to protect himself from the sun and does not see the human and natural effects of an old aristocratic economy operated according to the share-cropper system. Hub's farm is comprised of "ragged, ill-tended fields . . ., sorry fruit trees and a stunted grove of silver poplar shrubs . . ., a small weathered house" (136), rusted farm implements hidden in weeds, and an ancient barn whose "hallway yawned in a stale desolation--a travesty of earth's garnered fullness and its rich inferences" (137). Caught between the failure of the old order and the uncertainty of the new, Hub and Suratt are as displaced as any persons in the novel. Like Bayard, they, too, are in a kind of flight. Speaking of his harsh sharecropper's childhood which justifies a flight from the past, Suratt remarks,

"But I swo' then, come what mought, I wound't never plant nothin' in the ground, soon's I could he'p myself. It's all right fer folks that owns the land, but folks like my folks was don't never own no land, and ever' time we made a furrow, we was scratchin' dirt fer somebody else." (141)

When they are about to leave the farm, Hub implicitly echoes Suratt's disgust with sharecropping when he responds to an unidentified woman in his doorway:

"Hub," she said in a flat, country voice.
"Goin' to town," Hub answered shortly. "Sue'll have to milk." (142)

As Brooks suggests, each of these men is sane, but the images of the farm must qualify Brooks's view of them. Perhaps Brooks might agree that Hub and Suratt would be less than sane if they did not flee or evade the dehumanizing life which the old system made their lot. But it is impossible to agree with Brooks that these men are the stable representatives of a vigorous folk society. It is unwise to see too
many similarities between the V. K. Suratt of *Sartoris* and the V. K. Ratliff of *The Hamlet*, and this is what Brooks may have done. The two sewing-machine salesmen are only superficially similar.

While Hub and Suratt owe little but their callouses and bad memories to families like the Sartorises, still they are utterly servile before Bayard and the order he is supposed to represent, reminding him with almost every word and gesture of the identity he believes himself unworthy of. As they pass through a barbed wire fence, Suratt, in a gesture of deference, holds "the top strand taut and set his foot on the lower one until Bayard was through" (138). Once at their drinking spot, an uncertain Suratt begins to doubt the propriety of their actions: "'I don't know if we ain't a-goin' to git in trouble, givin' Mr. Bayard whiskey, Hub.'" And although he rationalizes their behavior, he yet remains diffident, since "'this is the first time me and him ever taken a drink together. Ain't that so, Mr. Bayard? ... I reckon you'll want a drinkin' cup won't you?'" (138-39). Their brief, ironic idyll is brought to an abrupt close when Suratt continues to fawn over Bayard, calling him "Mr. Bayard": "'Dammit,' Bayard said, 'quit calling me Mr. Bayard'" (142). Try though he might, alcohol never dulls his sensibilities, nor does his choice of companions enable him to escape his name—neither here nor later that evening when Bayard, Hub, Mitch the freight agent, and three Negroes drive about the countryside serenading the ladies.

"'It's my damned head,'" Bayard tells Mitch, ironically suggesting the furies born of a mind bent on destruction. "'I keep thinking
another drink will ease it off some'" (146), he says, but he can find no sanctuary from the conflicts of a divided identity.

After he frightens his grandfather to death, young Bayard first flees to the MacCallums, ostensibly at Rafe MacCallum's invitation to a fox hunt. In reality, of course, he chooses to hide himself at the MacCallums' farm because, down a "dim, infrequent road" (339) in the hills fourteen miles from Jefferson, it is literally a sanctuary from the knowledge of old Bayard's death. But he also seeks the family out because, as hill men, theirs should be an identity utterly different from his own; he still hopes to escape, paradoxically, the shame for his failure to be a Sartoris and the identity hounding him to ever more violent gestures. Finally, he comes to the MacCallums through a cold December afternoon, simply seeking warmth—actual warmth, human warmth, and warmth against the deathly chill that comes from the denial of his fleshly humanity. But what Bayard seeks in the way of a sanctuary and what he finds in this place where years before he was initiated, supposedly, into Sartoris manhood are, of course, two different things.

Seeking sanctuary from his past, Bayard is confronted by it wherever he turns. While not as servilely class-conscious as Hub and Suratt, the MacCallums still will not permit Bayard to forget that he is a Sartoris, "comp'ny" (318), different from them. At Bayard's arrival, in a gesture of both politeness and deference, Buddy MacCallum refuses to allow him to put up his horse. Later that evening, after

6 Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, p. 54.
inquiring about Bayard's family, Mr. MacCallum tells him, "'We 'uns gits up at fo' o'clock, Bayard, ... But you don't have to git up till daylight'" (318). The next morning, Buddy does let Bayard sleep, going hunting without him. When Rafe later wakens him, he recognizes but does not understand the ravages of the family "presences" seen in Bayard's face: "'We let you sleep,'" Rafe says. "'Good Lord, boy, you look like a ha'nt. Didn't you sleep last night?'" (325). Nor will the MacCallums--or Bayard himself, for that matter--permit him to forget Johnny and how much more a Sartoris Johnny was than Bayard is. When he first greets Mandy, the MacCallums' black cook, he remembers how Johnny had never forgotten to bring her "some trinket of no value" (314), while Bayard gave her only money. Then next morning, having spent an almost sleepless night dreaming of Johnny's death, reliving "it again as you might run over a printed, oft-read tale" (321), he eats breakfast "while Mandy talked to him about his brother" (326). And when Bayard and the MacCallums finally go fox hunting, they, too, fall to speaking of Johnny:

"John was a fine boy," the old man said.
"Yes, suh," Jackson repeated, "a right warm-hearted boy. Henry says he never come out hyer withouten he brung Mandy and the boys a little sto'-bought somethin'."
"He never sulled on a hunt," Stuart said. "No matter how cold and wet it was, even when he was a little chap, with that 'ere single bar'l he bought with his own money, that kicked 'im so hard ever' time he shot it. And yit he'd tote it around, instead of that 'ere sixteen old Colonel give 'im, jest because he saved up his own money and bought it hisself."
"Yes," Jackson agreed, "ef a feller gits into somethin' on his own accord, he'd ought to go through with hit cheerful." (332)

Wherever Bayard turns, his insufficiencies stand revealed, if only to himself, and always in terms of his membership in the Sartoris family.
Where Johnny was warm, concerned for others, determined, independent, and responsible, Bayard is the opposite in all respects. Ironically, of course, because his twin was all these things, Bayard can never have so. Obsessed with matching his brother's full possession of his identity, Bayard must seem cold, aloof, dependent, and irresponsible to others. All he shares with Johnny presently is determination, but even here he must seem indecisive to others, since one half of his identity is determined to be a Sartoris, while the other half is determined to escape that definition.

Seeking sanctuary from the destructive source of this division, his family, Bayard is forced to confront a patriarchal family which comments ironically and ambivalently on his own. It has been customary when reading the MacCallum episode to see the family as sympathetically as Cleanth Brooks does. The MacCallums "are not confused by the times. . . . their lives . . . have the natural dignity of all lives that possess a certain form and discipline."7 Unlike the Sartoris family, each member of the MacCallum family is different, has a physical and psychological identity all his own, yet remains unmistakably a MacCallum, and not only in the dignity and integrity which seem to set this family off from almost all other characters in the novel. About Henry MacCallum there is "something domestic, womanish. . . . He it was who superintended the kitchen (he was a better cook now than Mandy) and the house, where he could be found most of the time, pottering soberly at some endless task" (313). Stuart has "much of Henry's

7 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 110.
placidity. He was a good farmer and a canny trader, and he had a respectable bank account of his own" (316). Rafe is much more easy going, almost loquacious. "Although they were twins, there was no closer resemblance between them than between any two of the others, as though the die were too certain and made too clean an imprint to be either hurried or altered, even by nature" (315). Jackson, the eldest son at fifty-two, is "a sort of shy and impractical Cincinnatus" (315). Lee is the loner of the family. His eyes are "black and restless; behind them lurked something wild and sad" (312). While he seems to recall Bayard here, Lee has none of the isolating drivenness which characterizes Bayard, nor does Lee's family seem to be responsible for his wildness and sadness. Buddy is the youngest MacCallum, born of his father's second wife:

... his hazel eyes and the reddish thatch cropped close to his round head was a noticeable contrast to his brothers' brown eyes and black hair. But the old man had stamped Buddy's face as clearly as any one of the other boys', and despite its youth it too was like the others—aquiline and spare, reserved and grave, though a trifle ruddy with his fresh coloring and finer skin. (334)

In this family individual personalities are not destroyed by the family name. There is variety in unity, the unifying power being the patriarch, Virginius MacCallum, who is "straight as an Indian, and with the exception of Buddy's lean and fluid length, he towered over his sons by a head" (314).

In a provocative essay criticizing this conventional view of the MacCallums, Albert Devlin argues that Virginius is a "highly aggressive, abrasive personality, projecting an image which is distant,
unapproachable, formidable." While it is certainly true that Vir-
ginius is the unmistakable head of his family, Devlin's characteri-
ization of him is not entirely fair. The elder MacCallum is blunt,
forceful, and often sarcastic, but he does not control his sons as
completely as Colonel Sartoris does his heirs or as ruthlessly as
Devlin suggests. Virginius reveals as much himself in response to
his sons' playful teasing:

"I be damned ef I ain't raised the damnedest, smartest set of
boys in the world. Can't tell 'em nothin', can't learn 'em
nothing', can't even set in front of my own fire fer the whole
passel of 'em tellin' me how to run the whole damn country.
Hyer, you boys, git on to bed." (336)

But Devlin's analysis is not without considerable value, as Mac-
Callum's scene-ending words reveal. We are not told, but supposedly
the sons did go to bed at their father's command. Devlin accuses the
MacCallum sons, some of them men in their forties and fifties, of ar-
rested development, and we may consider them emotionally immature inso-
far as they bend meekly before their father's whims at this and many
other moments. Even more important, however, are Devlin's reminders
of the sons' bachelorhood, the feminine qualities of some of them,
and the fact that all these grown men still live together under one
roof. It is possible, Devlin suggests, that Virginius' "masculinity
is so overwhelming, his personality so forceful, that his sons find it
impossible to identify with him and thus develop their own masculinity." 9

8 "Sartoris: Rereading the MacCallum Episode," Twentieth Century
Literature, 17 (1971), 86.
9 Ibid.
Of all the sons, only Buddy gives promise of marriage someday, and he is the one who fought to free himself from his father's identity. During military training, he battled two men "steadily and thoroughly and without anger" (335) who called him by his real name, Virge, his father's name. But several objections can be made to Devlin here: as we have already seen with Bayard, marriage is no guarantee of emotional maturity or independence from one's family. Furthermore, Buddy fought without anger, suggesting that his response was more a ritual than a compulsion. The independence he already possessed demanded that he fight, not the independence he feared he lacked. Finally, to accuse several MacCallum sons of arrested development because they have feminine traits is hardly much of an accusation in a novel where the obvious masculinity of the males of the title family is such an ambivalent quality. Young Bayard and Johnny are thoroughly masculine according to a heroic definition of it, and note what becomes of them. Besides, there is no suggestion the thoroughly masculine patriarch is bothered by his sons who have feminine qualities; if we are expected to see these qualities negatively, one would think the elder MacCallum would be most disturbed at their presence in his sons, even if he was responsible for their presence. It begins to appear that neither Devlin's view nor the view of those he criticizes is satisfactory alone as an explanation of the MacCallum family. Perhaps Faulkner intends us to see this hill family as ambivalently as we do the Sartorises; if we do, we see that the MacCallums comment ironically on young Bayard's inability to resolve his family problem with their unity and individ-
uality and with their weaknesses expand Faulkner's exploration of a whole region in decline.

Bayard sought sanctuary here not only because this family should have been so different from his own, but also because among these simple people, one would expect to be free of the kind of heroic consciousness characteristic of the Sartorises. Bayard does not expect to be reminded of his failures at heroic self-definition. What we discover, however, is that the MacCallum's, too, have heroic stature, but one free of the Sartorises' compulsive posturing. Like Colonel John Sartoris, Virginius MacCallum fought in the Civil War, but unlike the Colonel, he walked, at sixteen years of age, from Mississippi to Lexington, Virginia, "enlisted, served four years in the Stonewall brigade and walked back to Mississippi and built himself a house and got married" (310). He did not leave his regiment in a fit of pique or take off for a season to plant crops. Buddy, like Bayard, enlisted to fight in World War I, but unlike Bayard, he had no strong attachments to the military way of life: "'Ain't enough to do. Good life for a lazy man!" (320). In spite of these feelings, he served courageously we are told in a diffident style which neatly matches the MacCallum's reticence and more realistic attitude toward wartime heroics:

In Europe, still following the deep but uncomplicated compulsions of his nature, he had contrived, unwittingly perhaps, to perpetrate something which was later ascertained by Authority to have severely annoyed the enemy, for which Buddy received his charm, as he called it. What it was he did, he could never be brought to say. . . . (335)

This contrasts forcefully with Sartorises' tales of the past and their
futile attempts to recapture it. Buddy's identity does not depend upon what he or his ancestors did in wartime. His heroism is part of his nature; there is nothing ulterior about it as there is with the Sartorises seeking to prove themselves worthy of their dreamt identity.

Finally, as I have suggested, Bayard flees to the MacCallums seeking warmth, but he finds only cold, in spite of the hospitality of his hosts. On the first night, he is not prepared for sleep in the "lamplit chill of the lean-to room" (318) where he is to stay with Buddy. After Buddy drifts off to sleep, Bayard relives his brother's death, once more feeling the duality within, the flesh which seems to prevent some more essential Bayard from achieving his passionate self-consummation: The very atmosphere is "like slush ice in the vise of the cold, oppressing his lungs. His feet were cold, his limbs sweated with it, and about his hot heart his body was rigid and shivering" (322). He rises in despair at this latest expression of his divided nature and considers suicide, but so frozen is he, not by the cold but by the rigid compulsions of his past determining the manner of his death, that he cannot go through with it, even though it seems the only alternative to his guilt and shame and even though the death scripted for him by his past is also a kind of suicide. Instead, he opens the lean-to door upon the night, feeling once more that it is his flesh preventing him from the release he seeks: "He was shaking slowly and steadily with cold; beneath his hands his flesh was rough and without sensation; yet still it jerked and jerked as though something within the dead envelope of him strove to free itself" (323).
He does not understand that it is not the envelope which is dead but his mind, struggling to be free of a shameful life and achieve the rigid, Grecian-Urn-like stasis which the Sartoris dream demands. The MacCallums, in harmony with themselves, their family, and their world, are, by contrast, at home in the cold. Such is never the case with Faulkner's divided heroes.

Driven out as much by the inhospitable nature of his sanctuary as by the family's pre-Christmas trip to Jefferson where they will surely learn of old Bayard's death, young Bayard announces his departure. Unable to lose his identity or quell his sense of responsibility for failing that identity, he must run once more, but not even then does he escape his family. After riding through "wild and black" hills where there is "no sign of any habitation, no trace of man's hand" (339), Bayard finally stops for Christmas Eve, seeking shelter at a black share-cropper's cabin. But he is not granted sanctuary until he is once more forced to confess himself a Sartoris:

"Who is you, white folks?"
"Bayard Sartoris, from Jefferson. Here." He extended his hand. The Negro made no effort to take it.
"Banker Sartoris's folks?" (341)

"Yes," says Bayard; only then is he granted shelter.
CHAPTER IV

A GAME CALLED "SARTORIS":

PRIMAL INJUSTICE IN SARTORIS

After young Bayard departs from the black sharecropper's cabin, once more in earnest flight from guilt and shame, the reader of Sartoris asks, not whether Bayard will accomplish his violent Sartoris destiny, but when. He is, after all, the one he would escape. Further, the novel is checkered with the language of necessity and fate, arising from what T. H. Adamowski calls the "Sartoris tradition in which death seems to come not with a mere rush of contingency but as a certain 'necessary' way that Sartoris men take leave of the world."¹ For the reader, then, it is simply a question of how and when young Bayard will accomplish his ironic destiny during his flight from it. There is, however, another, even more important irony revealed in Bayard's flight: the apparently unshakable fate dogging him is, in reality, just one more feature of the Sartoris's transfiguring dream of the past by which the family gives meaning to their lives and avoids responsibility for their acts. Through their dreaming, old Bayard and Aunt Jenny have given not only a substance which it never had to the past but a false shape as well, tragic in its design. That genealogy which Colonel John Sartoris called poppycock thus becomes a rigid pattern which supposedly must be fulfilled by each generation.


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of Sartorises. That the pattern is a figment of the imagination does not lessen old Bayard and Miss Jenny's certainty of its accomplishment nor its weight as it bears on young Bayard's choices and acts. One might say the Sartorises are determined to be tragic in spite of themselves.

The novel's first Sartorises, the first Bayard and Colonel John, had no sense of tragic destiny, however. What they did have, as I have identified them, were fatalistic energies born of their fear of death and the need to compensate for that fear in order to maintain their self-images. As old man Falls remarks to old Bayard: "'Destruction's like airy other coward. . . . Hit won't strike a feller that's a-lookin' hit in the eye lessen he pushes hit too clost. Your paw knowed that'" (235). The first Bayard apparently did not know this, because he pushed destruction too close and died a violent but hardly tragic death. It was Aunt Jenny who turned that death into an inspirational and "finely tragic focal point" (9) for the whole family. She saw her brother Bayard's scorn for the Christian tenets of salvation but thought, missing the inconsistency, that "he believed too firmly in Providence, as all his actions clearly showed, to have any religious convictions whatever" (9). By according to her reckless and heedless brother a belief in Providence similar to hers--Providence as predestination--she was able to interpret his life as having a pattern, a direction, a divinely ordained destiny, a meaning discoverable if only in hindsight.

Colonel John did not conceive a family destiny any more than his brother did, except, that is, for the death which comes to all men.
On the contrary, he believed in his own individuality, the necessity to create his own destiny and take responsibility for that destiny, since "'only what a man takes and keeps has any significance'" (92). If this self-creation meant that he had to create a genealogy to give roots to his identity "'in America, where . . . the only house from which we can claim descent with any assurance is the Old Bailey'" (92), then so be it. But genealogy and the destiny which comes to be a part of it are only a fillip to individual achievement. According to Colonel John, man has the freedom to create himself and then delude himself about the origins of his creation. And Colonel John took this freedom. He created and maintained his image of himself through the Civil War and the beginning of his railroad, but then, in the words of old Falls, "'That'us when hit changed. When he had to start killin' folks. . . . When a feller has to start killin' folks, he 'most always has to keep on killin' 'em. And when he does, he's already dead hisself'" (22-23). The Colonel wore himself out attempting to impose his vision on an intransigent world and in the process lost the poise necessary to fend off destruction. After killing the carpet-baggers agitating for the Negro vote, finishing the first leg of his railroad, and winning election to the state legislature, he gave himself up in expiation for the inability of his flawed humanity to realize its dreams: "'And so,' he said to his son about his opponent in the recent election, "'Redlaw'll kill me tomorrow, for I shall be unarmed. I'm tired of killing men. . . . Pass the wine, Bayard'" (23). Old Bayard, however, saw much more that evening than his father's weariness and disillusion: "It showed on John Sartoris' brow, the
dark shadow of fatality and doom . . . while he talked to his son" (23). And when, the following day, his father did die, old Bayard's vision was confirmed.

Given their tragic vision of the past and their obsession with genealogy, it is not unusual that old Bayard and Miss Jenny should come to rationalize the destiny of all Sartorises in tragic and deterministic terms. Having adopted the forms of lives lived in "glamorous and old disastrous days" (90), they logically expect that their ends will be the same as the ancestors they imitate. They, like Simon, come to see the Sartoris plantation "distinct with miniature verisimilitude, as though it were a stage set for the diversion of" (113) Colonel John Sartoris on which they, though diminished to the stature of puppets, must enact a destiny worthy of their dream. They are, of course, unaware that they pull their own strings. Occasionally, Aunt Jenny speaks of this destiny in terms of a kind of corrupted Calvinism. God may be in His heaven running things, but He needs as much help as He can get with the vainglorious and willful Sartorises. And since she is sure of her destination by dint of "'laying up crowns and harps for a long time'" (67), she has appointed herself God's executrix on earth for those "'Sartorises . . . just set out to plague and worry'" (67) her. She first has

old Bayard's soul to get into heaven somehow . . . what with him and young Bayard tearing around the country every afternoon at the imminent risk of their necks. About young Bayard's soul Miss Jenny did not alarm herself at all: he had no soul. (199-200)

Having taken upon herself responsibility for divine judgment, she feels-free to question what appears to be God's very arbitrary governance.
Speaking to old Bayard about his suicidal grandson, she argues, "'He ought to have a wife. . . . Let him get a son, then he can break his neck as soon and as often as he pleases. Providence doesn't seem to have any judgment at all. . .'" (88-89). To untangle Aunt Jenny's faulty logic, we must suppose that God has no judgment because He took the favored Johnny who seemed to have a much greater right to life than his twin. Thus does she illustrate her assumption that Providence ought to work in ways that seem reasonable to her.

More often, however, Miss Jenny joins old Bayard in a nihilistic and pagan conception of Sartoris destiny. In this mood, their protests against their self-created primal injustice become more shrill but no less ironic or illogical. Now salvation becomes impossible for the Sartorises; all must die a violent, premature death. When old Bayard tramps up to the attic to enter in the family Bible Johnny's name, the names of young Bayard's first wife and child, and their death dates, he is reminded that he has delayed because "the other grandson still possessed quickness and all the incalculable portent of his heritage. So he had forborne for the time being, expecting to be able to kill two birds with one stone, as it were" (90). Aunt Jenny elaborates this heritage-as-destiny belief when she protests Dr. Peabody's diagnosis of old Bayard's weak heart: "'Did you ever hear of a Sartoris dying from a natural cause, like anybody else?' Miss Jenny demanded. 'Don't you know that heart ain't going to take Bayard off before his time?'" (103). Because the Sartorises are biologically determined to such violent ends, old Bayard and Jenny come to see themselves as a doomed race. Old Bayard rides in young Bayard's car, Miss Jenny says, "'for
the same reason that boy himself does. Sartoris. It's in the blood. Savages, every one of 'em. No earthly use to anybody" (298). Imagine her surprise, then, when old Bayard fails the family destiny and dies of the same weak heart whose soundness she averred. His betrayal, however, does not really shake her faith in destiny:

Miss Jenny felt that old Bayard had somehow flouted them all, had committed lese majesty toward his ancestors and the lusty glamour of the family doom by dying, as she put it, practically from the "inside out." Thus he was in something like a bad odor with her. . . . (354)

Apparently Miss Jenny believes that the only means of mitigating this doom lies in the power she primitively accords to names: if "Sartoris" means destruction, first names can at least soften the blow. Referring to both the name and its bearer, she speaks of young Bayard as she tells the pregnant Narcissa what to call her child:

"We seem to have pretty well worn out Bayard, for the time being. . . . I reckon we'd better name him John this time."
"Yes?"
"Yes," Miss Jenny repeated. "We'll name him John." (277)

As the flippant tone of many of the preceding speeches suggests, Faulkner chooses to play for comedy old Bayard and Miss Jenny's conception of and protest against their common destiny. They believe in their dream and tragic fate too certainly to take their belief very seriously any more. With his light touch, Faulkner prevents us from taking their tragic language seriously and guides us to the ironies underlying their speeches. Old Bayard and Jenny use the language of fate not to comprehend the meaning of their lives and those of their relatives but to rationalize their absorption with death and the past and to evade responsibility for their choices and acts. Compounding
this irony, however, some Sartorises do achieve the destiny their name implies for them because the language of fate becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. As Olga Vickery remarks, Miss Jenny, for example, is unaware of the extent to which "her semi-humorous carping on the inevitable end of each Sartoris ... contributes to that end by admitting the closed pattern of life they have embraced." The family is, after all, bound by their conceptions of themselves as created in their fictions. But their fates are ironic, not the tragic ones they suppose.

Horace and Narcissa Benbow and their sometime guardian-housekeeper, Aunt Sally Wyatt, use this same language of tragedy about both themselves and the Sartorises. While serving to deepen the fateful coloring of the novel's surface texture, their language also characterizes their own delusions and casts the Sartorises' in even greater ironic relief. Aunt Sally denies young Bayard and Johnny's responsibility for their fates with the argument from circumstance distorted by the genetic fallacy and the language of sin and judgment:

"One's bad as the other. But I reckon it ain't their fault, raised like they were. Rotten spoiled, both of 'em ... But those folks, thinking there wasn't anybody quite as good as a Sartoris. Even Lucy Cranston, come of as good people as there are in the state, acting like it was divine providence that let her marry one Sartoris and be the mother of two more. Pride, false pride."

"It was a judgment on 'em, taking John instead of that other one. John at least tipped his hat to a lady on the street, but that other boy ..." (74)

While Aunt Sally is correct in her evaluation of Sartoris false pride, she nevertheless over-estimates the family's power to corrupt by under-

2 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 25.
estimating the fatal attraction such families have for women like Narcissa. "'You better stay away from that boy,'" she warns Narcissa of Bayard. "'He'll be killing you same as he did that poor little wife of his'" (74). She fails to understand that if Sartoris wives are corrupted, they become so through the same free choice of destiny exercised by their husbands. "'Nobody got me into it,'" Narcissa later admits to Aunt Jenny about her marriage to Bayard. "'I did it myself'" (298).

She does it herself because, as I suggested in my discussion of her primal energy, she has the same capacity as the Sartorises for self-delusion and the same need to transfigure her flight from life into a dream of tragic necessity and so evade responsibility for her acts. James Gray Watson argues that the "progress of her life is from stasis to motion," 3 but this is hardly the case. She much prefers the static role of tragic heroine, forever fair, to the confusing and threatening energies of her repressed humanity. And so she conceives of Johnny and young Bayard not as Aunt Sally's "'wild Indians!'" (74) but in more generous pagan terms as romantic tragic heroes. To her Johnny was a hero flawed by the very energy and vitality which gave his life such meaning as it had, he "'who had not waited for Time and its furniture to teach him that the end of wisdom is to dream high enough not to lose the dream in the seeking of it" (74). She fails to recognize, however, that his dream was a nightmare about death, one not compromised by any wisdom. His laughter at the "mouth-sounds that

3 "Sartoris and the Search for Form," p. 29.
stood for repose" (74) was in fact nervous laughter in the face of the mundane life he spurned for a glorious transfiguration. Seeing in him not the fear, which she also possessed, but something "merry and bold and wild" (73), she is able to rationalize her misperceptions into "the blind tragedy of human events" (356) which destroyed him.

In young Bayard, her second choice perhaps because his "bleak arrogance" (356) cannot successfully mask the denial and fear of life he shares with her, she foresees a tragic destiny born more of necessity than chance. It is his doom which most attracts her to him, the certainty of his escape from the complexities of responsibility, answering her own desire for escape. On an autumn afternoon, she watches her husband talking to a Negro, "the one lean and tall and fatally young and the other stooped with time, and her spirit went out in serene and steady waves, surrounding him unawares" (279-80). But the doom she imputes to him not only prompts her maternal, protective instincts; it also seems to be at the root of what sexual feeling she has for him. On an evening not long after the above, Bayard persuades her to go hunting where she sees another vision of death in a 'possum soon to be killed: "She looked at the motionless thing with pity and distinct loathing--such a paradox, its vulpine, skull-like grim and those tiny, human-looking hands, and the long ratlike tail of it" (285). She flees the fall of the ax, but later, when she and Bayard are about to return to the house, "she took his face between her palms and drew it down, but his lips were cold and upon them she tasted fatality and doom, and she clung to him for a time, her head bowed against his chest" (289). Just as she has a "shrinking curiosity"
(285) about the o'possum's death, so is she drawn to Bayard with whom she can share the "isolation of that doom he could not escape" (289), a doom rationalizing her own isolation from humanity behind "the walls of her serene garden" (258) of the imagination.

So completely has she accepted the Sartoris myth answering her own fantasies and fears of life that, months later, pregnant with Bayard's son,

it was as though already she could discern the dark shape of that doom which she had incurred, standing beside her chair, waiting and biding its time. "No, no," she whispered with passionate protest, surrounding her child with wave after wave of that strength which welled so abundantly within her as the days accumulated, manning her walls with invincible garrisons. (356)

Ironically, as the heroic imagery of her thought reveals, Narcissa tries to oppose the doom of which she is now "forewarned as well as fore-armed" (356) by invincible garrisons of the very energy which has driven her to accept the myth of doom in the first place. Both the doom threatening her child and her defense against the doom are products of her heroic imagination. Believing herself secure, Narcissa sits back, "serene again behind her forewarned bastions, listening, admiring more than ever that indomitable" (357) Miss Jenny. Just when she believes she has most successfully opposed the Sartorises' threat to her and her son, she most fully surrenders to their myth in her heroic conception of Sartoris women, of whom she is now one:

And she thought how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foes no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it. "And now she is trying to make me one of them; to make of my child just another rocket to glare for a moment in the sky, then die away." (357-58)
Aunt Jenny is not forcing her and her child; the critical choices are Narcissa’s, as is the martial imagery. James Gray Watson argues that Narcissa will not perpetuate in her son the Sartoris myth destroying her husband, but it is evident in the terms of her resistance here that she has bought the whole myth. Thus does a myth of destiny become destiny.

With Horace Benbow, the tone inhabiting the language of tragedy once more broadens into comedy. So ludicrously does he apply the terminology that the ironies in the other characters’ perceptions of destiny are through him debased almost to farce. The fate which the Sartorises have created as the culmination of their dream becomes for Horace the "'rotten luck they have. Funny family. Always going to war, and always getting killed'" (167). In contrast to them, Horace believes himself "'immune to destruction: I have a magic'" (178). Of course, he is immune to destruction because he so cravenly evades the consequences of and responsibility for his actions through "the never-failing magic" (180) of words which remake reality for him as they have done for the Sartorises. He rationalizes away "his own fantastic impotence" (198) through lies, for which he finds justification. "'You forget that lying is a struggle for survival'" (198), he once instructs Narcissa in words which are echoed and re-echoed in every character's attempt to evade responsibility for his life. Lying is "'little puny man's way of dragging circumstance about to fit his preconception of himself as a figure in the world. Revenge on the

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sinister gods'" (198). While Horace intends to accuse Mrs. Marders of lying to Narcissa about his affair with Belle, his words also ironically indict his vision of himself as Belle's tragic lover, Narcissa's vision of herself as a tragic heroine, and the Sartorises of themselves as tragic heroes. The survival for which they struggle is for their illusions, and the sinister gods against which they struggle are those who have made them what they have chosen to be--themselves. Thus, the circle of illogic inhabited by all characters is complete: They lie, creating myths which reshape circumstance, only to fool themselves. No gods are responsible for what becomes of them.

Young Bayard Sartoris does not have the luxury of Horace's sophistry, however, nor can he joke in half self-conscious irony, as do Jenny and old Bayard, about the family destiny weighing so heavily upon him as both fate and responsibility. While the others talk and await their dreamt destiny to overtake them, he is driven by guilt and shame to confront and thus create it. As might be expected with his divided energies, Bayard's attitudes toward his fate are divided. Given his fear of dying yet his need to die to cancel guilt and claim his identity, he is both disgusted and fascinated by his fate, protests it, yet in action seeks to achieve it. With the instruction Bayard has received in the family's destiny, he cannot help but feel it looming before him. It exists in the family myths of violent and glorious self-definition heard since he could understand and in the example set for him by Johnny's death. It fills the air whenever Jenny and old Bayard try to explain his recklessness. It is physically present in "the hawklike planes of his face" (43), so similar to his
great grandfather's "hawklike face" (1), and in the sound of his name; both are symbols of his enduring shame for failure yet to attain the benchmarks of his violent namesakes. His destiny is even urged upon him when Aunt Jenny seeks to prevent him from further violent attempts to claim it:

"You and your stiff-necked, sullen ways. Helling around the country. . . . Just because you went to a war. Do you think you're the only person in the world that ever went to a war? Do you reckon that when my Bayard came back from The War that he made a nuisance of himself to everybody that had to live with him? But he was a gentleman: he raised the devil like a gentleman, not like you Mississippi country people. Clod-hoppers. Look what he did with just a horse. . . . He didn't need any flying-machine."

(230)

What Jenny does not recognize is that because Bayard did not define himself heroically in his war, so different from the first Bayard's war, he cannot afford to raise the devil like a gentleman. Nor does she recognize his major burden, his brother's death. Further, in the very act of condemning Bayard's pursuits by comparing him to his ancient namesake, she unwittingly shows him how far he has to go to be worthy of his first and last names.

Inarticulate and introspective, Bayard seldom speaks, except of the moment of his greatest shame and the cause of his guilt, Johnny's death. Once, however, when drunk with Rafe MacCallum, he falls to talking of his war, and we learn just how well he has been schooled in the Sartoris destiny. He speaks, "not of combat, but rather of a life peopled by young men like fallen angels, and of a meteoric violence like that of fallen angels, beyond heaven or hell and partaking of both: doomed immortality and immortal doom" (126). These are the men he admires, those he would be if he could. These men, fliers, probably,
are superior tragic beings, doomed by defiance of some diminished and therefore jealous god, too great for the reward or punishment he might mete. Such men must live forever because of the enormity and endurance of their tragic defiance. As Bayard romanticizes the First World War, he reveals himself as more of a vainglorious Sartoris than his shame will permit him to admit. Like Jenny and old Bayard's, his voice is filled "with ghosts of a thing high-pitched as a hysteria, like a glare of fallen meteors on the dark retina of the world" (126). Turning topsy-turvy what really happened, he gives light, color, and emotion to what the world cannot see.

Instructed in the family illusions of fate, Bayard seeks destructive self-fulfillment through violent gestures inimical to his potential individuality. Only once does this healthy half of his personality rise to protest his seduction by the rich language of doom. After his arrival at the MacCallums' farm, when he fears they have heard of his grandfather's death, he thinks:

"Then they would know... and for an instant he saw the recent months of his life coldly in all their headlong and heedless wastefulness; saw its entirety like the swift unrolling of a film, culminating in that which he had been warned against and that any fool might have foreseen." (311)

As soon, however, as he realizes that the image of his fate has been produced, directed, and edited by himself and the rest of his family and is on the verge of accepting responsibility for his fate, his impulsive Sartoris pride joins in debate, rationalizing his responsibility by reducing it to an absurdity: "Well, damn it, suppose it had: was he to blame? Had he insisted that his grandfather ride with
him? Had he given the old fellow a bum heart?" (311). Though logicians would call his reasoning a red herring, it enables Bayard to evade responsibility for his guilt and the death wish which grew from it, but we see that he is to blame to the extent that he is capable of predicting, as he does here, the consequences of his acts. Immediately, Bayard's potentially autonomous self catches him in another evasion as he evaluates his acts after his grandfather's death, and at this moment he gains the fullest comprehension of the meaning and motion of his life—the relationship between choice and fate—that he is ever to achieve. This is his recognition scene:

and then, coldly: You were afraid to go home. You made a nigger sneak your horse out to you. You, who deliberately do things your judgment tells you may not be successful, even possible, are afraid to face the consequences of your own acts. (311)

Here he confronts his divided nature, his apparent fatedness, and the irresponsibility which his fate encourages. But Bayard cannot confront this irresponsibility for long before his Sartoris nature obscures his clarity with a rush of emotion:

Then again something bitter and deep and sleepless in him blazed out in vindication and justification and accusation; what, he knew not, blazing out at what, Whom, he did not know: You did it! You caused it all; you killed Johnny. (311)

This "something," bitter because all his gestures have not yet won him stature as a true Sartoris, is deep and sleepless, more truly himself than his potentially autonomous other half. This "something" defends his "heedless wastefulness," explains it, accuses him in present failure. Overwhelmed by these emotions, Bayard cannot recognize the other self—the "Whom, he did not know"—which indicts him for the folly of his violence. He does not know how his nature is divided, nor does he
realize that his disgust is double, occasioned by his apparently fated life on the one hand and by his inability to achieve his Sartoris fate on the other. And so his Sartoris half wins the debate, drowning reason and independence from Sartoris folly in a flood of self-pity and guilt.

It is this Sartoris half of his nature and the disgust accompanying it which cries out against the primal injustice of his fate once more that evening when he lies sleepless in Buddy MacCallum's bed:

Buddy breathed on in the darkness, steadily and peacefully. Bayard could hear his own breathing also, but above it, all around it, enclosing him, that other breathing. As though he were one thing breathing with restrained, laboring pants, within himself breathing with Buddy's breathing; using up all the air so that the lesser thing must pant for it. Meanwhile the greater thing breathed deeply and steadily and unawares, asleep, remote; ay, perhaps dead. Perhaps he was dead, and he recalled that morning, relived it with strained attention from the time he had seen the first tracer smoke • • •; relived it again as you might run over a printed, oft-read tale, trying to remember, feel, a bullet going into his own body or head that might have slain him at the same instant. That would account for it, would explain so much; that he too was dead and this was hell, through which he moved for ever and ever with an illusion of quickness, seeking his brother who in turn was somewhere seeking him, never the two to meet. (321-22)

At the beginning of this, one of the most difficult purple passages in the novel, Bayard hears his corporeal self breathing with Buddy in the darkness, producing together the breath of a kind of natural life, "the greater thing." At the same time, this corporeal self seems to deny breath to that "lesser thing," his half-formed Sartoris identity isolated from the natural human life unaware of this "lesser thing" so real to Bayard. Thus isolated, Bayard wonders if he, now this "lesser thing," is not dead; this moves him to remember the moment of Johnny's
death to discover whether he, too, had died then. If he had died prematurely in what the Sartoris myth would consider an unheroic attempt to save Johnny from his heroic apotheosis, his sense of being in hell for the past year would be explained. Abandoned by this "greater thing," life, the guilt he once felt for failing to save Johnny's life no longer seems to matter very much. Now he feels condemned to the mere illusion of violent Sartoris energy, doomed never to fulfill his brother's challenge to equal his destiny. He seeks his brother and his brother seeks him, not for life, now behind them, but so that they may match the joint apotheosis of the first Sartorises. Bayard cannot understand that the two will never meet because of what till now has been the healthiest part of him, his life impulses. Ironically, then, he protests the primal injustice, not of a fate for which he is unsuited by nature, which he might rightly protest, but the primal injustice of his inability as a "lesser thing" to accomplish his family's illusion of doom. It was for this inability, almost six months before, that he called himself a fool for surviving the war: "'Takes damn near as big a fool to get hurt in a war as it does in peacetime. Damn fool, that's what it is'" (44). He cannot understand why his fate seems to be denied him, why it should be other than that scripted for him by his family past. Later that night he lies in something like a tortured and fitful doze, surrounded by coiling images and shapes of stubborn despair and the ceaseless striving for . . . not vindication so much as comprehension; a hand, no matter whose, to touch him out of his black chaos. He would spurn it, of course, but it would restore his cold sufficiency again. (323-24)

His stubborn despair is his refusal to abandon his illusion of an
unattainable destiny. He seeks, not vindication for his failure to attain it, but merely understanding of his inability. But if someone were to lead him from his blind confusion and despair, provide him with equilibrium, he would still spurn that hand and the comprehension it could offer, preferring instead, as do other Sartorises, isolation with his illusions of grandeur and destiny. Once more the lesser but deeper thing in his nature predominates. It is just this stubborn refusal to abandon what his healthy half recognizes to be illusion and evasion which ensures that he will continue to voyage "alone in the bleak and barren regions of his despair" (218).

Thus Bayard continues to run in shame, guilt, and despair. And in the end, having fled in what must seem to him an incomplete circle to Mexico, South America, San Francisco, Chicago, and Dayton, Ohio, he closes the circle of his destiny in ironic ways neither he nor his family could foresee. Like his great grandfather, Colonel John Sartoris, he apparently gives up pursuit of his dream in wearied frustration. He simply wants out of his life as quickly as possible, and violence is the only way he knows. In a Chicago bar, his face "arrogant" still, but "dead white," he attempts unsuccessfully to drink himself into oblivion. A woman he is with tells Monaghan, an aviator who met him there, that "'he'll do anything. He threw an empty bottle at a traffic cop as we were driving out here'" (361). Like Colonel Sartoris and in contradiction to family myth, Bayard freely chooses his destiny in full knowledge of the consequences of his choice. When asked by the inventor with the "intense, visionary eyes" (359) to fly his new airplane, and having been given an explanation of its revol-
tionary and risky lift principle, he turns to Monaghan and asks, "'Why don't you fly his coffin for him ... ?'" (362). At the same time, however, given circumstances and his personality, he must choose as he does. The inventor hurls at Bayard the one challenge he cannot resist:

"I've work and slaved, and begged and borrowed, and now when I've got the machine and a government inspector, I can't get a test because you damn yellow-liveried pilots won't take it up. A service full of you, drawing flying pay for sitting on hotel roofs swilling alcohol. You overseas pilots talking about your guts! No wonder the germans--"

"Shut up," Bayard told him without heat, in his cold, careful voice. (362)

Threatened with the cowardice Bayard believes himself guilty of, he must accept the inventor's challenge: "'Come on, you,' he said to the shabby man" (363).

Bayard has finally put himself into a situation from which there is no chance to escape the doom frustrating him for so long. He forces himself to confront the "old terror" (203), an air crash, which disgusts and fascinates. Through suicide he intends to expiate past failures, just as Colonel John gave himself up in expiation. No longer is heroic self-definition really at issue. As T. H. Adamowski suggests, comparing Bayard's death to the deaths of other Sartorises: "Where their final actions were transfigured into gestures, Bayard's final gesture is an action in disguise. His effort at coincidence with the Sartorises is a critique, albeit unconscious, of the sentimental cult that has grown up within his family." On the tarmac at Dayton, a man who lends Bayard goggles tries to dissuade him from going up:

"... let that crate alone. ... If the C.O. won't give him a pilot (and you know we try anything here that has a prop on it) you can gamble it's a washout!" (364-65). But Bayard goes on toward the hanger. There, the same man tries to give him a woman's garter for luck; to this Bayard responds as the first Bayard Sartoris would not: "I won't need it," he says. "Thanks just the same" (365). Once in the plane and taxiing, Bayard avoids the inventor's last attempt to give him instructions. But when the plane soon comes apart in the air, Bayard makes one last, thoroughly ironic gesture in opposition to his suicide: "Again the machine swung its tail in a soaring arc, but this time the wings came off and he ducked his head automatically as one of them slapped viciously past it and crashed into the tail, shearing that too away" (366). Something in him, the "greater thing" he thought dead at the MacCallums' farm, does not yet want to die. He retains what set him apart from his family identity even as he fulfills the family's fate.

Through his desperate suicide, young Bayard at last fulfills his destiny—but not the one envisioned in the family dream. Rather, he has been true to the pattern followed by earlier dreamers like his great grandfather. He is true to his family, if not to their dream. But this is not the final irony of Bayard's life and death; the final irony is revealed when his gravestone is erected: "Bayard Sartoris. March 16, 1893--June 11, 1920" (373). He pays the full price for his family's heroic identity but never is granted it as earlier Sartorises were with their gravestone inscriptions. Rather than perpetuating the heroic identity, Bayard abrogates it. His despairing death by air
crash is a repetition of, substitution for, and, as T. H. Adamowski suggests, revenge against what happened in the skies over France: "in killing himself," Bayard "kills the Sartorises that he has taken within him." His "brutal and unconscious parody of the death of one Sartoris 'killing himself,' Bayard 'kills' the myth of 'Sartoris.'" Bayard kills the myth because his death is a replication of his forefather's death antedating that first death's transfiguration into myth. Bayard recreates the true pattern of the past and thereby breaks the false one created to ennoble the first. His death is ironic and pathetic, but hardly the tragic one the Sartorises' language would suggest and demand. His struggle is not against what Richard B. Dewall calls the "ancient cosmic evil" which truly tragic heroes oppose, but with only his family and caste; and rather than opposing those life-denying energies which frustrate his humanity, energies which in later novels become positively evil, he laments his inability to surrender fully to them. His suffering does not finally matter outside himself and the closed circle of his family. As Water McDonald suggests, with young Bayard's death we feel, not tragic waste, but "blind ignorant waste."


7 Ibid., p. 156.


If Sartoris concluded with Bayard's death and burial, we could be sure that whatever ambivalence Faulkner may have had toward his Southern heritage earlier in the novel, he here resolved it in favor of a condemnation of the antebellum myth oppressing young Bayard and causing such entropy among its other believers. That the novel does not end here suggests that Faulkner's final judgment is other than this. A final ambivalence remains, contained in old Bayard and Miss Jenny's protests against, not the doom they dream, but the end of the dream itself. These old people come to understand that the dream they thought absolute and immortal is finally subject to the time-bound imaginations and memories of the dreamers, to a "slow time" like that of the Grecian Urn, a subjection that becomes for them primal injustice.

Old Bayard is perhaps the most acutely aware of time and impermanence. Aunt Jenny, twelve years his senior, tartly observes, he is "'the oldest person I ever knew in my life'" (100). It is Bayard who remembers his father, Colonel John, as "like the creatures of that prehistoric day that were too grandly conceived and executed either to exist very long or to vanish utterly when dead from an earth shaped and furnished for punier things" (2). Concerned with decline and fall, the decay which time brings, he takes responsibility for recording deaths in the family Bible. There, in the attic by the trunk whose contents—ephemeral memento mori—are scattered about him, faced by the names of forebears and relatives now only dissolving ink on fly-leaves, he protests time's injustice:
Old Bayard sat for a long time, regarding the stark dissolving apotheosis of his name. Sartorises had derided Time, but Time was not vindictive, being longer than Sartorises. And probably unaware of them. But it was a good gesture, anyway. (92)

For this old man, Time is the great force in the universe, the final arbiter of man's fate. Here, as we do not with young Bayard, we confront an injustice which is truly primal. In contrast to later novels where the presence of the past is absolute and permanent, man in this novel may seek to preserve his name and hope to have his deeds glorified by the memories of his ancestors, but this dream must finally come to nothing. Bayard's sense of man alone in the universe, subject to a force without design, purpose, or sentience—only motion, is drawn so sharply here that the reader is almost willing to sanction the Sartorises' dreams of an ennobled humanity. A Time which reduces human achievement to futile gesture seems to necessitate illusion as a legitimate protest. If Time refuses to recognize man, is there not something to be said for man's derision of It?

Bayard then remembers his father's remarks on genealogy, the origin of the derisive gesture, and continues his reverie: "Yes, it was a good gesture, and old Bayard sat and mused quietly on the tense he had unwittingly used. Was. Fatality: the augury of a man's destiny peeping out at him from the roadside hedge, if he but recognize it..." (92). He now understands that what is past is surely past, that with no more gestures to perpetuate it, the dream must surely die. He remembers how, at fourteen, he had watched from cover as his father escaped a Yankee troop; he then pursued on foot until he dropped breathless. He should have divined then the death of the dream in the
epiphany at the spring where he crawled:

and as he leaned down to it the final light of day was reflected on to his face, bringing into sharp relief forehead and nose above the cavernous sockets of his eyes and the panting snarl of his teeth, and from the still water there stared back at him, for a sudden moment, a skull. (93)

Even if he had not been killed that day he still must die. Now he knows that that death sentence applies to the dream as well.

The unturned corners of man's destiny. Well, heaven, that crowded place, lay just beyond one of them, they claimed; heaven filled with every man's illusion of himself and with the conflicting illusions of him that parade through the minds of other illusions. . . . He stirred and sighed quietly, and took out his fountain pen. At the foot of the column he wrote:

"John Sartoris. July 5, 1918."

and beneath that:

"Caroline White Sartoris and son. October 27, 1918." (93)

For old Bayard, life presents all the possibilities and chances of a maze. One can never be sure what lies around the next corner; what he can be sure of is that death lies around one of them. Again asserting his nihilism, he will have nothing to do with the illusory comforts of an illusory heaven. Those are illusions over which one has no control. All that remains to him still is a defiant gesture against time and the void which seems to lie beyond death, and so he writes in his Bible the names of the Sartoris dead, even though he knows they must fade and the memories of them perish, as have the names of earlier Sartoris's.

Jenny's protest against the death of the dream is less elegaic than Bayard's if only because hers is more complex and follows from a broader awareness of the forces opposing the Sartoris dream and from a deeper awareness of the Sartoris's responsibility for their fates.
But she, too, feels the force of time. Even before she learns of young Bayard's death, time is taking its toll in the weariness of this chief curator of the dream. Once, as the old lady talks of Johnny, Narcissa suddenly realizes that Jenny is confusing the dead with the unborn, "and with a sort of shock she knew that Miss Jenny was getting old, that at last even her indomitable old heart was growing a little tired" (356). In the evenings a few days or weeks later, "with the song of mocking-birds and with all the renewed and timeless mischief of spring," Narcissa once more listens to Aunt Jenny, noticing that she no longer talked of her far-off girlhood and of Jeb Stuart with his crimson sash and his garlanded bay and his mandolin, but always of a time no further back than Bayard's and John's childhood. As though her life were closing, not into the future, but out of the past, like a spool being rewound. (357)

While time and nature's cycles unroll continuously, scorning man's gestures at eternity and the family's absorption with family patterns, Jenny's life closes. She will die with the thread of her dream wound within her.

When young Bayard dies the day his son is born, Miss Jenny responds to both events in terms of her tragic dream but uses its language to condemn its excesses in a way she never has before. In her weariness she now fully understands the dream's futility, though she refuses to deny the dream and its capacity to order lives. When she sees Narcissa's baby she remarks, "'He's a Sartoris, all right . . . but an improved model. He hasn't got that wild look of 'em. I believe it was the name. Bayard. We did well to name him Johnny'" (371). But later, when Narcissa tells her that she has changed his name to Benbow Sartoris, Jenny demands, "'And do you think that'll
do any good? ... Do you think you can change one of 'em with a
name?'" (380). She may have abandoned her belief in the power of names
here but not in the dream's seductive power for those, like Narcissa,
who need to dream. When she reads of Bayard's death in the newspaper,
she accepts the news, as she accepted his child, in terms of fate:
"'And I know that he was somewhere he had no business being, doing
something that wasn't any affair of his'" (369). But at the cemetery
days later, she is glad his gravestone inscription is "simple: no
Sartoris man to invent bombast to put on it. Can't even lie dead in
the ground without strutting and swaggering'" (374). She finally recog-
nizes the folly of attempting to dream time away, surrounded as she is
by images of mutability. On Simon's recent grave, "the mound was still
heaped with floral designs from which the blooms had fallen, leaving a
rank, lean mass of stems and peacefully rusting wire skeletons" (373).
The "tedious rows of broken gaudy bits of crockery and of colored
glass" offer mute, ironic testimony to the tawdriness of man's claim
to immortality in the minds of his descendants. Young Bayard's grave,
too, is a "shapeless mass of withered flowers" (373). And his parents'
headstone is "weathered"; "only with difficulty could the inscriptions
have been deciphered" (374). And most ironically, although Colonel
John's epitaph is still decipherable, "the pedestal and effigy were
mottled with seasons of rain and sun and with drippings from the cedar
branches, and the bold carving of the letters was bleared with mold. . . ."
(375). With such images impressing themselves upon her, it is not un-
usual that Miss Jenny should protest that "virus" (375) the dream and
the dreamers have spred, "that gesture of haughty pride which repeated
itself generation after generation with a fateful fidelity" (375).

About to leave, she pauses once more, "and she remembered something
Narcissa had said once, about a world without men, and wondered if
therein lay peaceful avenues and dwellings thatched with quiet, and
she didn't know" (376). What she does not recognize is that if Sar-
toris men did not exist she would, given her nature, have to invent
them.

That evening, in the same ambivalent mood, Miss Jenny makes her
final protest against both the dream and its death:

The music went on in the dusk softly; the dusk was peopled
with ghosts of glamorous and old disastrous things. And if they
were just glamorous enough, there was sure to be a Sartoris in
them, and then they were sure to be disastrous. Pawns. But the
Player, and the game He plays . . . He must have a name for His
Pawns, though. But perhaps Sartoris is the game itself—a game
outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late and to an old
dead pattern, and of which the Player Himself is a little wearied.
For there is death in the sound of it, and a glamorous fatality,
like silver pennons downrushing at sunset, or a dying fall of
horns along the road to Roncevaux. (380)

Once more, as she herself dreams, she condemns the Sartoris propensity
for illusions of grandeur and the violence it seems to take to create
these illusions. Such dreams are too high for attainment. But, like
pawns in some fateful game, the Sartorises try anyway. Why? And what
is the game? And who is the Player? The game is the Sartoris dream,
the Player, the Sartoris spirit. Here Jenny—not Faulkner, as so many
of those who condemn this purple passage assume\(^{10}\)—extends her protest
beyond old Bayard's against time. She recognizes that the years have

\(^{10}\) Hyatt H. Waggoner, *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the
World*, p. 25; Melvin Backman, "Faulkner's Sick Heroes," pp. 96-97;
taken their toll on game, pawns, and Player, that the dream no longer fits the times, but she also understands that the Sartorises are responsible for the impasse to which the glamorous game has finally brought them, what Ronald Walker calls "a perilous, self-abnegating conflux of meaningless prescriptive laws." The Player has not known when to quit the game, has spent Himself insisting that it continue when He knows the rules can no longer apply to the new pawns, young Bayard and Johnny. Thus does Miss Jenny condemn the death which is the inevitable outcome of the game. Yet she chooses to do so through an allusion to The Song of Roland, thus reasserting the novel's fundamental ambivalence. For while false pride and a wrong choice caused Roland's death, they also brought on the battle in which he died heroically and for which he came to be immortalized in his Song. Faulkner simply will not here surrender the value he finds in the folly, romance, and grandeur of man's dreaming.

From this ambivalent chord, the novel dissolves in irony. Once more Aunt Jenny asks Narcissa at the piano if she truly believes changing her son's name will make him "'any less a Sartoris and a scoundrel and a fool?'" (380). Narcissa does not answer. Instead, confident of her powers of resistance,

she smiled at Miss Jenny quietly, a little dreamily, with serene, fond detachment. Beyond Miss Jenny's trim, fading head the maroon curtains hung motionless; beyond the window evening was a windless lilac dream, foster dam of quietude and peace. (380)

11 "Death in the Sound of Their Names," p. 277.
Through this final allusion to Keats's Ode, Faulkner suggests that the Sartoris dream will be reborn, however Narcissa may corrupt it, however she may believe herself secure from it behind her forewarned bastions, however outmoded the dream may be. The true mother of the peace Narcissa sees is Narcissa herself as she projects her romantic dream into the world about her. She will remake the world for her son, giving him the illusions which have given her life whatever meaning it has had. She is able, as we are not, to neglect Aunt Jenny's warning: changing names does not change inheritances. And so the novel ends in ambivalence and irony.

The ambivalence of Sartoris is made even more convincing because Faulkner fails to come to grips in this young man's romance with the nature of the foundation upon which the dream was built—slavery. It is certainly easier to sympathize with the Southern past, however mixed our sympathies may be, when we are permitted, even encouraged, to forget this outrageous example of man's inhumanity. Most blacks in the novel, in fact, feel they have a corner in some part of the dream. The only black attack on the Sartorises' myth is offered by Caspey, but only after he has been reduced to farcical stereotype by his tall tales of his French exploits:

"I don't take nothin'fum no white folks no mo'," he was say­ing. "War don changed all dat. If us culled folks is good enough ter save France fum de Germans, den us is good enough ter have de same rights de Germans is. French folks thinks so, any­how, and ef America don't, dey's ways of learnin' 'um. Yes, suh, it was de culled soldier saved France and America bofe. Black regiments kilt mo' Germans dan all de white armies put to­gether, let 'lone unloading steamboats all day long fer a dollar a day." (62)
As the foregoing reveals, Faulkner is already aware of the legitimate claims by blacks to white America's conscience, but as Caspy's protest also makes clear, Faulkner is not yet prepared to admit those claims. In *Sartoris*, blacks and whites are separate but equal, their equality residing in a full but flawed humanity, as Faulkner suggests when Bayard shares Christmas with a black sharecropper's family:

> The Negroes drank with him, amicably, a little diffidently—two opposed concepts antipathetic by race, blood, nature and environment, touching for a moment and fused within an illusion—human-kind forgetting its lust and cowardice and greed for a day. "Chris'mus," the woman murmured shyly. "Thanky, suh." (347)

This is the closest Faulkner comes in this novel to an analysis of the Southern racial ethos. It remains for later novels to question the nature of the oppositions which Faulkner here seems to accept.
PART III
CHAPTER V

"MEMORY BELIEVES":

PRIMAL ENERGIES IN LIGHT IN AUGUST

Of all the problems which \textit{Light in August} poses for its readers, the problem of its unity has been one of the most persistent and most energetically disputed. Many of Faulkner's early critics seriously doubted that the novel forms a unified whole. Malcolm Cowley, in his introduction to \textit{The Portable Faulkner}, insists that \textit{Light in August} combines "two or more themes having little relation to each other."\footnote{1} Another early reader, George Marion O'Donnell, argues that the novel "fails . . . because of the disproportionate emphasis upon Christmas—who ought to be the antagonist but who becomes, like Milton's Satan, the real protagonist in the novel."\footnote{2} At least two later critics also find that the novel lacks unity. Richard Adams suggests that the stories of Lena Grove, Reverend Hightower, and Joe Christmas "are not connected logically in such a fashion as to account for the degree of unity critics generally expect to find in a great work of art."\footnote{3} And Walter Slatoff argues that the novel's themes contribute no more to its unity.

\footnote{1}{(New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1946), p. 18.}
\footnote{3}{\textit{Myth and Motion}, p. 84.}
unity than the separate stories do: These themes "come to form part of the insoluble suspension, for they cannot be clearly related to one another."  

Most contemporary readers, however, do find unity in the themes and stories of *Light in August*. The trouble is that there is little agreement about just where the source of this unity lies. There seem to be at least four distinctly different theories of the novels' unity, and while each has much to recommend it, each also raises as many problems as it solves. The first of these theories discovers unity in the thematic and structural polarities which the stories of Lena and Joe generate. According to François Pitavy, one who holds this view, "Lena, living in the present, trusting in nature, life, and love, partaking of the community of mankind, is the counterbalance to Christmas, locked in his sterile violence, an outcast from society and, in total contrast to Lena, nearly always described in the past tense."  

But

4 *Quest for Failure*, p. 196.

5 *Faulkner's Light in August*, trans. Gillian E. Cook (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 14. Similarly, Michael Millgate, in *The Achievement of William Faulkner*, finds that Lena and Joe form "opposite poles" in the novel and that its unity is "secured through various forms of thematic interrelation and ironic reflection rather than through the more familiar kind of narrative link" (p. 126). Richard Chase, in "The Stone and the Crucifixion: Faulkner's *Light in August*," *Kenyon Review*, 10 (1948), 540, finds a contrapuntal structure in the images of "linear discreteness" ("'modernism': abstraction, rationalism, applied science, capitalism, progressivism, emasculation, the atomized consciousness and its pathological extensions") and in images of the curve ("holistic consciousness, a containing culture and tradition, the cyclical life and death of all the creatures of earth"). In *Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Meaning* (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1972), Sally Page argues that a "dialectic of birth and reproduction versus death and destruction forms the basis of the structure of the novel" (p. 143). Alfred Kazin suggests that the
while the tensions Pitavy and others identify certainly are present in the novel, one would be incautious to insist too strenuously on them as unifying devices. Lena Grove is too slight a figure, too limited in characterization and stature, to bear the burdens this structure places upon her. To make too much of Lena is to leave her open to the kind of harsh criticism I shall come to shortly. Despite her virtue, energy, and harmony with all life, she cannot adequately counterbalance or offer a genuine alternative to the suffering and evil dramatized in the novel's other stories. In other words, when examined closely, this theory of unity collapses under the strain that Lena is unnecessarily made to bear.


6 Tangled Fire, p. 72. Like O'Connor, Ilse Du Soir Lind argues that Calvinism and the racism it encourages is central to the novel's meaning and structure ("The Calvinistic Burden of Light in August," p. 93). Hyatt Waggoner, in William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, suggests that "the story of Christmas is . . . framed and illuminated by the stories of several kinds of practicing Christians" (p. 108). And, in The Art of Faulkner's Novels, Peter Swiggart finds that "in Light in August Faulkner continues his exploration of the South's puritan mentality; at the same time he introduces racial miscegenation as a central dramatic issue" (p. 131).
to unity are the religious and related social and racial codes shaping and oppressing human personality. The holders of this theory are right, it seems to me, to locate the source of the novel's unity in the problem of human identity. Faulkner himself said that this problem is "the tragic central idea of the story." But these critics miss the mark somewhat by focusing more on milieu than on the characters themselves. In order for the personalities of the major characters to be shaped and oppressed by this environment, there must first be something there to be shaped: inheritance, potentiality, the rudiments of personality. None is really a tabula rasa, though his oppressors may see him as such. Further, to emphasize oppressive forces rather than the characters is to see the characters finally as little more than victims and to beg the question of their apparent lack of responsibility for their fates. The major characters of this novel are not entirely the passive victims this reading makes them seem.

Like the second theory, the third rightly stresses the identity of the major characters as the key to Light in August's unity, but instead of concentrating on the process by which a corrupt identity is created, this theory concentrates on a particular feature of identity common to each major character. As Robert Slabey suggests, the "primary point of the novel" is "the fact of the isolation of the major characters of the novel: they are all 'outsiders'; they are 'strangers' to the people of Jefferson--but, more important, most of them are

7 Faulkner in the University, p. 72.
'strangers' to themselves." But like the theorists in the second group these too seem to miss the essence of the conflict between character and environment. While the second group examines the cause of pain, this group examines the symptoms of pain. Neither goes to the source of pain in the individual. If the characters of the novel are alienated, they are alienated from something. And their alienation from community is only symptomatic of a deeper division within the self which all the major characters except Lena share with the community that rejects them. This group of critics has not sufficiently considered the healthy self these characters are "strangers" to.

Those who hold the fourth theory find the source of unity in the novel's mythic, religious, or archetypal themes. For Walter Brylowski, *Light in August* is unified by two kinds of mythic quests, "Lena's comic search for the father of her child and Joe's more complicated tragic quest." Beach Langston believes that "just as Joe

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8 "Joe Christmas: Faulkner's Marginal Man," Phylon, 21 (1960), 266. For Carl Benson, "solidarity within the community is certainly the central subject, but the characters are not all outside the community. Furthermore, those who are outside are outside in different degrees, and the book achieves its particular form because the different degrees are so intermeshed as to constitute a narrative and dramatic presentation of an essentially thematic structure ("Thematic Design in Light in August," South Atlantic Quarterly, 53 [1954], 540). While Irving Howe has definite doubts about the novel's unity, such unity as it has may be found in the "central concern . . . with the relation between a man's social role and private being" (William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 201). For Cleanth Brooks, the community and the individual characters' alienation from it provide "the central clue" to the novel's structure (The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 53). And Olga Vickery, in The Novels of William Faulkner, finds the novels' unity in the characters' relationship to community expressed through the interlocking images of the circle, the shadow, and the mirror (67).

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9 Faulkner's Olympian Laugh, p. 102.
Christmas is a reincarnation of the idea of the suffering Christ, so Lena Grove and Hightower are incarnate manifestations of the fertility goddess Diana of the Grove of Nemi and of the recurring figure of the Buddha. For C. Hugh Holman, "the dim but discernible outline of Christ" is "the organizing principle behind the characters": Hightower as suffering Christ, Christmas as a sacrificial Christ, and Lena's child as a symbol of hope for redemption. And Robert Slabey contributes to this theory of unity as well as the third:

*Light in August* is part of an "eternal" framework: the journey of the classical hero in his mythological descent into the abyss and meeting with the Shadow (the Shadow which is his own "dark" side); the similar pattern in the modern existential encounter with Nothingness; the timeless sequence of withdrawal and return, death and rebirth.

The virtue of these last readings of the novel's unity, so various as to be almost mutually exclusive, is that they focus more sharply on the major characters and the essence of their personalities. Further, each of these interpretations insists upon the characters as active participants in their fates, not passive victims. Unfortunately, however, these readings tend to slight the oppressive forces in the novel which the other readings describe so well. Also, they often tend to become


a bit far-fetched, the crux of their arguments depending upon vague implications in minor images and tortuous twists of plausibility and character psychology.

Considered together, these widely varied theories of *Light in August*'s unity might make one wonder whether the novel is, after all, unified or whether the diversity of criticism has made us unable to see the unity that is there. As Joseph Gold suggests, "one cannot help but feel that in the case of *Light in August* the result of so much criticism has been fragmentation rather than synthesis."\(^{13}\) Clearly what is needed, then, if we are to account for the novel's unity is another theory, one which will take the solid contributions of each of these separate theories and, where possible, harmonize them in a genuine synthesis both respecting the diversity in the novel yet recognizing its inner congruence of theme, image, and structure. I want to suggest that the evolving pattern of tragic idea and image that I see governing Faulkner's novels may provide just such a synthesis. The major characters of this novel are all driven by the same set of primal energies, the essence of their identities neglected by so many of the novel's critics. Unimpeded, these energies would generate healthy human personalities for their possessors, but such healthy growth is not permitted. Although they are, as we shall see, very different novels, *Light in August*, like *Sartoris*, dramatizes man's struggle against or eager acceptance of certain kinds of imposed, life-denying

\(^{13}\) "The Two Worlds of *Light in August*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 16 (1963), 160.
identities and the resulting corruption of man's healthy primal energies. But while the attractive heroic identity imposed in *Sartoris* offers the possibility of transcending human limitations, the cultural, racial, and religious identities imposed in *Light in August* deny even the mere humanity the Sartorises seek to transcend. The task facing the characters of the later novel, then, is to regain their common humanity, the basis of authentic identity, by surrendering to the healthy primal energies their culture denies and the imposed identities corrupt.

Faulkner himself seemed to imply this identity-quest structure in his response at the University of Virginia to a question about *Light in August* 's unity. Asked whether unity is discernible in the denial of love to the major characters and their search for some form of compensation, he replied: "So many people are seeking something and quite often it is love--it don't have to be love between man and woman, it's to be one with some universal force, power that goes through life, through the world."14 The characters of the novel can be understood and organized according to their success in becoming one with this "universal force." Some, like Lena Grove and Byron Bunch, transcend limiting identities, fulfill themselves by partaking of this "universal force," and are comic survivors. Joe Christmas fulfills himself only after great suffering and at the price of his life; he is tragic. Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower, finding that their limiting identities absolve them of the responsibilities of their humanity, transcend these identities only reluctantly and fitfully and are

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14 *Faulkner in the University*, p. 95.
finally defeated. They are pathetic. Faulkner represents both his "universal force" and the energies drawing his characters to it by images of life, family, and community. This universal force is, in other words, the fulness of fully human life.

I. LENA GROVE: "A BODY DOES GET AROUND"

The first chapter of Light in August introduces us to Lena Grove as symbol and character and, thereby, to both the life force other characters lack in varying degrees and to the primal energies they share with her, however diluted their energies have become. It is this dual role of Lena's, I believe, which has provoked the drubbing so many critics have given her. She has been described as "the good unruffled vegetable," "the bovine madonna" who survives all with her "impervious detachment," 15 "more than slightly stupid," 16 nearly imbecile, 17 "almost subhuman," 18 the possessor of little more than "mammalian stupidity," 19 "hardly more than an expression of the will to live of the species." 20 Lena has received this rough treatment,

15 Howe, William Faulkner, pp. 70 + 205.
16 Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 83.
17 Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner’s Novels, p. 141.
18 Adams, Myth and Motion, p. 95.
first, because these critics rightly resist the attempts by others to make her a saintly norm and counterbalance to the novel's other stories. As Irving Howe suggests, Lena cannot be a saint "if only because she has never known the life of trouble, the ordeal of surmounting, which is usually taken as a prerequisite for sainthood." But in their rush to correct one misreading, they have created another by confusing Lena's symbolic role with her dramatic one. As a character, Lena is much more than her symbolic function.

There can be no doubt, however, that Faulkner intended to represent Lena as an avatar of his universal life force. This aspect of her character, the source of the epithets quoted above, has been so often and so thoroughly explored that we need not pursue it far here beyond some imagery that certainly supports this reading: As she travels, she becomes part of the natural scene itself, "swollen, slow, deliber-

21 Howe, William Faulkner, p. 205.

22 J. F. Kobler suggests that Lena "is principle" ("Lena Grove," p. 350). R. G. Collins observes that "Lena is eternally unchanging . . ." ("Light in August: Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," Mosaic, 7, No. 1 [1973], 151). Richard Adams suggests that she is "completely in harmony with the motion of life in the earth" (p. 86). Robert Slabey believes that Lena "represents a primordial image and ancient and lasting truths about existence, perhaps more Oriental than Western --life as a rhythmic cycle of births and rebirths and 'the Peace that passeth understanding'" ("Myth and Ritual in Light in August," p. 348). In The Yoknapatawpha Country, Cleanth Brooks says that "she is nature," an "embodiment of the female principle" (p. 67). Olga Vickery calls her "the world of nature" (The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 80), and C. Hugh Holman suggests that she is "almost an earth-mother symbol" (p. 127). Francois Pitavy calls her "Nature itself . . . the purity and innocence of prelapsarian man" (p. 114). Beach Langston suggests she is a "combination of the mistress and mother of all mankind" (p. 50), and Michael Millgate calls her a "kind of impersonalized catalytic force" (p. 125).
erate, unhurried and tireless as the augmenting afternoon itself." 23 To those she meets she tells her story "with the untroubled unhaste of a change of season" (47). Indeed, this natural life--Faulkner's "universal force"--informs and governs Lena. Pregnant, she hears and feels within her "the implacable and immemorial earth" (26), not just one chance life but all life and its irresistible and eternal urge to create and sustain itself. This "old earth of and with and by which she lives" (23) is the ground of her being. Antedating man's reason, it sustains her, protects her, and provides her with what might loosely be called a code of conduct. It renders her a whole person, complete and undivided. But Faulkner means to use Lena as a symbol of a life force which is more than brute, insentient fertility; this becomes clear when we consider her name, her story, and another allusion to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." As Irving Howe suggests, her first name means "bright one." 24 It is the diminutive of Helen, the archetypal woman. Her last name evokes, as I have already mentioned, Diana of the Grove, 25 and as Beach Langston reveals, there are a number of parallels between Lena and this goddess:

both are nature and fertility goddesses; both are huntresses (though Lena's quarry is a husband); though unmarried both have childbirth as their particular concern; and both are associated with fire in August. Byron Bunch has to fight Lucas Burch before


24 William Faulkner, p. 64.

replacing him as Lena's lover just as an aspirant to the priesthood of Diana had to vanquish the incumbent before he could become the local Jupiter and mate with Diana of the Grove.26

In the first of several urn images in the novel, each of which helps define the energies of the character to whom it is applied, the succession of wagons in which Lena rides are "like something moving forever and without progress across an urn" (5). This allusion recalls the community of votaries moving forever across Keats's urn to the shrine of a deity. In contrast to Sartoris where the urn motif evokes Narcissa Benbow's frigidity and self-deluded serenity, the image here imbues Lena and her quest with a spiritual dimension, a timeless harmony with her surroundings, and a pure perfection of purpose.

In Sartoris, nature's cycles and the earth are little more than a calm, harmonious background and counterpoint to the fury of young Bayard and old Bayard and Aunt Jenny's illusions of permanence. Here Faulkner brings the background into the foreground and personifies it in Lena Grove, suggesting thereby that in some fundamental way mankind's spiritual, mental, and physical life partakes of this natural life, that this life is the source of man's primal energies. This is not to imply that Lena as a symbol effectively counterbalances the other characters or provides a norm for them. Rather, this symbolic Lena, radiating "a luminosity older than our Christian civilization,"27 is Faulkner's universal force, natural life inextricably involved with human life, yet utterly indifferent to and unmoved by human travail.

27 Faulkner in the University, p. 199.
It is simply present, pure, almost sacred, fruitful. In the terms of Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, Lena as symbol and the life force she represents simply "endure." She moves through the novel with "an inward lighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment" (15).

As a character, however, Lena "prevails," developing a healthy identity in spite of a threatening past, functioning thereby as a norm for others, and ironically achieving the goal of her quest. In his essay on Lena, Robert Kirk argues that she has "a total lack of compulsions, one might even say a total lack of distinguishable drive beyond her humble desire for travel." This reading is inaccurate. Her drives, the energies she shares in uncorrupted forms with other characters, ensure she will prevail. The first of these is her desire simply to live--survive--and to foster life. Lena reveals this energy in the fact of her journey, both a quest and a flight. Leaving Doane's Mill, her childhood home, she turns her back on a place of death: Her mother and father were dead. Her only living brother, with whom she stayed, was spiritually dead, "a hard man. Softness and gentleness and youth (he was just forty) and almost everything else except a kind of stubborn and despairing fortitude and the bleak heritage of his bloodpride had been sweated out of him" (4). Doane's Mill itself, prefiguring other false communities in the novel, is a dying town, surviving only through destruction: The mill "had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and

existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away" (2). Living by and because of and for a different principle, Lena had to flee this past as potentially destructive as those pasts corrupting the novel's other major characters.

Once on her way, all her efforts are directed to getting her "chap up to his time" (17)--bringing forth life--and nourishing her own. Unlike Joe Christmas, who can never permit himself to be nourished by others, who refuses all offers of "women's muck," Lena accepts Mrs. Armstid's ambiguous gift of her egg money and buys a can of sardines which, after offering to a wagon driver, she eats "slowly, steadily, sucking the rich sardine oil from her fingers with slow and complete relish" (26). The quintessential comic heroine, she will do whatever is necessary to survive, without, however, sacrificing her integrity. In contrast to the rigid characters for whom she is a foil, Lena will, like a plant which turns to catch the sun or a tree which thrives by growing around a rock, accommodate herself to the world. Outside Frenchman's Bend she slyly puts herself in the way of Armstid's wagon and so finds another ride and a place to spend the night. At the Armstids' she earns her keep by implicitly accepting Mrs. Armstid's unspoken social definition of a pregnant, unmarried woman. Days later, she gives up the father of her child, the object of her quest, for another man who will better care for and nourish her and her child.

The second element of Lena's primal energy is her desire to create a family, the primary community she has never really had, even though her childhood was spent holding families together. At her death,
Lena's mother passed responsibility for the family to her twelve-year-old daughter: "'Take care of paw.' Lena did so" (2). When her father died and she was entrusted to her brother McKinley whom she scarcely remembered, she did not regain a family, although she did much to ensure that her brother had one. To him she was more servant than relative. She "slept in a leanto room at the back of the house," and during the half of every year when McKinley's "labor- and childridden" wife "was either lying in or recovering . . . Lena did all the house work and took care of the other children" (3). So prepared by her past, Lena's search for Lucas Burch is an attempt to do what she knows best, foster family life. She may be physically unsuited for her comically absurd journey, but her energy provides her with much to sustain her. It has given her a capacity not only for love but for the trust upon which families and communities depend. So complete is her "unflagging and tranquil faith" (4) in the scoundrel Lucas that she believed they "'didn't need to make no word promises'" (15): "'You just send me your mouthword when you are ready for me,'" she told him. "'I'll be waiting'" (16). A large part of this trust is her "unshakable, sheeplike . . . patient and steadfast fidelity" (4). She would not, for example, admit to her brother that Lucas was her lover, even though he had gone six months before. Unlike her brother's and the faces of so many of the other life-denying characters in the novel, hers "is calm as stone, but not hard. Its doggedness has a soft quality . . ." (15).

Given these positive qualities of her energy and personality, it at first seems dreadfully ironic that the physical goal of Lena's quest
is a man not worth the pursuit. That Lena should be drawn to him does not seem to speak well of her, not only as a judge of character but as one who is supposed to be a measure for the healthy impulses of others. Lucas Burch is, after all, a betrayer of life at odds with all that Lena supposedly represents and lives to accomplish. Unlike her, he has been "travelling light" (32) in body and spirit and is "strange anywhere. . . . Even at home" (404). If Lena represents wholeness and purpose, he suggests disintegration and aimlessness: "a gangling shape already in ludicrous diffusion of escape as if he were on the point of clattering to earth in complete disintegration" (259-60). He is not a whole man, "a whole pair of pants" (32) even. After what is supposed to pass for his work at the planing mill, he drives about Jefferson in Joe Christmas' new car, "idle, destinationless . . . and not making a very good job of being dissolute and enviable and idle" (41). While Lena represents the harmonious union of nature and spirit, Lucas is merely the animal half. He reminds Byron Bunch of a mule, and Mooney, the foreman at the planing mill, of a horse, "just a worthless horse. Looks fine in the pasture, but it's always down in the spring bottom when anybody comes to the gate with a bridle" (33). About him no one but Lena cares, "because wherever he came from and wherever he had been, a man knew that he was just living on the country, like a locust" (33). Lena, however, sees not what others see but "'a young fellow full of life . . . that likes folks and jollifying, and liked by folks in turn'" (16). Now we see why she is drawn to Lucas. He represents to her the essence of a lively community. "'He'll
be where the folks are gathered together, and the laughing and joking is. He always was a hand for that'" (10). In other words, Lucas seems to offer fulfillment for the third element of Lena's primal energy, desire for membership in the community circle.

Lena is a stranger to community, having been to the village near her parents only six or eight times a year on Saturdays and never having "been to Doane's Mill until after" (1) they died. Here she was an outsider to an aggregation of outsiders, five families following the saw mill as it cut a swath across the land. Isolated even at its height, Doane's Mill "had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals" (3), and the one daily train "fled shrieking through it," "athward and past that little less-than-village like a forgotten bead from a broken string" (3). Thus Lena travels to fulfill social as well as familial and spiritual needs unmet in her past. As a child she would ride into town with her parents on Saturdays but stop the wagon at the edge of town, climb down, and walk "because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too" (1-2). Lena, however, desires more than simple community membership; she also wants to be thought well of. Leaving McKinley's to find Lucas, she fled at night through her back window, even though "she could have departed by the door, by daylight. Nobody would have stopped her" (4). Perhaps she left this way to deny the identity--"whore" (4)--her brother cast on her. On the road, she tells Mrs. Armstid, "'It worried me a little at first, after he left, because my name wasn't Burch yet. . . .'" (17). What Lena wants finally is to be a married lady. Fed by strangers, she eats with "a
quality of polite and almost finicking restraint" (19-20) and says to herself later, "'Like a lady I et. Like a lady travelling'" (23).

Although Lena's pretensions to community membership are juvenile and played for broad comedy, it would be a mistake to dismiss them lightly, for they are supported by qualities necessary to any thriving community. With a face "young, pleasant . . ., candid, friendly, and alert" (9), she draws a community circle around her. More important, she has the human concern and humane vision necessary for men and women to live together. It is not true, as Irving Howe suggests, that Lena survives simply because of her "impervious detachment" to all the fury and suffering in Jefferson. Howe, as I suggested earlier, confuses Lena's symbolic with her dramatic role. She is in town only a few hours before she tries to find out about the tragedy unfolding around her. "'What is it them men were trying to tell you?'" she asks Byron. "'What is it about that burned house?'" (77). The following night she has still not lost her curiosity: "'What has happened here?'" (287) she demands of Byron, but again he evades her question, believing she needs protection. Unlike the morally blind in this novel who refuse or are unable to see, Lena sees all in "a single glance all-embracing, swift, innocent and profound" (7). Her gaze is "grave, unwinking, unbearable" (405), capable of stripping naked "verbiage and deceit," filled with "either nothing in it, or everything, all knowledge" (409). She has nothing in her eyes when she looks upon another because only rarely does she distort what she sees

29 William Faulkner, p. 205.
in terms of her own needs. Her eyes possess everything because she accepts others completely, sees their full humanity. She may have been duped by Lucas Burch but was so not because she is stupid or even subhuman but because of her complete trust, however naive, because she accepts him on his own terms, and because she mistakes him for a fully functioning human being. But even then she is not duped completely, as Byron recognizes:

"It's like she was in two parts, and one of them knows that he is a scoundrel. But the other part believes that when a man and a woman are going to have a child, that the Lord will see that they are all together when the right time comes." (285)

And, of course, Lena's faith is not misplaced; she and Lucas are brought together. Through this faith Lena sees people and communities as better than they are and with hope; almost everyone else in the novel sees them in terms of their darkest fears, as worse.

With this potent vision, she sees a community circle "peopled with kind and nameless faces and voices" (4) wherever she travels, even creating kindness in others when they lack the will for it. Even in diffident Henry Armstid's ancient and dilapidated wagon mounting toward her, "like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road" (6), she sees the potential for connection, for community, that never existed in the "forgotten bead" of Doane's Mill. Lena's goal is as much to move forever in harmony with the earth and all mankind as it is to gain a husband. "'My, my. A body does get around!'" (26), she sighs in the leitmotif that opens and closes the novel. And Lena does get around, accomplishing the circle of her humanity as she closes the community circle around her. It is thus, as a fully
functioning human being responding to her primal energies, that Lena becomes a norm for the other characters, affirming, in Cleanth Brooks's words, "a kind of integrity and wholeness by which the alienated characters are to be judged." But she is not a full or adequate norm for the other characters, not simply, as Walter Slatoff suggests, because of her intellectual limitations, but because Faulkner does not intend her to be a model for conduct, only a measure of wholeness. Faulkner surely does not intend that the other characters behave as she does. The questions Joe poses for his culture are questions about the South's and America's communal definition of man which need to be posed. Lena cannot ask them, nor would one with her tranquillity want to ask them. Nor can she wage the battles Joe wages with oppressive racial and religious codes. Joe's struggles may be colored by tragic ironies, but they are battles which need to be fought. Lena may bring life to barren Jefferson, but before life can thrive here, those forces threatening it must first be opposed and purged. Each character participates in this design.

II. JOE CHRISTMAS: "LIKE A BLIND MAN OR A SLEEPWALKER"

In this design the serene, open, harmonious Lena Grove of Chapter One is obviously all that the troubled, isolated, threatening Joe Christmas of Chapter Two is not and can never be. She has transcended her past while he has been broken by his. While she fosters life, he

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30 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 69.
31 Quest for Failure, p. 195.
denies it, hounded as he is by a damnatory Calvinist theology and a racist code of human definition. While she seeks family and community circles, the community teaches him a negative identity and makes him its scapegoat. Yet Joe, as we shall see, is as much a foil for characters like Joanna Burden and Reverend Hightower as Lena is for Joe. Unlike Joanna and Hightower, the Joe we meet at the beginning of Light in August is, in Alfred Kazin's words, still "trying to become someone, a human being, to find the integrity that is so ripely present in Lena Grove." A number of other readers have also noticed this potentiality and aspiration in Joe, but none seem fully aware that his striving for a human identity is the key to his character and central to the unifying design of the novel. Blighted though he may be, Joe has not lost completely the healthful energies possessed so abundantly by Lena. Harboring humanity apart from the identity imposed upon him, not entirely the agents of others' illusions and


33 Irving Howe says of Joe: "that there must be something better he is certain. . . . he knows that there is something to be done and something toward which to aspire" (68). Lawrance Thompson suggests that what Joe "craves most is some kind of reconciliation or armistice which will end his inner warfare and give him a sense of peace, of belonging—a sense of home and of roots" (William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967], p. 74). Hyatt Waggoner sees Joe's "determination to 'strike through the mask' to get at absolute truth, ultimate certainty and clarity, for good or for ill" (p. 105). Richard Chase argues that Joe "asks merely to live, to share the human experience, and to be an individual" ("Light in August," The American Novel and Its Tradition [New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957], rpt. in Dean Morgan Schmitter, ed., William Faulkner [New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973], p. 104). Finally, Robert Slabey suggests that Joe is trying "to find the way back to himself . . . to prove that he is a man and not a thing" ("Faulkner's Marginal Man," p. 269).
his past, he seeks in whatever confused or tentative fashion an identity that fosters life and that will bind him to a family and a community. Thus, while Lena is naturally whole, he is divided, at once compelled to fulfill the curse of his false identity while struggling to become a fully functioning human being.

To begin to understand the puzzling Joe Christmas we are confronted with in Chapter Two, we must first understand those who literally and figuratively name him: primarily Doc Hines and Simon McEachern, but also the orphanage dietition, the matron of the orphanage, and Mrs. McEachern. They name him according to a communal theology and racial code which, like the Sartorises' aristocratic myth, affirms their sense of the value of their own lives. Members of the spiritually elect according to their Calvinist theology, Hines and McEachern believe they are representatives for and have the ear of an angry God and by so believing commit what their creed considers, in Joseph Gold's words, "the supreme sin of false pride." 34 Hines tells Reverend Hightower that "'the Lord God of wrathful hosts'" (362) "'told old Doc Hines what to do and old Doc Hines done it'" (360). McEachern believes himself "the actual representative of the wrathful and retributive Throne" (191), "propelled by some militant Michael Himself" (190). Both men ramify their religious certitude into a belief in their superiority to common, fleshly life. Doc Hines knows he is a sinner but tells the dietition, perversely using his sin as an emblem of his superiority, that "'to what I done

and what I suffered to expiate it, what you done and are womansuffering aint no more than a handful of rotten dirt'" (120). An embodiment, as R. G. Collins recognizes, of "the white South's fanaticism concerning race," Hines most certainly stands above what he considers the defilement of black skin. To the blacks in Mottstown, he preached "humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race, himself his own exhibit A in fanatic and unconscious paradox" (325). McEachern reveals his superiority to natural life through images of cleanliness and implied abnegation. His house is "clean, spartan," his shirts, "clean white," his hands, "clean, scrubbed" (137 + 138). And in his rearrangement of the Decalogue and his own catechism, whereby fornication becomes "the cardinal sin" (149), McEachern ensures his superiority to the feeble flesh. Like Hines, he stands above "the sluttishness of weak human men" (191), before whose sin he feels "something of that pure and impersonal outrage which a judge must feel were he to see a man on trial for his life lean and spit on the bailiff's sleeve" (189).

Their illusions are, however, as thoroughly undercut by the reality they deny as are old Bayard Sartoris and Jenny Du Pre's aristocratic pretensions, but with one difference: While the Sartorises attempt to deny a new social reality, these men hide a psychological reality whose images are more sordid. Hines and McEachern's obsession with others' filth suggests that they doubt their own cleanliness. Hines is physically as well as morally de-

35 "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 113.
filed and stunted, "a small dirty man" (118). McEachern's sense of defilement is revealed more indirectly: compulsive cleanliness is a compensation for a man who recognizes "the face of Satan, which he knew as well as" (191) Joe's and who has "just as firmly fixed convictions about the mechanics, the theatring of evil as about those of good" (189).

Their illusions of superiority are as false as their belief in their purity. Perhaps nowhere else in Faulkner's fiction do we find as savage a portrayal of the inhumanity of racism as we find in that of the goat-bearded, bestial Doc Hines. He is a dangerous outsider and anachronism, a muskox "strayed from the north pole," a "homeless and belated" beast "from beyond the glacial period" (323-24). Both he and McEachern lack the warmth and suppleness of natural life, Hines, a "hard man" (118), and McEachern, "squat, big, shapeless, somehow rocklike, indomitable, not so much ungentle as ruthless" (135), his head resembling "one of the marble cannonballs on Civil War monuments" (153). Nowhere does either betray his inhumanity more than in the brutalization of his family. Hines, of course, murdered his daughter and has so degraded his wife, "a whore's dam" (358), that when we meet her she seems scarcely alive: "dumpy, obese, gray in color, with a face like that of a drowned corpse" (330). McEachern, with a "blunt clean hand shut ... into a fist" (133), guarantees that Joe will grow up to hate him. His wife does not have this luxury, however. Long before Joe's arrival she has been "hammered stubbornly thinner and thinner like some passive and dully
malleable metal into an attenuation of dumb hopes and frustrated desires now faint and pale as dead ashes" (155).

These men have crushed their families because both look upon the world through an "apparently inverted eye" (361), a distorted moral vision which is the product of their fears, obsessions, and illusions. Through "steelrimmed spectacles" (118), symbolic of moral blindness in this novel, Hines looks with eyes "blind, wide open, ice cold, fanatical" (120). Through his spectacles, with "eyes ruthless, cold," in which such gentleness as they contain is described by negation, as "not unkind" (141), McEachern also looks upon a world distorted to fit his misconceptions. That Miss Atkins and the matron share this blindness suggests that the disease which causes it is as much cultural as it is religious or personal in origin. When the dietitian discovers Joe in her closet, she sees him only in terms of her own guilty fears. Fearing "being caught at" (114) love, and seeing with "mad eyes" (119), she identifies Joe as black to hide her sin and punish him "for having given her terror and worry" (121). And when, now with "bland and innocent" (125) eyes, she tells the matron about Joe, the older woman denies what she hears until the social implications of a black child at a white orphanage register. Then the matron forces herself to recast her original perceptions: "Behind her glasses the weak, troubled eyes of the matron had a harried, jellied look, as if she were trying to force them to something beyond their physical cohesiveness" (126).

The final pattern of images ironically judging these characters' distortions is the compulsion or outright insanity lurking
behind their masks of superiority. In contrast to Sartoris where the family is likened to actors playing out their obsessions, the characters here are less free. As the half-dressed Miss Atkins attempts to defend herself against the onrushing Doc Hines, she is "like a puppet in some burlesque of rapine and despair. Leaning, downlooking, immobile, she appeared to be in deepest thought, as if the puppet in the midst of the scene had gone astray within itself" (122). Her sense of propriety is a kind of dumb-show scripted for her by her culture to which she must be publicly and consciously faithful, yet when she earlier believed that her private impropriety might be exposed by Joe, who had seen her making what could hardly be called love with an intern, her fear robbed her even of the freedom of a puppet gone astray. She was driven "like a passenger in a car" by a "kind of divination" which led "full and straight and instantaneous" (117-18) to Hines, a more devoted servant of the compulsions she shares with him. Hines, too, is "puppetlike"; "operated by clumsy springwork" (349)—his and his culture's misperceptions of man and nature—he is more firmly in the grip of his compulsions than Miss Atkins. Although Simon McEachern does not slip quite as far into madness as these others do, he is nevertheless manipulated by a paranoia born of his theology. When he discovers Joe sneaking out to meet Bobbie Allen, "bigotry and clairvoyance were practically one" (189). Moving in "pure and impersonal outrage, as if he believed so that he would be guided by some greater and purer outrage that he would not even need to doubt personal faculties" (189), he finds Joe and Bobbie almost at once.
To these men and women obsessed with denying unflattering and threatening aspects of their humanity, Joe Christmas is, in Alfred Kazin's words, "a tabula rasa, a white sheet of paper on which anyone can write out an identity for him and make him believe it."\(^{36}\) In terms of the novel's images, Joe is no more than a "shadow" (111), lacking any identity other than what they impute to him as the scapegoat for their fears, guilt, and sense of defilement. And as Otto Rank reveals in The Double, the shadow is one of the most common images representing the double or scapegoat.\(^ {37}\) To those at the orphanage, then, his "rightful nature" (119) is "little nigger bastard" (114), a "walking pollution in God's own face" (119). Although Simon McEachern knows nothing of Joe's supposed blackness, the same theology of fear demands that Joe, like all boys, be damned and soiled. When he first sees Joe, he looks at him with the "same stare with which he might have examined a horse or a second-hand plow, convinced beforehand that he would see flaws" (133).

But, as I suggested earlier, Joe is more than a blank sheet of paper or a shadow, more than the sum of the forces oppressing him. At five he possesses the potentiality for the kind of healthy personality revealed by Lena. Like Lena, he seeks life, symbolically expressed in childhood by the desire for nourishment. To him Miss Atkins is "something of pleasing association . . . making his mind

\(^{36}\) "The Stillness of Light in August," p. 96.

think of the diningroom, making his mouth think of something sweet and sticky to eat" (112). Before she discovers him in her room, he possesses, as Lena does, the harmony of mind and body essential for full humanity. He knew he should take only one mouthful of toothpaste each time he came surreptitiously to Miss Atkins' room: "Perhaps it was the animal warning him that more would make him sick; perhaps the human being warning him that if he took more than that, she would miss it" (113). He also has Lena's desire for a family and the nourishment of love. At three he had turned to another orphan, "a girl of twelve named Alice. He had liked her, enough to let her mother him a little; perhaps because of it" (127). When she was adopted and taken away in the night, she seemed to Joe to grow "heroic at the instant of vanishing beyond the clashedto gates, fading without diminution of size into something nameless and splendid, like a sunset" (128). Two years later when McEachern comes, Joe remembers her departure for a real home and family: "Perhaps memory knowing, knowing beginning to remember; perhaps even desire, since five is still too young to have learned enough despair to hope" (132).

Though a child, Joe also has Lena's impulses for community membership. At Doc Hines' urging the other children call him "nigger," but Joe asserts to the black yard man his membership in the dominant culture: "'I aint a nigger'" (363). He even accepts the religion of the community, which is nothing more to him at five or six than "music that pleases the ear and words that did not trouble the ear at all--on the whole, pleasant, even if a little tiresome" (135). And, of course, part of the culture he accepts is its notions of right and
wrong. Believing he has done wrong after the toothpaste episode, he puts himself in Miss Atkins' "way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off" (115). His acceptance of community morality explains his "astonishment, shock, outrage" (117) when the woman tries to buy his silence. Ironically, it is just this desire to be a member of the white community and his acceptance of its values which later so torments and divides him.

Tragically, the scapegoat identity imposed on Joe at the orphanage and in his first few years at McEachern's betrays the promise of these healthy desires, distorting his primal energies and turning him against them, until he believes that these energies, not his false identity, are his betrayers. The "shadow" that darkens his life, dividing and confusing him, is his unconscious, distorted memories of these betrayals: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (111). What Faulkner describes in this difficult but seldom examined passage is the reciprocal relationship between man's conscious and unconscious minds and the knowledge which results from it, a relationship which defines not only the creation of Joe's fragmented identity and those of the novel's other major characters but also the means by which the community preserves its identity. "Memory" here is apparently synonymous with the unconscious, one more Jungian than Freudian, presenting as permanently true certain racial, sexual, and religious judgments, even those passed on children. Highly subjective, unreliable perceptions thus become immutable facts, believed even though "knowing," consciousness, no longer remembers them. No
longer recollected, such beliefs then attain the character of the a priori assumptions underlying one's sense of identity, his most dearly held conscious beliefs, and his most crucial acts. To be defined or to act in terms of this unconscious meld of past images, however, is potentially harmful, first, because the definition comes almost wholly from without; second, because the past, closed off from the present, is often irrelevant to present circumstances and personal need; and, third, because the past is absorbed, reconstituted and acted upon before it is understood. "Knowing" no longer "even wonders" about the assumptions shaping belief and action. In the end, as the tense of the passage suggests, conscious perception of the present, what is, becomes largely a result of what the unconscious believes about the past. As Faulkner said at the University of Virginia about this relationship between past and present: "... no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. ... And so a man ... is all that made him...." 38 Man "knows" and is because his unconscious "remembers" what it "believes" about the past. No wonder the characters and communities in this novel often act on knowledge so distorted as to be not only useless but pernicious.

Faulkner here takes a view of personality different from that undergirding Sartoris, where to be a family member is to have an identity biologically and spiritually determined. To be young Bayard at eight years of age is to be a definite personality with the same

38 Faulkner in the University, p. 84.
violent pride, "the bleak arrogance" (Sartoris, 356), present at twenty-seven. To be Joe Christmas at five, however, is to be only a shadow of his future self, a tentative striving for identity about to be battered into shape by his environment. While the adult Bayard is constant, essentially faithful to his illusions, the adult Joe is protean, becoming what Lawrance Thompson calls "a microcosm of his immediate social-religious macrocosm." 39

About the orphanage itself, Joe "knows remembers believes" (111) intimations of an identity inimical to his human stature. Like the Mitchell house in Sartoris with its suggestion of confusion, the architecture of the orphanage is "garbled." It is a "cold echoing building" of "bleak walls . . . bleak windows" providing none of the warmth a child requires. Hardly the place for children, it is "surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo" (111). Constant, too, in Joe's memory is the filth, the "soot bleakened" "dark red brick" of the main building, down whose windows "soot from the yearly adjacenting chimneys streaked like black tears." To grow up here is to feel oneself a sub-human outsider, unnatural, soiled, punished for reasons unknown. But the most definite early intimations of Joe's outcast identity come from Doc Hines, "a more definite person than anyone else in his life" (129). "With more vocabulary but no more age he might have thought He hates me and fears me. . . . That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time He accepted it" (129).

39 William Faulkner, p. 66.
The famous toothpaste episode and its aftermath confirms these intimations, organizes and adds to Joe's perceptions, and teaches him that he is his own betrayer. He enters the dietitian's room a harmony of mind and body only to be divided by fear and the compulsion and nausea which follow.

He seemed to be turned in upon himself, watching himself sweating, watching himself smear another worm of paste into his mouth which his stomach did not want. Sure enough, it refused to go down. Motionless now, utterly contemplative, he seemed to stoop above himself like a chemist in his laboratory, waiting. (114)

The duality between mind and body which will plague Joe as an adolescent and adult is first created here as his mind dissociates itself from the body it cannot control. Unlike young Bayard Sartoris, who at least partially understands his duality, this child cannot understand his. His compulsions and physical revulsion seem outside and beneath him, unpredictable. It is not him, his stomach, which rebels, but the toothpaste he has swallowed, lifting inside him, trying to get back out, into the air where it was cool. It was no longer sweet. In the rife, pinkwomansmelling obscurity behind the curtain he squatted, pinkfoamed, listening to his insides, waiting with astonished fatalism for what was about to happen to him. Then it happened. (114)

Seeking symbolic nourishment, Joe is betrayed by the very impulses which brought him to the dietitian's room in the first place—or so he comes to believe. In later years he will remember this physical betrayal in terms of darkness, sickness, and "soft womansmelling" things. But most of all, he will remember it as a moment of discovery and self-definition: "he said to himself with complete and passive surrender: 'Well, here I am'" (114). He crept into Miss Atkins' room
sensing himself an outsider yet still believing that he somehow belonged, but when the dietitian discovers him, she confirms, organizes, and objectifies all of Joe's perceptions, past and present, of the soiled identity he would deny: "'You little rat! Spying on me! You little nigger bastard'" (114). Her identification, because it confirms what Joe senses about himself, forces a coalescence of images which will form the shadow following him through his life. Her words also drive a permanent wedge into Joe's personality, confirming the duality he felt at his sickness. He has, in effect, been asked to hold two opposing conceptions of himself, the one which has resulted from his desire to be a member of the white orphanage community and the other which is explicit in Miss Atkins' and the children's epithet, "nigger." He will later resolve the dilemma of his divided mind by driving his "blackness" down into the body, becoming, like Bayard Sartoris, permanently divided between tragic mind and stubborn, enduring flesh.

For the moment, however, Joe tries to resolve his dilemma by seeking the punishment which his childhood morals demand and which, when received, will reconfirm his membership in the orphanage community. Yet he is betrayed again, this time by Miss Atkins' offer of hush money, which he mistakenly assumes is to be used to further soil himself: "Looking at the dollar, he seemed to see ranked tubes of toothpaste like corded wood, endless and terrifying; his whole being coiled in a rich and passionate revulsion" (117). The orphanage finally puts the stamp on this terrifying soiled identity when, before expelling him as the "executor" of "the promissory note which he had
signed with a tube of toothpaste" (134), it must first make him presentable, "his ears and face red and burning with harsh soap and harsh towelling" (132).

Just before leaving the orphanage, when Joe hears Simon McEachern announce that he will change his name, the boy half thinks to himself, "My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas. There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time" (136). As T. H. Adamowski observes, Christmas here asserts his freedom to create his own identity, yet the identity he claims is, ironically, the soiled one, "the conferred essence" given him by the orphanage, which McEachern will force him to assert sooner than Joe thinks. The brief hiatus in Joe's struggle for an identity ends on a spring Sunday three years later, of which "twenty years later memory is still to believe On this day I became a man" (137). Accused of failing to learn his catechism, he responds as he did after the toothpaste incident, expecting justice. "'I did try'" (138), he says. His defiance of McEachern, his refusal to try further in the face of unjust accusation, is a commendable attempt to preserve his integrity. Unfortunately and ironically, however, Joe's defiance forces him to assume the attitude of those opposed to life energies. He walks "stiffly" (140) to the barn with McEachern to take his whipping, "their two backs in rigid abnegation of all compromise more alike than actual blood could have made them" (139), Joe insisting like his stepfather that right and

Resisting McEachern, Joe is "rigid with pride perhaps and despair. Or maybe it was vanity, the stupid vanity of a man" (140). The pride Joe feels in asserting his ironic dependence is twisted by despair at a father's injustice and results, as it will in the future, in further ironic defiance, a defiance that Faulkner calls vain, "the stupid vanity of a man." When McEachern punishes the defiant Joe, the step-father confirms the soiled nature of the identity Joe claims but at the same time offers something the orphanage did not, release through suffering from the sense of being soiled; Joe finally receives punishment for transgression denied him at the orphanage. Feeling the "clean hard virile living leather" (139) strap, Joe is "like a monk in a picture."

He stood so, erect, his face and the pamphlet lifted, his attitude one of exaltation. Save for surplice he might have been a Catholic choir boy, with for nave the looming and shadowy crib, the rough planked wall beyond which in the ammoniac and dryscented obscurity beasts stirred now and then with snorts and indolent thuds. (140)

Joe may be soiled, something less than human among beasts, but he can be purified of his apparent aberrations of character through suffering. It is this violent purgation which binds Joe to McEachern in a thoroughly ironic father-son relationship. Joe can depend on this man to purge him of the very filth the man makes him feel. After being repeatedly beaten for his refusal to learn the catechism, Joe nevertheless feels "quite well" (142). Having undergone a catharsis of sorts, his face is "quite calm; calm, peaceful, quite inscrutable" (143).

41 Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 105.
Ironically, however, what has been purged are Joe's life impulses rather than his soiled nature; he lies in bed, "on his back, his hands crossed on his breast like a tomb effigy" (144).

Intruding in this most intimate struggle between rigid man and rigid boy is the soft Mrs. McEachern. Though she "always tried to be kind to him" (155), she is closely associated in Joe's mind with that other betraying woman, Miss Atkins. On the night of his arrival three years before, Joe did not know what she was trying to do when, like Mary Magdalene, she washed his feet. "He didn't know that that was all, because it felt too good. He was waiting for the rest of it to begin: the part that would not be pleasant, whatever it would be" (156). Now again she comes, confusing Joe by covertly opposing her husband's unjust justice with her offer of food. "'I know what you think,'" she tells him. "'It aint that. He never told me to bring it to you. It was me that thought to do it. He dont know. It aint any food he sent you'" (145). By offering nourishment to Joe's betraying flesh—not only that which is soiled but also that which failed to outlast McEachern's beatings—she threatens to deny the purification won by suffering. He understands her gesture as analogous to Miss Atkins' bribe and so rejects her and "that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men" (158). He spurns love, nourishment, and his life energies, too, with the same, almost religious zeal with which he underwent the beatings. Dumping the food in a corner, he returns to bed, "carrying the empty tray as though it were a monstrance and he the bearer, his
surplice the cutdown undergarment which had been bought for a man to wear" (145). Joe has become a man, shaped to the form of his shadow, like his step-father hating the body and its emotional and physical needs.

But, of course, the demands of the body--life impulses--will not be denied. Having gone without food all day, Joe must eat:

It was years later that memory knew what he was remembering; years after that night when, an hour later, he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner as he had not done on the rug [when McEachern prayed for him], and above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, like a dog. (145-46)

Because Joe's body forces him to bend in a way that his tragic mind would not permit when he resisted McEachern, Joe now knows for certain what memory is to believe, that his body is his betrayer. If the orphanage's racist code betray's Joe's human impulses and organizes his perceptions of himself in terms of his outcast identity, the catechism episode teaches Joe that it is these impulses which soil and dehumanize. He is taught to fear and deny the very energies which would sustain him and to surrender to—even claim in defiance—those negative racist and religious conceptions dividing and perverting him.

From these seminal episodes in Joe Christmas' youth develops the complex personality of his adolescence and adulthood. The episodes at McEachern's that follow reveal the fundamental pattern of Joe's response to life as determined by his now divided unconscious. In each episode Joe is first driven by his primal energies to fulfill some healthy instinct, which is corrupted by his outcast identity or by others who confirm that identity. But instead of denying the identity imposed on him, Joe's tragic mind demands the purgation of the healthy
impulses seen as defiling. Joe, himself a scapegoat, makes his body the scapegoat or scourge for the white illusions of defilement in his mind. He is, as R. G. Collins aptly puts it, "the Ku Klux Klan of his dark self." Submitting his body to punishment, Joe gains a measure of release. The pattern, however, is doomed to repeat itself because Joe's stubbornly healthy primal energies and inchoate desires for full humanity will not be denied, but with each repetition of the pattern, another of these healthy energies is corrupted as he progressively comes to see more and more of the world in terms of his sense of his own defilement. It is by this process, as Faulkner said at the University of Virginia, that Joe "deliberately evicted himself from the human race." Not able to choose between black and white and unable to harmonize body and mind, "he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out. Which . . . is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in. . . ." 43

The first of Joe's healthy energies corrupted are those driving him to seek, sustain, and create life itself. As a child he expressed these energies in his desire for nourishment; now an adolescent, he expresses them most clearly in his sexual desire. Through his encounter with the black girl, however, he comes to believe that the sex act is defiled and defiling. It is dark in the shed where he comes to the girl:

42 "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 105.
43 Faulkner in the University, p. 72.
At once he was overcome by a terrible haste. There was something in him trying to get out, like when he had used to think of toothpaste. But he could not move at once, standing there, smelling the woman, smelling the Negro all at once; enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste, driven, having to wait until she spoke. . . . Then it seemed to him that he could see her—something, prone, abject; her eyes perhaps. Leaning, he seemed to look down into a black well and at the bottom saw two glints like reflection of dead stars. (146-47)

Joe does not think of sex particularly as sin—until, that is, he thinks "of the man who would be waiting for him at home, since to fourteen the paramount sin would be to be publicly convicted of virginity" (146). This sinful sex is, however, McEachern's, not Joe's, concept, and since it is McEachern's, the defiant Joe has all the more reason to enter the shed. But as soon as he enters and confronts the girl, his unconscious memory of the past organizes his present perceptions: he dimly remembers the darkness of Miss Atkins' closet where his nourishment-seeking flesh betrayed him with sickness and the woman herself stamped him with the mark of darkness, "nigger bastard." All of this forces a coalescence of Joe's present perceptions into the image "womanshenegro," an objectification of his inner torment. Confronting the black girl, Joe is both himself, seeing with the white half of his tragic mind, and that which is being seen—"something, abject, prone"—the betraying black flesh personified by the black girl. The black well where she seems to lie is an image of the pit, which Robert Slabey suggests is the "primordial womb symbol," the source of both life and the betrayal of white illusions. Born black, or so he believes Joe sees life and its female source as

betrayers, as corrupt and corrupting. Divided within, opposing himself, Joe must necessarily oppose life. The dead stars of the black girl's eyes, recalling to the reader the "black and savage stars" (Sartoris, 205) of young Bayard Sartoris' destiny, symbolize Joe's sense of entrapment. R. G. Collins helpfully defines the dynamics of this episode: "Negro equals guilt; Guilt induces Hatred of Life; therefore, Sex and the Sexual Object, which compel the act of Life creation, are essentially vile and must be debased violently, since they by their nature corrupt."45

Not to be betrayed by life again, as he was in the dietitian's closet or in his bedroom where Mrs. McEachern brought him food, he strikes out at this nemesis from his past, kicking her, "hitting at her with wide, wild blows, striking at the voice, perhaps, feeling her flesh anyway, enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste" (147). That Joe is, in fact, punishing himself is revealed by the fight he provokes with his friends: then "it was male he smelled, they smelled." Once more, suffering offers purification of his sullied desire. "Yet he still struggled, fighting, weeping. There was no She at all now. They just fought; it was as if a wind had blown among them, hard and clean" (147). But not even the wind, what Robert Slabey calls the male archetype, "the solar phallus,"46 can cleanse him of the taint of the flesh expressed by sexual desire. Fleeing "phantomlike," the image of his past, Joe brushes "at his overalls, mechanically, with his hands" (148).

45 "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 106.
Through Bobbie Allen, Joe's images of soiled life are extended to white womanhood. But before he meets her, perhaps even before the incident with the black girl, he learns from his only slightly less ignorant companions that women, "the smooth and superior shape," are "doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth" (173). Although Joe understands menstruation as, in T. H. Adamowski's words, "the imprimatur of nature," the mark of the flesh and thus defilement, he nevertheless attempts to purchase special immunity from it by killing a sheep: "Then he knelt, his hands in the yet warm blood of the dying heart, trembling, drymouthed, backglaring" (174). With this ritual we are reminded of young Bayard Sartoris' attempt to gain absolution from guilt by burning his brother's personal effects. The gestures are different, however, in that Bayard's is pagan in tone, while Joe's, influenced by McEachern's Old Testament Christianity, is ironically a Christian gesture, perhaps suggested to him by the words of that hymn of purification: "Sinner, have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?" Joe's gesture also reveals that while he views life and its source as defiled, he still seeks in his deluded idealism to purify them. His gesture is both a measure of the extent to which his healthy primal energies have been perverted and the extent to which he still retains these energies.

At his first opportunity to make love to Bobbie, he holds in paradoxical suspension his impression of female defilement and his belief in his absolution from it: "It was as if he said, illogical and desperately calm All right. It is so, then. But not to me. Not in

my life and my love" (174). Still a virgin, having "struck refraining that Negro girl three years ago" (165-66), Joe believes he is untainted by female defilement; with his ritual gesture he trusts he has purchased special dispensation for Bobbie. So believing, he is terribly betrayed when he learns that Bobbie is, in her words, "sick." He strikes this betraying white woman as he could not the dietitian or Mrs. McEachern. Once more seeking purification from betrayal by the human condition, he flees to a wood which, to his deluded imagination, is a masculine place of "hardtrunks . . . branchshadowed quiet, hardfeeling, hard-smelling" (177). There, in the "hardknowing," in terms of the illusions of the men who have raised him,

as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul. He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it, seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited. (177-78)

From one point of view, almost all of Joe's actions at McEachern's are desperate attempts to free himself from the images of defilement which have been features of his outcast identity since he could remember; ironically, however, the failure of each attempt to drive out the defilement only serves to extend Joe's impressions of this defilement further and further into the life around him. This must happen, not only because Joe projects the sense of his defilement to others seen in the light of his Calvinist racism, but also because others share and confirm his delusions (the word "sick" is, after all, Bobbie and her culture's euphemism for her condition). In the shed with the black girl, Joe understood sex as corrupt insofar as
it was physical, involved with women, and tainted by blackness. But with the black girl, at least, Joe managed to confine his sense of physical corruption with the fact of her blackness. Whiteness, more an ideal than a physical fact like the opposing blackness, remained untainted. When he met Bobbie, he conjured a naive illusion of perfect white womanhood—"a suavely shaped urn," the "smooth and superior shape"—the product both of his desire for a healthy sexual union and his racist illusions of white purity. The Bobbie in Joe's mind is thus freed from corruption by his delusions and by Joe's gesture of ritual purification. He has tried to drive a wedge into "womanshe-negro," freeing woman, the object of desire, from the defilement he associates with "Negro," only to have his illusions of this possibility blasted by Bobbie's menstrual cycle. She seems to demonstrate to him that the object of desire and its corrupt condition are inseparable. To Joe, woman's nature is mysteriously changeable like the moon and dark like a fetid cave. What are now corrupted—"cracked"—are not simply white women, of course, but Joe's illusory concepts of pure white womanhood. What is so sickeningly terrible to him is apparently that the source of the white life he aspires to is so "foul." Whiteness seems as defiled as he believes himself to be. Bobbie's "sickness," then, is a betrayal not only of Joe personally but, to his way of thinking, a betrayal of the racist illusions that structure his perceptions.

Thus, the following Monday when Joe comes to Bobbie again, he drags her back to his phallic woods where he consummates their affair with a violence which is as much punitive as purgative.
"Wait," she said, the words jolting from her mouth. "The fence--I can't--" As she stooped to go through, between the strands of wire which he had stepped over, her dress caught. He leaned and jerked it free with a ripping sound.

"I'll buy you another one," he said. She said nothing. She let herself be half carried and half dragged among the growing plants, the furrows, and into the woods, the trees. (178)

Here, as it will be in later years, violence is a necessary preliminary or postscript to sex, for only in this way, Joe believes, can desire be purified. At the same time, sex itself becomes a weapon to punish woman, now seen as the betrayer of purity and the purveyor of defilement. Conditioned by his outcast identity, Joe has, at this stage of his life, turned once healthy primal energies to destructive ends.

Equally corrupted by his outcast identity are those energies motivating Joe to seek family and community circles. There is, of course, no possibility for him to develop a nourishing relationship with the McEacherns. Mrs. McEachern--desperate for love and affection--betrays the painful identity Joe has claimed for himself; Simon McEachern only confirms and then purges this soiled identity, ever widening the breach in Joe's character. During one of the periodic beatings McEachern administers, Joe's "body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and self-crucifixion" (150). The rift in Joe's personality is now so wide that his body no longer seems a part of him; it is not even made of human stuff. To his tragic mind, then, the body's pain is almost an abstraction, a cause for exultation, not suffering, since pain con-
firms the cleansing sacrifice of what he understands to be his foul body. After this beating, "his mind was made up to run away. He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (150-51). Although Faulkner explains most of his ironies here, we should still note that the cage Joe would escape is the circle of common humanity he seeks unconsciously. His decision to escape his cage, to run away, is, we readily recognize, not a flight from family but a plea for dignity and, ultimately, for love. McEachern does not intend to, of course, but he also thwarts Joe's social impulses as surely as his familial ones. Raised by another, no less religious father, Joe might have found community in his church, but the boy as been so turned against McEachern and all he represents that the church becomes nothing more than another opportunity to express defiance: "He saw girls only at church, on Sunday. They were associated with Sunday and with church. So he could not notice them. To do so would be, even to him, a retraction of his religious hatred" (173). The town near where Joe lives, a railroad division point, offers him no healthy social outlets either, not simply because "the air of the place was masculine, transient" (162), but because when he goes there in the company of McEachern, his step-father ensures that Joe will once more be defiant. Leaving the restaurant-whorehouse where they went one Saturday apparently by accident, McEachern tells Joe: "'I'll have you remember that place. There are places in this world where a man may go but a boy, a youth of your age, may not. That is one of them" (164). Given this
tantalizing prohibition, Joe must return, drawn to a community of outsiders by his defiance and by his familial and social impulses.

Ironically, it is here among these outsiders that Joe most fully reveals the stubborn presence of his healthy social impulses as well as their terrible vulnerability. In a dream following his first meeting with Bobbie Allen, a woman "not much larger than a child" (165) and thus innocent to him, Joe recreates her in the image of his own need, imprisoning "within the eye's self her face demure, pensive; tragic, sad, and young; waiting, colored with all the vague and formless magic of young desire" (165). "Unworldly and innocent," Joe is drawn back to the restaurant, betrayed there by the very physical instincts he believes sullied: "He did it without plan or design, almost without volition, as if he feet ordered his action and not his head" (166).

In its early phase, Bobbie and Joe's affair is characterized by a purity of purpose which recalls Lena Grove's instinctive search for family. At their second meeting, "they must have looked a little like they were praying" (168). At their third, "they must have looked like two monks met during the hour of contemplation in a garden path" (172). Bobbie's pimp, Max Confrey, unaware of the reach of his ironies, exclaims of the two lovers: "'It's Romeo and Juliet. For sweet Jesus!'" (180). In what is perhaps the novel's tenderest scene, when they first make love in Bobbie's room, Joe puts behind him for the time his images of soiled flesh, opening himself to her as he never will to another, revealing his vulnerable humanity, and learning the contours and rhythms of physical life:
They lay in the bed, in the dark, talking. Or he talked, that is. All the time he was thinking "Jesus, Jesus. So this is it." He lay naked too, beside her, touching her with his hand and talking about her. Not about where she had come from and what she had even done, but about her body as if no one had ever done this before, with her or with anyone else. It was as if with speech he were learning about women's bodies, with the curiosity of a child. (183-84)

In this brief phase of their affair Joe struggles to free himself from the furies loosed on him in his past, but each word, each gesture, each act in this struggle only mire him more deeply in his outcast identity. When Bobbie asks him his name, he replies first in negation of his oppressive past and then in affirmation of the independent man he desires to be: "'It's not McEachern,' he said. 'It's Christmas'" (173). He is unaware, of course, of the extent to which "Christmas" has become the sign of the outcast identity hurting him, the extent to which the identity he claims is the dark, distorted mirror image of the identity he rejects, "McEachern." When he at last discovers that Bobbie is a prostitute and sees the shattering of another of his illusions about her, he cannot leave her even though he feels badly betrayed; she has been the only one to gratify his familial and social impulses. Instead of fleeing, he plunges into a fanatical puritan's version of corruption, degrading himself for his degraded woman. In imitation of Max Confrey, a surrogate father, and his acquaintances among the outsiders at Max's whorehouse, Joe begins

to smoke, squinting his face against the smoke, and he drank too. He would drink at night with Max and Mame and sometimes three or four other men and usually another woman or two, sometimes from the town, but usually strangers. . . . He did not always know their names, but he could cock his hat as they did; during the evenings behind the drawn shades of the diningroom at Max's he cocked it so
and spoke of [Bobbie] to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore. (187)

To keep Bobbie, the ironic fulfillment of his primal energies, he finally steps outside the thin edge of the community circle where Max and Bobbie dwell. After striking and perhaps killing McEachern in defense of Bobbie's honor, Joe celebrates what he believes to be his hard-won freedom, "exulting perhaps at that moment as Faustus had, of having put behind now at once and for all the Shalt Not, of being free at last of honor and law" (194). Like Faustus, Joe has repudiated the constraints of his condition, but unlike Faustus, Joe does not so much seek to transcend the limits of humanity as to find a way into the community circle, a way the oppressive McEachern had blocked. By striking McEachern, however, Joe cuts himself off from humanity as surely as Faustus does, becoming an outcast in point of law as well as in spirit. He has not reckoned that the "Shalt Not" circumscribing his identity has been imposed as much by his community as by McEachern. Nor is he aware that the inescapable "law" decreeing this identity has been written in the unconscious of others as well as his own.

His relationship with Bobbie is doomed, then, not only because of his criminal defiance or because he is unable to escape his past, but also because Bobbie, herself an outsider, subscribes to the "Shalt Not" code oppressing Joe. Her eyes, which seem "to be without depth, as if they could not even reflect" (169), will in moments of crisis see only what they have been conditioned by her community to see. After McEachern threatens her at the dance with the truth of her nature—"'Jezebel!'" "'Harlot!'"—she denounces Joe in the same simple terms
Miss Atkins once used to denounce him and protect herself: "'Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!'" (204). At the tenderest moment of their affair and in a bid for complete acceptance, Joe confessed his greatest vulnerability to Bobbie, "'I think I got some nigger blood in me'" (184), and now this woman, like others before her, betrays him with his trust. This betrayal, as Olga Vickery remarks, "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." 

48 In other words, this final betrayal of Joe's youth culminates all the betrayals of his human identity and the primal energies which would generate a healthy identity; this last betrayal confirms Joe's place outside the three circles of life, family, and community.

Joe is savagely punished that night in Max and Mame's whorehouse for still possessing healthy energies, and as in the past his suffering is only a temporary purification of such desires. Having completed what Joseph Gold calls his "training period," 

49 Joe runs for fifteen years, seeking equivocally down "a thousand savage and lonely streets" (207), like "a blind man or a sleepwalker" (209), for a resolution to his divided identity. At times he tricks or teases "white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten" (212). Like a sleepwalker, directed by the unconscious nightmare of his outcast identity, he still seeks to purge his

48 *The Novels of William Faulkner*, p. 71.

49 "The Two Worlds of Light in August," p. 162.
soiled nature through suffering, "or failing that," as R. G. Collins suggests, "to pay back the white race for that natural superiority in which he himself believes."\(^5\) Sometimes he makes subtler pleas for suffering, at once punishing and gratifying his natural urges "below the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight" where "he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them that he was a Negro" (211). He is beaten and cursed, as he desires, for this defiance. This compulsive form of confession, not unlike young Bayard Sartoris' and perhaps revealing the same sense of guilt, works well until he meets a white prostitute who will not humiliate him for being black. "He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years" (212). His is sick now as he was when Bobbie Allen betrayed his delusions of white purity, feeling revulsion because the white half of his divided mind cannot dominate the black self.

Still the possessor of healthy energies, however corrupt they may be, Joe is also like a blind man, groping for the life, family, and community essential for the human identity he yet insists upon. After all he has been through, he still desires to cease being an outsider.\(^5\) Unlike young Bayard during his flight, Joe ambivalently involves himself in communities, working in turn as "laborer, miner, prospector,\

\(^5\) "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 118.

gambling tout; he enlisted in the army, served four months and de-
serted and was never caught" (211). After his sickness he chooses to
live among black people in what would be a step toward a healthy iden-
tity if only his conception of blackness were not as illusory as his
conception of whiteness. Lying in bed in the darkness next to "a
woman who resembled an ebony carving" (212), Joe "deliberately" tries
to "breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable think-
ing and being of Negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from
himself the white blood and the white thinking and being" (212). But
just as the black half, the image of his physical nature, has proven
impervious to expulsion from his tragic mind, so does the white half,
the image of his past. "The irony of Joe's position," Olga Vickery
suggests, "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." 52 As his "whole being" writhes and strains "with physical
outrage and denial" (212), what suffers most is his humanity. But he
cannot escape that, either. Whether living as black or white, Joe has
a drive foreign to young Bayard Sartoris to resolve his dilemma. Bay-
ard finally evades the issue of his identity; Joe actively confronts
his, at last completing the circle of his flight and returning to the
South, the origin of pain and division. He arrives with little more
than a flicker of his original healthy energies. "Rootless . . . , as
though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of
earth his home, . . . almost proud" of his ability to endure his

52 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 69.
division and isolation, Joe is the perfect representation of what Erik Erikson calls negative identity: "an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous, and yet, also as most real."\(^5\) Joe's tragedy is that he has insisted upon an identity whose terms are inhuman. All he knows, all he has ever been taught, is to be an outsider. But he must be someone; his primal energies demand it.

This is the Joe Christmas we meet at the beginning of Chapter Two of *Light in August*, a man who is, as R. G. Collins describes him, "an analogue of the South that Faulkner saw as present actuality, uncertain of its own identity, battling the darkness in its blood, damned by its inability to accept its mixed culture, striking out in violence whenever the acceptance is urged upon it."\(^5\) In their own ways, Byron Bunch, Joanna Burden, and Gail Hightower are also analogues for Faulkner's South, each representing a particular way of coming to terms with some of the same cultural, religious, and historical forces oppressing Joe. But while these forces have shocked Lena and Joe into two kinds of motion, they have numbed Byron, Joanna, and Hightower into passivity or lassitude. If Joe is rootless, they are rootbound, prevented by their pasts from growing, from expressing the healthy


\(^5\) "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 101
primal energies which make a whole personality possible.

III. BYRON BUNCH: "AN EMPTY PLACE WHERE THE SAND BLOWS"

Byron Bunch has probably received the least scrutiny of any of the novel's major characters, and this is unfortunate because during the course of the novel he becomes a center of moral consciousness and conscience, a measure of the continuing blindness of the community and other major characters. When we first see him, however, he is living a life of abnegation not unlike that of his only friend, Gail Hightower. We know next to nothing about Byron's past, but given the pasts of the other characters, we know enough when we learn that he is the product of "an austere and jealous country raising" (44). As the result of this upbringing he suspends, as it were, his healthy primal energies, devoting all his efforts to the avoidance of evil in all forms and the avoidance of harm to others. Believing that "a fellow is bound to get into mischief as soon as he quits working" (50), he spends Saturday afternoons alone at the planing mill "where the chance to do hurt or harm could not have found him" (50). During the rest of what for others is an idle weekend, he

rides thirty miles into the country and spends Sunday leading the choir in a country church—a service which lasts all day long. Then some time around midnight he saddles the mule again and rides back to Jefferson at a steady, allnight jog. And on Monday morning, in his clean overalls and shirt he will be on hand at the mill when the whistle blows. (43)

While his church duties provide Byron with more community than Hightower has, the emphasis of the description on the ride to and from the church and the length of the service suggests that church offers Byron
as much an opportunity for harmless isolation and the means to fill
time as it does the opportunity for service to others.

As a consequence of his abnegation, Byron leads a lifeless and
isolated existence, albeit a harmless and relatively contented one.
He is a slave to mechanical time, to his "huge silver watch" (43)
which reminds us of McEachern's, measuring life by linear time instead
of the natural rhythms Lena responds to. His life, therefore, is one
of barren "celibacy and hard labor" (76): "If there had been love
once, man or woman would have said that Byron Bunch had forgotten her.
Or she (meaning love) him, more like" (42), since his upbringing de-
mands "physical inviolability" (44) in the object of love. "Bunch-ed"
up like a snail or turtle in his withdrawal from life and its ambiv-
alent attitudes, with "the face of a hermit who has lived for a long
time in an empty place where the sand blows" (285), Byron is known
"by name or habit" (394) even less than Joanna and Joe. Unwilling to
meddle, he participates scarcely at all in community life. Byron is a
good man, but the price for his goodness has been high. He is, as John
Longley and Beach Langston suggest, a kind of Adam, not so much cor-
rupted by his past as untouched by life. As Longely observes, Byron
"labors in the garden of the world as he knows it and is unfallen not
because he is ignorant of the existence of sin but because he is
firmly established in his own system for avoiding it."55 As a result,
he has no proper field for the exercise of the genuine wisdom he

55 Longley, The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes, p. 50,
possesses in contrast to the Reverend Hightower's brittle sophistry—that is, until he meets and falls in love with Lena Grove "contrary to the tradition" (44) of his past.

IV. JOANNA BURDEN: "THE SHADOW IN THE SHAPE OF A CROSS"

If Byron has suspended his healthy instincts, Joanna Burden has suppressed hers in the belief that they are the mark of spiritual damnation. Like Joe, she has been divided by a religious and racial identity imposed in her past, "warped," Cleanth Brooks says, "away from the fulfillment of her nature," but while Joe's imposed identity confuses him, making him uncertain of who he is, the identity imposed on Joanna makes her certain, both of her nature and her mission in life. The origins of her destructive identity lie, like the origins of Joe's, in the false, self-serving values of her forebears. While Cleanth Brooks argues that the forebears of both Joanna and Hightower "were whole men, fully related to the world outside them, fully alive," his observation is sound only after heavy qualification. Only the first Gail Hightower completely fits Brooks's description. The rest had to one degree or another severed certain bonds with the world outside them; they were also divided within by

56 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 57.

57 François Pitavy, in Faulkner's Light in August, p. 43, and Frederick Hoffman, in William Faulkner (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 71, have also noticed this ironic contrast between Joanna and Joe.

58 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 60.
the pattern of their values. Through ironies not dissimilar to those 
undercutting the convictions of Doc Hines and Simon McEachern, Faulk-
ner suggests that the Burden men and Gail Hightower's father were af-
flicted by a kind of moral and social solipsism which follows from 
their particular values. That the Yankee Burdens as well as Hines, 
McEachern, and Hightower's father were so afflicted suggests that their 
disease is more than a Southern problem.

Joanna's grandfather, Calvin Burden, gazing "vague, fanatical, 
and convinced" (234) like Joe's grandfather and foster-father upon a 
divided world which was the projection of his own myopic moral vision, 
believed he had to raise his children on a diet of hatred, pain, and 
denial. "'I'll learn you to hate two things,'" he admonished them, 
"'or I'll frail the tar out of you. And those things are hell and 
slaveholders'" (229). With his "hard hand" (229) he "'beat the loving 
God'" (230) into his children, so providing them with an essentially 
Manichean conception of the world. Like Hines and McEachern, the 
Burdens attempted to assure themselves that they were elect members of 
the church militant, the bright half of the Manichean duality. Those 
who did not believe their rigid creed were the dark half: "heathen," 
all doomed "'to their own benighted hell'" (229-30). "Washed and clean" 
(230), the Burdens believed themselves superior to common, fleshly-- 
and thus, evil--life, especially to the black people whom they had to 
redeem. Echoing Doc Hines's vision of blacks as damned, degraded, and 
soiled, Joanna's grandfather declared them to be "'damn, lowbuilt 
folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black be-
cause of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh"
Salvation for these damned lay, he insisted, in the freedom the Burdens would win for them and in the purification of their tainted blood and flesh: "But we done freed them now... They'll bleach out now. In a hundred years they will be white folks again. Then maybe we'll let them come back into America" (234).

Such are the Burdens' ironic echoes of Hines and McEachern. To understand these ironies fully, however, especially the paradox of abolitionist sentiments founded on racism and the divorce of theological from moral injunctions which this paradox reveals, we must examine the ambivalent pattern of behavior repeated in each generation of the family. The youngest or only Burden child of each generation, compelled by the same healthy energies possessed by Joe and Lena, fled the harsh, oppressive, lifeless religion of his family; carrying with him the religious and racial symbols of his father, he sought dark-skinned people, black or Latin, whom he associated with life in the body. To express the unconscious desire for a union of mind and body, each Burden married into this darkness. The first Calvin married Evangeline, an apparently dark-skinned woman of French Huguenot descent, and together they produced a son, Nathaniel, a symbol both of his father's desire for harmony between mind and body and of the impulses his religious creed must condemn: "Like people of two different races," "the tall, gaunt Nordic" Calvin is contrasted to the "small,

Cleanth Brooks has noted that the Burdens are racists, but he treats this simply as an historical fact about some abolitionists rather than a part of Faulkner's thematic design (The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 378-79n.).
dark, vivid child who had inherited his mother's build and coloring" (229). Absolutely faithful to his father's impulses, this son Nathaniel ran away at fourteen, took "for a wife a woman who looked almost exactly like" his mother, and produced a son "dark like . . . his mother" (233) and grandmother.

Unable, however, to escape the soiling illusions of his father, each Burden son eventually became confused, failing, as all characters in the novel do, to comprehend the origin and nature of his healthy impulses. Looking "with a kind of violently slumbering contemplativeness and bewidered outrage" at son and grandson, the first Calvin remarked: "'Another damn black Burden. . . . Folks will think I bred to a damn slaver. And now he's got to breed to one, too!'" (234). Doomed by their humanity, they loved what their religion had taught them to hate. Of his namesake grandson Calvin declared: "'By God, he's going to be as big a man as his grandpappy; not a runt like his pa. For all his black dam and his black look, he will!'" (234). From this guilty love-hatred for their own humanity and its issue evolved the Burden abolitionism, a self-serving projection of their desire for purification, redemption from the humanity they believe soiled. Like Joe Christmas, they need a violent purgation and so they killed and were killed by those whose values are an ironic mirror of their own. Thus Faulkner reveals a burden borne by this family much heavier than "the white man's burden" cliché. Turning from the opportunity for easy satire, Faulkner penetrates to the heart of what he saw as the unconscious guilt shaping Northern animus toward the South. The burden the Burdens bore as aliens was compounded by their own
flawed humanity; it is this complex identity, complete with its legacy of frustrated life, incomprehension, and fatality, which Nathaniel Burden bequeathed to his daughter in the cedar grove protecting the family burial plot.

There his twisted logic absolved Southern whites for his father and son's deaths; he told his daughter that the true blame lay upon the blacks whom the family had attempted to reclaim.

"'Remember this. Your grandfather and brother are lying there, murdered not by one white man but by the curse which God put on a whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of. A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins. Remember that. . . . None can escape it.'" (239)

In his tortured attempt to explain the nature of the family's peculiar identity and fate, Nathaniel unwittingly employed the terms of race and God's curse in an unconscious analogy to describe the ambivalent relationship between deluded tragic mind and soiled body plaguing the family. The search for a harmony of mind and body, when the body is assumed to be corrupt, was the basis for his sense of damnation, a damnation which can never be escaped just as the claims of healthy impulses can never be fully denied nor completely corrupted.

The four-year-old Joanna, already tainted by having been named for her half-brother's dark mother, was terrified by what she heard in the cedars. She did not want to go there in the first place. "'I think it was something about father,'" she tells Joe, "'something that came from the cedar grove to me, through him. A something that I felt that he had put on the cedar grove, and that when I went into it, the grove would put on me so that I would never be able to forget it'"
The only time Joanna can remember her father distinctly, "as somebody, a person" (238) was when he passed the curse. As happened to Joe Christmas in Miss Atkins' closet, Joanna in the cedar grove was overwhelmed by a vague sense of her own damnation which was then ordered and given meaning by her father's malediction. Her childhood, too, was darkened by a threatening shadow:

"I had seen and known Negroes since I could remember. I just looked at them as I did at rain, or furniture, or food or sleep. But after that I seemed to see them for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people." (239)

Her world and her vision of it were then transfigured, distorted as badly as young Bayard Sartoris' were by the stories he heard as a child from Aunt Jenny Du Pre. The difference, of course, is that instead of being given an unrealistic dream to aspire to as Bayard was, Joanna was judged and cursed, given something to flee, the expiatory pain which whites must endure because of their illusions of the tainting black shadow:

"I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross." (239)

Soiled before birth, Joanna must suffer for her soul as well as for the souls of black people. Her only hope for salvation from damnation and suffering is really no hope at all: ""You must struggle, rise,"" her father explained it. ""But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level. I see that
now, which I did not see until I came down here. But escape it you cannot" (240). To escape the curse, Joanna must lift the shadow, yet she can never remove the taint of her fleshly humanity nor wholly reclaim black people. She must; she cannot. Her father then compounded what were to become Joanna's feelings of attraction and repulsion toward blacks. Possibly alluding to the biblical myth that blacks are descendants of Noah's son Ham, Nathaniel warned her that the cursed of God are also His favored: ""The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him"" (240). The apparently corrupt humanity which he condemned on the one hand, he blessed on the other to justify his own ambivalent impulses. Nathaniel treasured the darkness in the flesh that he was taught to hate. Joanna's response to her father's confusion and unreconciled conflict could only be a retreat from the confusions of life, the denial of her natural impulses, and a desperate attempt to purge the black shadow darkening the prospects for her soul's salvation.

Her family's divided energies now released within her, Joanna, though only a child, was fully a Burden. Condemned by her heritage, she more or less repeats its ambivalent pattern in the three phases of her affair with Joe Christmas. Long before they meet she has suppressed most of the earthy energies and femininity Lena Grove possesses in such abundance. As Byron Bunch observes, she is seen only occasionally and then "'in a dress and sunbonnet that some nigger women I know wouldn't have wore for its shape and how it made her look'" (81). With her brown hair almost always hidden, her face "calm, cold . . . , almost
manlike" (244), her voice "pitched almost like the voice of a man" (227), with even the "mantrained muscles and the mantrained habit of thinking born of heritage and environment" (221-22), she comes to us as the personification of her culture's repudiation of the supposedly soiled source of soiled fleshly existence. For twenty years--all her adult life--she has lived this way, trying to lift the black shadow from her. The closest she has come to having a family or a community are the blacks in the neighborhood whom she believes she cares for. Ironically, as a black boy tells Joe, it is not she who cares for them: "'Colored folks around here looks after her!'" (214). Yet in spite of all her abnegation, Joanna makes an ambivalent plea for the violation of her "spiritual privacy so long intact" (221); she sleeps at night with windows open and doors "never locked" (99).

In the first phase of her affair with Joe, she ambivalently attempts to maintain her privacy and deny her physical impulses. On the one hand, after a year, when she and Joe have become what hardly could be called lovers, she still resists him, degrading their affair to fit her religion's conception of it. When he comes to her,

it was as though he entered by stealth to despoil her virginity each time anew. It was as though each turn of dark saw him faced again with the necessity to despoil again that which he had already despoiled--or never had and never would. (221)

The victim, as Cleanth Brooks nicely puts it, "of sex driven up into the head," Joanna will never be despoiled; her virginity is not a physical fact but a function of her tragic mind's revulsion at the body and its urges. Her responses to Joe's early advances are thus

60 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 58.
automatic, unthinking, her surrender "hard, untearful and unself-pitying and almost manlike" (221). It is with her past that Joe must "fight up to the final instant. There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last" (222). On the other hand, though her desire is not obvious, though she does nothing to consciously encourage Joe's advances, though she fights hard when he comes to her, still she does not lock her windows, bar her door, or do any of the things that she might have done to drive him away. Yet when she finally does surrender, thus marking the end of phase one, it is with her mind, the true arena of her struggle, not with her body; beneath Joe's hands her "body might have been the body of a dead woman not yet stiffened" (223). Finished, Joe thinks, "'At least I have made a woman of her at last!'" (223). It is Joanna's attempt to become a woman according to the corrupt conception of womanhood she shares with Joe which forms the second phase of their affair.

In an image recalling Joe's childhood hunger, we are told that the years before Joanna's surrender were "starved years" (250). Now, however, the physical hunger she has never quite purged by her spiritual fast demands nourishment, but as Joe notices, "'She's trying to be a woman and she don't know how" (227). As she surrenders to her life energies, "it seemed to be instinct alone: instinct physical and instinctive denial of the wasted years" (248), even though these healthy instincts are as blighted by her past as Joe's were in his affair with Bobbie Allen. Believing Joe black, she surrenders not only her spiritual privacy but also her tragic mind's quest for her body's purification, the latter surrender "like the breaking down of a spiritual
skeleton" (242). Broken within, she submits to the shadow which she believes soiled her before birth, her capitulation an "anti-climax, as when a defeated general on the day after the last battle, shaved over-night and with his boots cleaned of the mud of combat, surrenders his sword to a committee" (242). Sex becomes for Joanna, as it is for Joe, a physical ritual testifying to one's defeat by the force of darkness. She attempts to confirm physically what her mind already knows, "damn-ing herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth. She had an avidity for the forbidden wordsymbols; an insatiable appetite for the sound of them on his tongue and on her own" (244). In the dark with Joe upon her, the transubstantiation of the shadow, she seeks in the abstractions of language for the defile-ment which she cannot make her stubbornly healthy flesh express: 

"'Negro! Negro! Negro!'" (245), she cries, using the fulfillment of her physical hunger as food for her tragic mind. Drawing on the legacy of her family, she enacts her debasement even as the Sartorises attempt to act out the glorification of their ritualized past, "playing it out like a play" (245). Thus does Joanna's affair sink into a degradation which is fully neurotic. In the empty rooms of her house she would make Joe seek her, she "waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats," "her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another of such formally erotic attitudes and gestures as a Beardsley of the time of Petronius might have drawn" (245).

Torn between healthy instincts and the tragic mind's perversión of them, "the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed suddenly
to the fire of the New England biblical hell" (244), Joanna is as divided as Joe. She reveals her duality most forcefully during sexual intercourse where Joe sees "two moongleamed shapes . . . drowning in alternate throes upon the surface of a thick black pool beneath the last moon" (246). To both Joanna and Joe human personality is changeable, mysterious. To them both sex is quicksand in which one half or the other of their personalities must perish. Watching Joanna struggle, Joe sees that now it would be that still, cold, contained figure of the first phase who, even though lost and damned, remained somehow impervious and impregnable; then it would be the other, the second one, who in furious denial of that impregnability strove to drown in the black abyss of its own creating that physical purity which had been preserved too long now even to be lost. Now and then they would come to the black surface, locked like sisters; the black waters would drain away. (246)

The identity given Joanna by her past would deny life to preserve her purity, damned though that purity may already be; her still healthy primal energies, understood by the tragic mind as corrupt and corrupting, would on the other hand destroy the enervating hold the past has on her and submerge Joanna in fully human life, a life seen by the mind as "black waters." For awhile it seems that this night sister has conquered, although the only terms to describe her victory are those from Joanna's past. The Joanna of phase one now appears to be little more than her "clean, austere garments," a husk, beneath which "moved articulate . . . that rotten richness ready to flow into putrefaction at a touch, like something growing in a swamp" (247-48). The Joanna Joe sees by daylight is now only "a phantom of someone whom the night sister had murdered and which now moved purposeless about the
scenes of old peace, robbed even of the power of lamenting" (248).

Ironically, however, as Joe has already demonstrated by his life, the "phantoms" of the unconscious never die. Even now at the height of her fury in phase two, Joanna stares at Joe after the two make love "with the wild, despairing face of a stranger; looking at her then he paraphrased himself: 'She wants to pray, but she don't know how to do that either!'" (247). Like other Burdens before her, she has begun to feel the call to purify herself, to justify her brief indulgence in physical life.

She at first resists the inevitable by attempting a compromise between the dictates of the mind and the demands of her body, her duality now symbolized by the "face of a spinster: prominently boned, long, a little thin, almost manlike: in contrast to . . . her plump body . . . more richly and softly animal than ever" (251). Attempting to give the lie of legitimacy to her affair, she now meets Joe, "as though by premeditation, . . . always in the bedroom, as though they were married" (249). In greater desperation, "she began to talk about a child, as though instinct had warned her that now was the time when she must either justify or expiate" (248). When Joe will not permit her to "justify," she must "expiate," and so begins phase three of their affair in which she reverts physically and psychologically to the Joanna of phase one. Once more, because they are threatening to her, she represses her life energies, becoming a "stranger" with a face "cold, dead white, fanatical, mad" (262), who puts "aside with the calm firmness of a man" (253) Joe's hand when he tries to woo her. Again she dresses like "a careless man" and, symbolic of the force
blighting her personality, draws her hair "gauntly back to a knot as savage and ugly as a wart on a diseased bough" (260). As happened to her grandfather before her, her physical and moral sight have begun to fail; for the first time Joe sees her wearing "steelrimmed spectacles" (260). Seeing him abstractly, as a shadow which must be lifted, now the instrument of her salvation as he was once the agent for her damnation, she tries to force him to confess his blackness and thus lift both of them "up out of darkness" (261). The reward for the renewed repression of her healthy instincts is the return of her ability to pray. Ironically exulting in her subjection to illusion, "her head was not bowed. Her face was lifted, almost with pride, her attitude of formal abjectness a part of the pride, her voice calm and tranquil and abnegant in the twilight" (265). As proud of her negative identity as Joe is of his, she declares in her "monotonous, sexless" (265) voice after Joe once again refuses her offer of salvation: "'There's just one other thing to do'" (265). And Joe agrees. But what they agree to is not an implicit suicide pact. Like her violent forebears, Joanna believes she must cut off the offending member to ensure her salvation. Tragically, she must kill the only one she could have loved; she must destroy the shadow that will not be raised to her plane of life-denying abnegation. As she levels her gun at Joe, there is "no heat" in her eyes, "no fury. They were calm and still as all pity and all despair and all conviction" (267).
V. GAIL HIGHTOWER: "THE GARMENTWORRIED SPIRIT"

As an isolated individual and creature of his past, Reverend Hightower is similar to Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, but in one significant respect he is the odd man out in this trio of wounded characters. As they do, he pursues illusions scripted by the "phantoms" in his past. As they do, he mistakenly believes that his humanity is the source of his pain. But unlike the other two who alternately acquiesce to and struggle against identities forcefully imposed on them, Hightower has no definite identity imposed on him. Instead, as a representation of those Southerners who have surrendered to heroic illusions, about the past, he attempts to efface his personality, expunge his life energies, and make himself a kind of martyr sustained by his memories of a simplified, heroic past. So dreaming, he trusts he can escape life's complexities. Gone from his portrait is much of the ambivalence which colors Faulkner's response to those earlier heroic dreamers, the Sartorises. In fact, Hightower's literary antecedent is more likely the enervated Horace Benbow than the striving Sartorises. Hightower is also set apart from the Sartorises by an obsession more a symptom of his problem than the problem itself; the wound in his life has been caused not by the ante-bellum past but by many of the same distortions of Christian precept and practice which afflict Joanna and Joe.

Like the other major characters, he is not intelligible apart from his past, from his three "phantoms" who have curiously received little critical commentary: the father who threatened Hightower with
life's complexity; the mother who wounded him with life's pain and frustration; and Cinthy, his grandfather's cook, who provided him with a means of escape. Hightower's unnamed father had the most powerful, though most indirect influence upon Gail through the threatening "paradox" (448) of his personality: His father was "two separate and complete people, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist" (448). On the one hand, he retreated from life in an attempt to avoid the coarser elements of the life of his father, Gail Hightower I, Gail's grandfather. Living at one remove from this earthy life, Gail's father adopted a radical conservatism which denies the fullness of life:

It was some throwback to the austere and not dim times not so long passed, when a man in that country had little of himself to waste and little time to do it in, and had to guard and protect that little not only from nature but from man too, by means of a sheer fortitude that did not offer, in his lifetime anyway, physical ease for reward. (448)

With such an attitude, Gail's father soon found his way into a Presbyterianism similar to McEachern's which insists upon still further denial of life and the desires of the body. All he wanted for a wife, according to his father, the first Gail, was "'somebody that can sing alto out of a Presbyterian hymnbook, where even the good Lord Himself couldn't squeeze any music'" (446). He physically destroyed this wife during the Civil War with his rigid self-sufficiency, abolitionist principles, and his belief in God's providence. Refusing to permit her to eat food grown by slave owners or prepared by slaves while he was away at the front, he nourished her instead with counsels of faith and fortitude: "'God will provide,'" he said.
"'Provide what? Dandelions and ditch weeds?'
"'Then He will give us the bowels to digest them.'" (442)

On the other hand, that part of Gail's father "which lived in the actual world, did as well as any and better than most" (448). Though an abolitionist and "without abating his principles or behavior one jot" (447), he served as a chaplain for the Confederate army and made what he could of "defeat by making practical use of that which he had learned in it" (449). "A minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy" (449), he attempted to resolve the paradox of his divided nature and "in defeat combined the two and became a doctor, a surgeon" (449), purging corrupt flesh by healing it. It was "as though the very cold and uncompromising conviction which propped him upright, as it were, between puritan and cavalier, had become not defeated and not discouraged, but wiser" (449). Ironically, however, this new wisdom led him to neglect the human spirit supposedly the primary concern of his principles. It was as if "he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing, was not worth the having, the saving" (449). Ultimately he became as sensual in his own way as his father whom he disdained. But the crowning irony of his story is that one of his first patients was his wife, whom the other part of his personality broke physically and spiritually by his denial of life to her: "Possibly he kept her alive. At least, he enabled her to produce life, though he was fifty and she past forty when the son was born" (449). Young Gail Hightower had to find his father's complexity and ambivalence terribly threatening.

Hightower's second "phantom," his broken mother, dramatized to
her son the pain and frustration of physical life, turning him against the father who was healthy though oblivious to the inconsistencies of his behavior. What her young son remembered of her "first and last" was a bed-ridden woman betrayed by the body and threatened with death, whose pained vision of reality became his own:

... at eight and nine and ten he thought of her as without legs, feet; as being only that thin face and the two eyes which seemed daily to grow bigger and bigger, as though about to embrace all seeing, all life, with one last terrible glare of frustration and suffering and foreknowledge, and that when that finally happened, he would hear it: it would be a sound, like a cry. (449-50)

As a child, the sickly Gail felt that he dwelled within these death cries: "he could feel them through all walls. They were the house: he dwelled within them, within their dark and all-embracing and patient aftermath of physical betrayal" (450). Misevaluating the source of the threat to his mother's life and his own, Hightower thought it lay in his father's "rude health" (450) rather than in the man's treatment of her which was the result of unconscious contradictions. Thus misperceived, the father was "a stranger to them both, a foreigner, almost a threat: so quickly does the body's wellbeing alter and change the spirit" (450).

If his mother turned Gail against apparently threatening life, Cinthy, his grandfather's cook and third "phantom" provided a refuge for him in her tales of her dead "Marster." Like so many characters in this novel, she, "the mask of a black tragedy between the scenes" (450), identified with the agent of her oppression, finding meaning for her life in her tales of Marse Gail's killing men "by the hundreds" (452). Little Gail, however, misperceived the complex "musing and
savage sorrow and pride" (452) in her telling and saw in her face only
the "peaceful shuddering of delight" (452) which he himself felt in
hearing of an abstract life and death in which "he found no terror"
(452).

These three "phantoms," however, did not actually present a
united front opposing Hightower's growth until he discovered his
father's Civil War frock coat in an attic trunk. In this episode
Faulkner asks us to make a quantum leap from the formative influences
in young Gail's life to their effects, without, however, telling us
much about the personality of the little boy. More than any other of
the major characters, Hightower was in his childhood a tabula rasa to
be inscribed upon. In the attic, through an epiphany reminding us of
Joe Christmas' sickness in the dietitian's closet, Gail's childhood
perceptions of self, family, the nature of life, and the reality of
death were organized, made coherent, and given meaning. Before his
recognition, he was subtly overcome by foreshadowing images of death:
in the rain, "the moist grieving of the October earth," "the musty
yawn as the lid of the trunk went back," and in "the evocation of his
dead mother's hands which lingered among the folds" (443) of his
father's tattered coat. But it was the patch of "blue, dark blue; the
blue of the United States" among the coat's patches of weathered Con-
federate gray that "stopped his very heart"

Looking at this patch, at the mute and anonymous cloth, the boy,
the child born into the autumn of his mother's and father's lives,
whose organs already required the unflagging care of a Swiss watch,
would experience a kind of hushed and triumphant terror which left
him a little sick. (444)
For Gail the patch symbolized the reality of death: of the Yankee soldier whose death supplied the patch, of his mother's death, and, eventually, his own. This blue, an image of "darkness made visible" according to the symbologist J. E. Cirlot,\(^\text{61}\) contrasts vividly with the sacred blue of Lena Grove's garments; for Gail it was an image of death-in-life. Yet even though the blue he saw implied death, it also confirmed his life—twin recognitions which were the source of his "triumphant terror." The soldier who supplied the patch and the mother who folded the coat were dead—the terror; he, however, was alive to see the effects of their lives—the triumph. The emotions of triumph and terror became annealed in Hightower's mind, because if one is alive, one must also die. It is this which sickened.

Complicating Hightower's response further was his speculation about who killed the Yankee whose coat supplied the patch. On future trips to the attic, an obsessive gesture to confirm his life for him, he would "touch the blue patch with that horrified triumph and sick joy and wonder if his father had killed the man from whose blue coat the patch came, wondering with still more horror yet at the depth and strength of his desire and dread to know" (444). It was terrifying enough when life and death were one abstraction in the mind, but now they had become physically one in the person of his father, the minister-doctor who had "fired no musket" (443) in the war but who was nevertheless perceived "with terror and awe and with something else" as

a destroyer from "the Pit itself" (443). It is this possibility of
the demonic paradox of death in life and the union of dread with the
desire for knowledge which provoked Gail's intestinal fits after each
trip to the attic. Although obsessed with this paradox, Hightower re-
treated from its frightening complexities embodied in his father, the
"phantom which would never die" (452) because Hightower can never re-
solve his paradox. To escape it, he drove a wedge between life and
death which parodied his father's division of the spirit and the flesh.
For Hightower, insubstantial spirit is equated with life, and the
flesh, as it is for others in the novel, is death. Unwilling to live
a life which has death in it, the young boy fled to Cinthy's dream
of his grandfather's life and death. Here there was "no horror" be-
cause the first Gail and the men he had killed were "just ghosts,
never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm" (452). As a medita-
tion on mortality, this most traumatic episode in Gail Hightower's
life reminds us of old Bayard Sartoris confronting mortality in his
attic as he muses over the family genealogy fading from the flyleaves
of his Bible. The difference, of course, is that old Bayard has
lived a long, active life ambivalently enriched by his dream of the
past and still possesses the energy necessary to protest and defy his
fate; young Hightower had scarcely begun to live when he discovered
his father's coat in his attic. He claims Cinthy's dream as a sub-
stitute for life, as a kind of safe pseudo-life. It is, he thinks,
as if "'I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light.
And that my only salvation must be to return to the place [Jefferson]
to die where my life had already ceased before it began'" (452).
In this "too fine, too simple" (424) dream preserved in its childhood form throughout Hightower's adult life, death loses its terror and life, its complexity. In it, his grandfather is not the grizzled man he actually was, on a dangerous, almost suicidal mission behind enemy lines, but a boy among boys, "'performing with the grim levity of schoolboys a prank so foolhardy that the troops who had opposed them for four years did not believe that even they would have attempted it'" (457). Oblivious to the ironies of his grandfather's death "'in somebody else's henhouse wid a han'ful of feathers."

Stealing chickens" (459), Hightower gratefully employs the mysterious ignominy of the man's death as a means to his greater glory; the mysterious death enables Gail to avoid once more the reality of death:

"That was it. They didn't know who fired the shot. They never did know. They didn't try to find out. It may have been a woman, likely enough the wife of a Confederate soldier. I like to think so. It's fine so. Any soldier can be killed by the enemy in the heat of battle, by a weapon approved by the arbiters and rule-makers of warfare. Or by a woman in a bedroom. But not with a shotgun, a fowling piece, in a henhouse." (459)

Unlike old Bayard Sartoris and Jenny Du Pre in Sartoris, he refuses to critically evaluate his dream, failing to understand that the recognition of past follies does not necessarily cheapen the dream but preserves it, makes it valuable to the living by recasting it in light of present concerns and perceptions. But because Hightower is utterly outside of life, his dream is not subject to ironic scrutiny; his isolation makes its inherent ironies more complete, deflating Southern pride in an ambiguous past made up more of gesture than principle. 62

So circumscribed from reality, Hightower's dream becomes rarified, ephemeral, "the suspended instant out of which the soon will presently begin" (460). Unlike the Sartorises' "Presences," it is scarcely seen at all except as "'hoofmarks or their shapes in the air'" (457). More precisely, it is heard before it is seen: "'... you must hear, feel: then you see'" (459), he told his wife as they rode to Jefferson.

As ephemeral and transient as this dream may be, it is all that Hightower has, both as life and as a defense against life, and thus it becomes a receptacle for all his primal energies. By his "obsession with the glorious manhood of the past," R. G. Collins suggests, Hightower "destroys his own manhood."63 In his dream the past becomes present, more real as "the sum of his life" (460) than the actual present can ever be: "'You can see it, hear it'" (424), he told his wife. If Joanna intellectualizes her passions, Hightower etherealizes his in what comes to seem a potent auto-erotic fantasy. His grandfather and the rest of the Confederate raiders assume "'that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes.'" On their foray into Jefferson, they ride the salt sea of life, "'the sheer tremendous tidal wave of desperate living'" (458). To come to this town where his grandfather had died was for Gail "the consummation of his life" (456), not only in the sense of consuming all that he had lived before and as the perfection of his life, but as the completion, the climax of his marriage to his dream. Although he could have come to Jefferson at almost any time, he told his wife, he did not, delaying

like a coy lover, building suspense and heightening the eventual climax in his mind. In rejecting life for his dream, he becomes a measure of the value of Joanna's attempt to transcend her past and Joe's instinctive ability to confront new situations which may provide him with a future.

So dreaming, "little better than a phantom" (452) of his dream, Hightower radically simplified his life. All his primal energy not invested in the dream was directed toward an escape from the complex world to the Jefferson of his mind, the end, he told his wife, "that he had been working for . . . since he was four years old; perhaps he was being humorous, whimsical" (456). And this goal actually did simplify his life, unlike the Sartorises' dream which complicates theirs; it was those associated with him who found their lives complicated by it.

The seminary was the first stage of his escape from life: "he went there, chose that as his vocation, with that as his purpose" (452). For him the church was a kind of social welfare agency for the imagination: "'And what is the church for,'" he asked his wife, "'if not for those who are foolish but who want the truth?'" (455). By truth here Hightower meant, not the quest for spiritual truth implied by Christian precepts, but only that the church should help him in his admittedly foolish quest for his truth, his dream. He believed the church would "shelter" his dream from any criticism by life: "if ever truth could walk naked and without shame or fear, it would be in the seminary" (453). So sheltered, he awaited God's "call" to the ministry in Jefferson, expecting His cooperation. When He finally did cooperate,
then it seemed to Hightower that he could see

his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living and die so, peacefully, with only the far sound of the circumvented wind, with scarce even a handful of rotting dust to be disposed of. That was what the seminary meant: quiet and safe walls within which the hampered and garmentworried spirit could learn anew serenity to contemplate without horror or alarm its own nakedness. (453)

Heedless of the spiritual and social responsibilities of his calling, Hightower saw the ministry as a shield to protect him from human communion and involvement. Here he upends, parodies, the Keatsian allusion which earlier evokes Lena Grove's natural wholeness and harmony of flesh, spirit, and earth. His urn is a burial urn. His serenity is the stasis of a corpse; in this respect he reminds us of the urn allusion as Horace Benbow applies it to his spiritually frigid sister in Sartoris. Faulkner further strengthens the ironies of this Southerner's distortion of Christianity and his past when he has him believe that in the ministry, as in the dream itself, he would be born again into a fleshless, substanceless life of the spirit, un-"hampered" by the "garment" of his corporeal existence. Thus purified of the complexities, or even the need, of living and dying, sheltered from the "harsh" breath of life as dreadfully misperceived as Jos Christmas' imaginings at McEachern's of the hard masculine wind of purification, Hightower could then at last confront his weakness, fear, mortality, and humanity. Ironically, according to the logic of his reverie, the nakedness he would then contemplate would be, because he is fleshless, nothing. Mired in illusions of his immateriality, he was scarcely aware of the character of the real world or of the harm and outrage
he caused others in the name of his dreams.

When he arrived in Jefferson, the second stage of his retreat from life, he was concerned only with shielding his dream from reality, with "quietly surrounding and closing and guarding his urgent heart" (460). He did not see his new town as it really was but as the "heaven" (460) he would make his haven. Lying in a "land similar to that where he had been born," still the town "looked different, though he knew that the difference lay not outside but inside the car window against which his face was almost pressed like that of a child" (456). As Jefferson's "dingy purlieus slid vanishing past" (460) the train window, he could see only his new house and its street, the one his grandfather had ridden down: "'I have never seen it,'" he told his bride, "'but I know exactly how it will look. I know exactly how the house that we will some day own and live in upon the street will look" (457). Blind to the town, he also failed to see its citizens, his parishoners, "faces full of bafflement and hunger and eagerness" (461) who were nevertheless "naturally dubious of his youth and jealous of the church which they were putting into his hands almost as father surrenders a bride" (460). "With a kind of glee" that sounded to them "like a horse trader's glee over an advantageous trade" (55), High-tower bragged to them how he had, in fact, exchanged his life and vocation for his dream: "he sounded like it was the town he desired to live in and not the church and the people who composed the church, that he wanted to serve. As if he did not care about the people, the living people, about whether they wanted him here or not" (56). Using his
parishioners as he did his wife before them, it was not long before
Hightower failed them in the pulpit, elevating the "defeat and glory"
of their communal past to the status of a religion which it had always
held in his mind, mixing "absolution and choirs of martial cherubim."
Perhaps nowhere else in all his fiction does Faulkner more keenly
satirize the South's false recasting of its heritage than he does in
his description of Hightower's sermons "which did not make sense at
all," "using religion as though it were a dream. Not a nightmare,
but something which went faster than the words in the Book; a sort of
cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth" (56).

Outraged though his parishioners were by this "sacrilege" (57),
they did not turn against him fully until, having failed his wife, he
brought scandal upon them. He could not "untangle" the religion and
the cavalry "in his private life, at home either" (56). Because of
the dream and having learned from his parents that marriage is, "not
men and women in sanctified and living physical intimacy, but a dead
state carried over into the existing still among the living like two
shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain" (454), Hightower
was neither able to see his new wife--the "eagerness in her face, be-
sides hunger and desperation" (456)—nor satisfy her spiritually and
sexually. He is unable to share his obsession fully with anyone:

Not even her. Not even her in the days when they were still the
night's lovers, and shame and division had not come and she knew
and had not forgot with division and regret and then despair.

. . . (441)

Since his obsession was all that he had and all he was, he frustrated
and starved his wife just as effectively as his father had starved his
mother. With "her face beginning to get thin and gaunted as though she never ate enough and that frozen look on it as if she were not seeing what she was looking at" (58), she was driven elsewhere for sexual satisfaction and, eventually, to the despair and guilt which were the fruits of her religious heritage and attenuated hopes.

The scandal and outrage which followed her apparent suicide provided Hightower with a convenient means to achieve the third and final stage of his flight from life. Through it all, "his face still not bowed" (64), as proud of his negative identity as Joe and Joanna are of theirs, he gloried in a welcome martyrdom. The morning after his wife's death, a Memphis photographer captured his face hidden behind a hymnal to shield not his grief but his demonic exultation in the humiliation he considered a fair price for his release from life: "behind the book his lips were drawn back as though he were smiling. But his teeth were tight together and his face looked like the face of Satan in the old prints" (63). Having gained at last his childhood dream of freedom from human complexity and from the mortality that it denies, Hightower is, like Joanna Burden, involved with actual life only at a great distance. He sends half of a small income inherited from his father to a home for delinquent girls, buying absolution for failing his wife by helping other fallen women. With nothing more on his hands than time, he is free to read about the life he has forsaken, including books on medicine which are, unfortunately, of little help for the delivery of his black neighbor's still-born child, one of the few occasions he is drawn back into life. More often, however, he chooses to read about "the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and
dehydrated lusts" in his "dogeared" (301) copy of Tennyson. Now there is no one to disturb him as he sits by his study window, waiting for the incarnation of his dream, "for that faint light which daygranaried leaf and grass blade reluctant suspirer" (52) at sunset, living, as Hyatt Waggoner suggests, "not in the light of nature, but in the reflected light of his dreams." Through the "twin motionless glares of his spectacles" (82) he can see nothing else.

Except for the apparent loneliness which moves him to take Byron Bunch for a friend, the Hightower we meet early in the novel seems unaware of the cost of his dream, the price paid by one "born anew" outside the body. Passive and aloof, his attitude is that "of an eastern idol" (83), a parody of the vocation of spiritual teacher he once chose, or as R. G. Collins suggests, further explicating the idol image: "In addition to the implication of denying the life of the body, this image also suggests Hightower as the oracle of fatalism, the figure who may have ultimate knowledge, perhaps, but is trapped in his own remoteness." He retains all of the precepts for right action, yet lacks the energy to act. He becomes consciousness and conscience without will. With "thin blackclad legs and spare, gaunt arms and shoulders, and with that flabby and obese stomach like some monstrous pregnancy" (291), he mocks the life-creating potential of Lena Grove; he gives birth only to further illusions. Having turned his back on life in the body, it is as if his own flesh would flee him. Byron

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64 From Jefferson to the World, p. 110.
65 "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 132.
Bunch comes upon him once asleep in a canvas chair in his back yard:

His mouth is open, the loose and flabby flesh sagging away from the round orifice in which the stained lower teeth show, and from the still fine nose which alone age, the defeat of sheer years, has not changed. Looking down at the unconscious face, it seems to Byron as though the whole man were fleeing away from the nose which holds invincibly to something yet of pride and courage above the sluttishness of vanquishment like a forgotten flag above a ruined fortress. (343)

Ironically, his flight from life in the flesh is partly the cause of the mortal decay he fears and would flee. Held by "'the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and don't try to hold him'" (69), High-tower now lives a "dead life in the actual world" (346) with neither vices and pain nor virtues and joy. He has "relinquished completely that grip upon that blending of pride and hope and vanity and fear, that strength to cling to either defeat or victory, which is the I-Am, and the relinquishment of which is usually death" (372). In such an attitude, having refused all that Joe and Lena seek, "he does not say even to himself: "There remains yet something of honor and pride, of life'" (55). The closest he can come to the life he has scorned, other than taking as a friend that other isolated one, Byron Bunch, is, like Joanna Burden, to leave the door of his house, his sanctuary, unlocked.
CHAPTER VI

"THE COLLECTIVE EYE":
SOCIAL CENTERS AND SANCTUARIES IN LIGHT IN AUGUST

The opening image in Light in August, Lena Grove "sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill toward her" (1), could serve in several important respects as a metaphor for the design of the novel. As Lena is absorbed by the motion of the wagon that will carry her toward Jefferson, we are absorbed by the motion of the characters toward Jefferson and the energies that will collide there, but it is the road—or in terms of the novel's images: streets, tunnels, and corridors—which governs motion and reveals the quality of the characters' energies. And in this novel, all roads lead from avatars of Jefferson (Doane's Mill, the Memphis orphanage, McEachern's unnamed town, Mottstown) to Jefferson itself, the mind, heart, and spirit of Yoknapatawpha County and the novel. Jefferson is the hub, the true catalyst of the characters' divided energies, not only a centripetal force drawing them inward but also a centrifugal force isolating them from the community and themselves. Many readers view the community in this way, as central to the design and meaning of the novel. In the best known study of the community in Light in August, "The Community and the Pariah," Cleanth Brooks argues that community is "the circumambient atmosphere, the essential ether of Faulkner's fiction."¹

¹ The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 52.
In this novel, especially, Jefferson is "a living force," not simply an aggregation of individuals but a "community of values," a "force . . . that pervades"\(^2\) the novel, but the novel presents the community in far more images than Brooks and others have examined, images which evoke Jefferson's values, energies, and way of life, the community's part in the novel's overall tragic design. Within this structure Jefferson is the ambivalently portrayed tragic nemesis with which the major characters—isolated and ambivalent—struggle. With the exception of Lena, all the major characters are at once scapegoats for the community and the chief exemplars of certain community values; this double relationship with the community explains why the sanctuaries they seek or erect against the hostile community ultimately fail them so miserably.

I. SOCIAL CENTERS

Surprisingly, the Jefferson of *Light in August* seems to antedate by decades its earlier namesake in *Sartoris*, instead of following it by twelve years of fictional time, as actually is the case. Socially the *Sartoris* Jefferson is urban, new, progressive, leisured, frantic, rootless, aimless. Old social barriers are falling along with old aristocratic families and institutions, while new blood and money rise in the persons of the Mitchells and Snopes. Where there was vacant land a year and a half before the opening of the novel, now there are new "tight little houses with a minimum of lawn, homes built by country-bred

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 52 + 53.
people and set close to the street after the country fashion" (Sartoris, 165-66). Although we often see factories in Sartoris and hear machines humming in the background, almost the only people we see doing any actual work are black. More often than not, the community is presented moving aimlessly about the town square—"drifting Negroes in casual and careless O.D. garments worn by both sexes, and country people in occasional khaki too; and the brisker urbanites weaving among their placid chewing unhaste and among men in tilted chairs before the stores" (Sartoris, 166)—or speeding "back and forth in automobiles" (Sartoris, 4).

The Light in August Jefferson, in contrast, is agrarian, conservative, work-oriented, and more or less ordered and peaceful until the novel's violent climax. A pastoral backwater apparently unmoved by the swirling social currents of the twentieth century, this middle and lower class Jefferson at times seems to share more with the aristocratic Sartorises on their plantation than with the Sartoris Jefferson. As Joanna Burden and her father point out, each of its citizens still lives close to the earth, acting "as the land where he was born had trained him to act" (241). It is a community so closely knit that every member is connected. Watching Lena Grove pass, Henry Armstid counters Winterbottom's speculation that she must be visiting someone nearby: "'I reckon not. Or I would have heard. And it aint nobody up my way, neither. I would have heard that, too'" (7). Living close to the land and one another, the members of the community are affectionately portrayed as the possessors of a fund of sound folk
wisdom and sharp psychological insight; as such they remind us of Aunt Jenny Du Pre in the earlier novel. There are Armstid and Winterbottom at the novel's opening, each employing a ruse transparent to the other and knowing it as they haggle over a cultivator. At Varner's store the next morning, Armstid and Jody Varner see instantaneously through Lena's pretense of marriage, as well as through their own rationalizations for aiding her: "A man. All men. He will pass up a hundred chances to do good for one chance to meddle where meddling is not wanted" (21). There is Mrs. Armstid, a "gray woman with a cold, harsh, irascible face, who bore five children in six years and raised them to man- and womanhood" (13), looking at Lena with "cold and impersonal contempt" (18), not so much because she condemns Lena in moral terms but because she believes Lena has surrendered too soon in the battle of the sexes and will be destroyed as she herself has been. There are the men at the planing mill evaluating Lucas Burch's work habits and the "countrybred" (398) sheriff, "a fat comfortable man with a hard canny head and a benevolent aspect" (271), "with little wise eyes like bits of mica embedded in his fat, still face" (398), trying in "a baffled and fretted manner" (274) both to catch Joanna's murderer and keep community order. And there is Mrs. Beard, Byron Bunch's sharp-tongued landlady, contemptuous of man's puny capacity for evil and his inability to clean up after it: speaking of the pursuit, capture, and trial of Joe Christmas, she says, "'They'll take as much time and trouble and county money as they can cleaning up what us women could have cleaned up in ten minutes Saturday night'" (397). While not necessarily spurning leisure and what a Mrs. Beard
might call the vices of idleness, the community nevertheless finds in honest work a makeweight for most forms of public and private immorality. Although we only see one factory in town, the planing mill, the community members in this novel work at all kinds of jobs—on farms, at mills, in shops—with an industriousness and seriousness foreign to the common people of Sartoris. Whatever their marital status, their age, the variety of their lives, "on Monday morning they all came to work with a kind of gravity, almost decorum" (36). No matter how they spend their weekends "in that terrific and aimless and restive idleness of men who labor" (42), on Monday morning they came quietly and soberly to work, in clean overalls and clean shirts, waiting quietly until the whistle blew and then going quietly to work, as though there were still something of Sabbath in the overlingering air which established a tenet that, no matter what a man had done with his Sabbath, to come quiet and clean to work on Monday morning was no more than seemly and right to do. (37)

Monday and work remain for all somehow holy and redemptive, a part of the religious creed all at least nominally profess. When not at work, the community more often than not lives its life in a peacefulness which recalls the tranquillity of the Sartoris plantation. Most members of the community seem benignly oblivious to the energies wracking the major characters, just as old Bayard Sartoris and Jenny Du Pre seem to turn their backs on the passions of the Jefferson forsaking them. The night of Joanna's murder Joe Christmas runs through a white section of town where "on a lighted veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the women glaring smooth and white above the trivial
cards" (108). On the following Sunday, when the posse chasing Joe returns to town, "the church bells were ringing, slow and peaceful, and along the streets the decorous people moved sedately beneath parasols, carrying Bibles and prayerbooks" (281). Even on the Saturday after Joe's capture there is little to prefigure the violent denouement of the coming Monday. The "quiet square" is "empty of people peacefully at suppertables about the peaceful town and that peaceful country" (430). In spite of what has happened and will happen, much of Jefferson is genuinely at peace, a peace symptomatic of both its strength and weakness.

In more important contrast, the Sartoris Jefferson is irreligious (there does not seem to be a church in town; not even the cemetery is connected with one) and relaxed about marriage ties, taking its sexual infidelities almost as casually as one of Belle Mitchell's teas; Light in August's Jefferson, however, is conventionally but deeply religious. Its earthy humanity, the source for much of its vitality, often conflicts with and is complicated by a Calvinistic Christianity whose ambivalence, tensions, aspirations, and energies are symbolized by its music, "at once austere and rich, abject and proud, swelling and falling in the quiet summer darkness like a harmonic tide" (70). The rhythms of this music, of course, contrast dramatically with the rhythms Lena responds to. According to the town's faith implied by its music, evil is definite, most often carnal, easily recognizable, and seldom tolerated, at least publicly. What is "natural" is for a man to live in quiet, holy, and fruitful wedlock with his wife, black with black and white with white. Hightower's wife "went bad on him"
and committed suicide, said town gossip, because after consorting with his Negro cook "he was not a natural husband, a natural man" (65). He might have been forgotten after this, but scarcely forgiven. His wife, however, because she did not transgress publicly, was forgiven, but scarcely forgotten, "lest the taste and savor of forgiveness die from the palate of conscience" (61). While Lena hungers for life, the town hungers after righteousness, its own and others'. This explains Mrs. Beard's single, all-embracing first glance at Lena, "as strange women had been doing for four weeks now" (78). This is why the sheriff must diffidently but firmly ask Byron Bunch, "the quiet little man who for seven years had been a minor mystery to the town and who had been for seven days wellnigh a public outrage and affront" (398), to leave town after he cares for the unwed Lena.

The religious contrast leads us to an even more significant difference between the Jeffersons of Sartoris and Light in August: the portrait of the community of the earlier novel is essentially two-dimensional; the Jefferson of Light in August has a third dimension. Faulkner recognizes here, as he apparently did not in the earlier novel, that the life and values of a community often depend as much on certain collective fears and malignant energies as they do on Rotarian aspirations for economic and social growth. Thus, while the description of the Sartoris Jefferson is primarily social and comic, concerned with money, sex, and social growth, the portrait of the later Jefferson is psychological, potentially tragic, and ambivalent, a portrait concerned with the necessary compulsions underlying communal order and values.
Listening to the music coming from what was once his church, Reverend Hightower "seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives ..." (347). More precisely, he hears a certain quality of abjectness and sublimation, as if the freed voices themselves were assuming the shapes and attitudes of crucifixions, ecstatic, solemn, and profound in gathering volume. Yet even then the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music. (347)

What we hear in this music is that Jefferson's conservative peace, piety, and order depend as often as not upon a denial of life and the body. This denial has its origins, as does the denial of the major characters, in the Calvinistic creed the music celebrates. The first prerequisite for spiritual salvation according to this creed is, as John Calvin declared in the Institutes of the Christian Religion, a contemplation of "our miserable condition since the fall of Adam, the sense of which tends to destroy all boasting and confidence, to overwhelm us with shame, and to fill us with real humility."\(^3\) Man must recognize, that the human will is, again in Calvin's words, "fettered by depraved and inordinate desires, so that it cannot aspire after anything that is good."\(^4\) Salvation itself consists not only in repentance


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 59.
and faith in God and Christ but also in what Calvin calls "the mortification of the flesh and vivification of the spirit." For when the prophets call men from the paths of wickedness, they require the total destruction of the flesh, which is full of wickedness and perverseness. It is a thing truly difficult and arduous, to put off ourselves and to depart from the native bias of our minds. Nor must the flesh be considered as entirely dead, unless all that we have of ourselves be destroyed.

So believing, as Hightower understands, the people of Jefferson are driven "to crucifixion of themselves and one another" (347). But if the flesh is not really dead nor the individual will destroyed, then the failure of self-mortification must prompt doubt, guilt, and further laceration of one's humanity, now felt to be intolerable. And so in their music Hightower hears of confused and guilty people who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable. . . . (347)

Unable to tolerate ambivalence generated by heavenly aspirations co-existing with their carnal nature, feeling guilt at what Otto Rank calls "the distance between the ego ideal and the attained reality," the townsfolk create doubles for themselves, as the Burdens, Miss Atkins, and Doc Hines do. The doubles and the community are, as Joseph Gold points out in reference to Joe Christmas, "two halves of a composite picture, or rather, the two elements that comprise a mirror

5 Ibid., pp. 61-62.

6 The Double, p. 71.
and the image which it reflects." As John T. Irwin suggests in his study of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, these doubles become the shadow, "the dark self that is made to bear the consciously unacceptable desires repudiated by the bright half of the mind." The rejected desires, in this case the life energies preventing Calvin's "spiritual vivification," are made to seem corrupting by the community and are then "repressed internally only to return externally personified in the double, where they can be at once vicariously satisfied and punished." This process is not only the means of handling ambivalence, but, as Olga Vickery indicates, it is also the essential process of communal definition:

collectively, Jefferson is Southern, White and Elect, qualities which have meaning only within a context which recognizes something or someone as Northern or Black or Damned. This antithesis is periodically affirmed through the sacrifice of a scapegoat who represents, in fact or popular convictions, those qualities which must be rejected if Jefferson is to maintain its self-defined character.

The black man is, of course, the primary but not the sole scapegoat for the community's repressed desires.

The murder of Joanna Burden, the precipitating event for the community's full involvement in the novel's plot, is a fulfillment of

7 "The Two Worlds of *Light in August,*" p. 161.


9 Ibid., p. 33.

10 *The Novels of William Faulkner*, pp. 67-68.
its desire to punish not one but two community doubles, Joe and Joanna, the similarity of their names suggesting both their symbolic relationship to each other and their twinned image in the community psyche. Her death evokes, then, the town's suppressed desire to punish her and her threatening family. When the workers at the planing mill first see the smoke from Lucas Burch's fire, one speculates that it is the Burden house:

"Maybe that's what it is," another said. "My pappy says he can remember how fifty years ago folks said it ought to be burned, and with a little human fat meat to start it good."

"Maybe your pappy slipped out there and set it afire," a third said. They laughed. (44)

Upon their arrival at the scene of Joanna's death, "the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north" (271) embody the unacknowledged desires of the whole community: they "believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward" (272). As these desires for violent sexual violation ironically suggest, the Burdens seem to deserve punishment chiefly because they have somehow threatened the town's suppression of its fleshly nature, a suppression personified by their prejudice toward the black people among whom the Burdens worked. It believes the fire is, as Byron explains to Lena, "a judgment on her":

"They say she is still mixed up with niggers. Visits them when they are sick, like they was white. Wont have a cook because it would have to be a nigger cook. Folks say she claims that niggers are the same as white folks. That's why folks dont never go out there." (48)

But what is even worse to the town than elevating blacks to equality with whites, "'there is . . . talk of [the Burdens'] queer relations
with Negroes in the town and out of it" (42). As a consequence of such beliefs, "it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatful" (42). The town's response to the Burdens is double, "hate and dread" (42), because the Burdens have been doubly threatening: on the one hand, the family seems to threaten the community with a union of mind and body, white and black, which imperils white Jefferson's spiritual salvation. Thus the Burdens have been hated. They have been dreaded, on the other hand, because they have apparently enacted the community's "dark and outlandish and threatful" (42) desire for this physical union of mind and body that can never be fully suppressed. Seen from this perspective, Colonel John Sartoris' killing of the two Calvin Burdens in Light in August is not the dash- ing, heroic deed it is ironically portrayed to be in Sartoris; rather, his deed in Light in August is a scapegoating impelled by these repressed fears and projected desires. Unconsciously understanding this true motive for the killings, the community's memory thus becomes "the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear" (42), a memory so powerful that it has made the descendants of both sides "in their relationship to one another ghosts" (42). Like Joe Christmas' present life, the community's has been powerfully shaped and oppressed by its past.

Complicating Jefferson's response to Joanna's death still further is that, whatever her status as double and outcast, she is a white woman, no longer the dark half but part of the bright half of the community psyche. In denying the carnal reality of the flesh, the white community apotheosises it. For someone to murder this white woman is
to attack the ironic foundation of its being and its virtue. The reign of the community super-ego has been threatened. In death she begins "to live again" as "the body . . . cried out for vengeance" (273). As news of her death spreads through town, appealing to the communal unconscious, "it was like something gone through the air, the evening, making the familiar faces of men appear strange" (76). As the community arms itself to punish someone for what is also the fulfillment of its unconscious desires, "it was as if the very initial outrage of the murder carried in its wake and made of all subsequent actions something monstrous and paradoxical and wrong, in themselves against both reason and nature" (280). Chaos now spreads through one half of the community enacting the fears of that other peaceful, pious, church-music half. Townsfolk come to the fire "in racing and blatting cars" (271) where "they moiled and clotted" (273) about the dying flames. Then "some of them with pistols already in their pocket-began to canvass about for someone to crucify" (272) and so redeem themselves from their own fearful desires. They turn immediately, of course, to their other double, the black shadow, to revenge themselves upon him for being the agent of the punishment of their first double: all "believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by a Negro" (271). Given their particular religious heritage, the word "Negro" is, as Olga Vickery suggests, "a compressed myth just as the stock response to that word is a compressed ritual." 11

They believe in "Negro" now because it makes "nice believing":

11 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 69.
Better than the shelves and the counters filled with long familiar objects bought, not because the owner desired them or admired them, could take any pleasure in the owning of them, but in order to cajole or trick other men into buying them at a profit; ... Better than the musty offices where the lawyers waited lurking among ghosts of old lusts and lies, or where the doctors waited with sharp knives and sharp drugs, telling man, believing that he should believe, without resorting to printed admonishments, that they labored for that end whose ultimate attainment would leave them with nothing whatever to do." (273)

Even the women choose to believe, "the idle ones in bright and sometimes hurried garments, with secret and passionate and glittering looks and with secret frustrated breasts (who have ever loved death better than peace)" (273). That a black man has killed a white woman makes better believing than other myths of the ultimately sordid nature of their physical and communal existence because it answers more fully their assumption of the sullied flesh decreed by their religion. To so believe is also to transcend for a time that flesh whose needs, ironically, they still must serve. This belief partly explains why the spectators at the fire follow the sheriff about the scene of the crime: "It was as though he carried within him, somewhere within that inert and sighing mass of flesh, the secret itself: that which moved and evoked them as with a promise of something beyond the sluttishness of stuffed entrails and monotonous days" (277). But they also follow him, as this passage ambivalently suggests, because they apparently sense, however inchoately, that the secret they seek is not merely the identity of the murderer but somehow the secret of the community's lost self, the fleshly darker half they have spurned. To be able to confront that half willfully hidden in shadow is to discover why, though alive, their entrails "stuffed," the community still longs for death.
Unable or unwilling to dredge the true nature of their secret out of the unconscious, they believe in the identity of Joanna's killer in the same way they view the fire consuming her house: "with that same dull and static amaze which they had brought down from the old fetid caves where knowing began, as though, like death, they had never seen fire before" (272). They unconsciously sense the communal self's complicity in the murder while at the same time conscious knowing--the "nice believing"--manages to evade any thought of responsibility. Knowing believes that the murderer is black and therefore none of them, even though the unconscious titillates knowing with the memory of its banished self. The townspeople have it both ways and, thus, have nothing at all.

So believing, the community quickly distorts facts to suit its illusions: "... soon nobody could remember exactly where the sheet [over Joanna's corpse] had rested, what earth it had covered ... " (272). And when the sheriff finds a black man to question, "it was as if all their individual five senses had become one organ of looking, like an apotheosis, the words that flew among them wind- or air-engendered Is that him? Is that the one that did it? Sheriff's got him. Sheriff has already caught him" (275). For the first time they see Joanna Burden with their "avid eyes" (275), though few had really ever "known to see" (394) her or Joe Christmas, about whom "even less was known than ... Brown" (279), his accuser. Thus does the repeated image of the smoke from Joanna's house, "taller than and impregnable as a monument which could be returned to at any time" (277), become a symbol not only of the failure of Joanna and Joe's passionate striving
but a symbol also of the community's illusions and the furious denial which creates them.

This episode more than any other dramatizes the problem of knowledge central to Faulkner's portrait of community in this novel. Mired in the necessary illusions which are the ironic foundation of order, the community cannot confront the truth about itself or others or its responsibility for many of the novel's moments of crisis. It cannot, as Hightower recognizes, "admit selfdoubt" (348), since to do so would be to recognize its ambivalent and divided nature, human limitations, and the need for pity. Certitude is all, no matter what the facts may be, an idea Faulkner hammers home throughout the novel. Of community gossip Byron Bunch remarks, "Most of what folks tells on other folks aint true to begin with" (49). Even the self-deluding Hightower understands that man more often lies to himself than others: "... ingenuity was apparently given man in order that he may supply himself in crises with shapes and sounds with which to guard himself from truth" (453). And Faulkner's narrator himself suggests that communal illusions often stem, on the one hand, from a projection of one's values, energies, or fears: "Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing" (43). On the other hand, illusion is created when the town "blind[s] its collective eye" through "a happy faculty of the mind to slough that which conscience refuses to assimilate" (323).

Faulkner further dramatizes this problem with a narrative manner and structural design peculiar to this novel. There are at least nine
narrative presences, each with his or her own opinionated view of events, offering as truth his or her own distortions and neurotic projections. Because of their distortions, we rarely learn the full or undistorted truth from any one source, although some would like us to believe we do. When Faulkner’s narrator speaks, however, the sense of definiteness drops dramatically away. Much that happens and almost all interpretations are prefaced by "seems" or "perhaps." He is diffident, conjectural, hypothetical, and unsure of his knowledge. Suggesting the complex nature of human reality, he refuses to assign certain motive, cause, or meaning to what he tells. Unlike the narrator of *Sartoris*, he refuses to participate in the illusions of his characters. Even when he gives us the immediate scene he often withholds information which would be the basis for a fully satisfying understanding. As in *Sartoris*, however, Faulkner uses structure to dramatize ironic counterpoint. While the structure of the earlier novel is cyclical, in contrast to the Sartoris’ obsession with linear time, the structure of *Light in August* is layered. We are first presented with an event in the present tense and fragmentary grounds for interpreting its causes or meaning. Only later does Faulkner provide us with the past preceding the present and the further knowledge necessary for understanding and for the correction of earlier distortions. In this way, too, Faulkner suggests the complex mystery of human nature and motivation.
II. SANCTUARIES

The sanctuaries the major characters search for or create to shelter themselves from community compulsions must fail them because the community is somehow present in each place. There is, Olga Vickery insists, an "interpenetration and interdependence of the public and private worlds" of Light in August; "the individual and the community are obverse reflections of each other."12 This reflection of the community by the sanctuary reveals an evolution in Faulkner's understanding of the alienated self's relationship to his world, a relationship which is more fully ironic and potentially tragic in Light in August than in Sartoris. The houses in the earlier novel are places of tranquillity, isolated from the chaos of the community and serenely oblivious to young Bayard's violent quest; the sanctuaries of Light in August, however, are centers of crisis and violent confrontation between the individual and the community. While the sanctuaries of Light in August embody community values, the Jefferson of Sartoris parodies the values embodied by the Sartorises and reveals thereby the profound differences between sanctuary and social center. It is this great difference which brings young Bayard Sartoris to so much grief; Joe Christmas, on the other hand, is wounded by the ironic similarities between sanctuary and social center. The evolution of this theme is finally suggested by the reader's sense of the meaning of the term "sanctuary" in each novel. In Sartoris the word resonates

12 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 66.
with more meanings because of the ambivalent description of the Sartorises' plantation and the MacCallum's farm. Both places may be ironically inhospitable to young Bayard and the physical embodiment of a decaying system of values, but we sense that these are somehow real sanctuaries, sacred to their inhabitants, the keepers of still-treasured old heroic values. Further, both farm and plantation are in communion with life; the Sartorises may be a dying family, but they are not completely apart from the natural world or out of harmony with its rhythms. Though individual family members may die, Narcissa Benbow assures us that the family will live on in its ironic dreams. By contrast, Joanna Burden's and Gail Hightower's houses are purely ironic sanctuaries—set apart not at all, wastelands, places of death and the dead.

A double and scapegoat for the community's fear of the flesh, Joanna Burden dwells apart from those who call her "nigger lover" (275) in what Cleanth Brooks has aptly called "a kind of cultural cyst,"¹³ an anti-society to Jefferson in "a region of Negro cabins" (271). There she creates an ironic community circle by her work as spiritually unqualified "priest and banker and trained nurse" (244) to students and alumnae of black colleges and "the Negro women who came to the house from both directions up and down the road, following paths which had been years in the wearing and which radiated from the house like wheelspokes" (243). As the image of the wheel suggests, the motion evoked by Joanna's community circle is not forward, akin to

¹³ The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 53.
the rhythmic motion associated with Lena Grove, but centripetal and centrifugal. Ironically, all of Joanna's activities among the blacks lead to no advancement. Her activities cannot, for although Joanna misconstrues her relationship to the community, believing herself its enemy for "'threatening white supremacy'" (235), she is almost as racist as white Jefferson; she simply expresses her racism in terms foreign to the town. This ironic agreement in values is further dramatized by the Burden house and grounds, "an old colonial plantation" (32), "obviously a place of some pretensions at one time" (213). In one sense, it is still a place of pretensions: the Burdens have unconsciously attempted to recolonize the blacks they pretend to serve. An obvious image of the denial of life Joanna shares with a community which more carefully masks its denial, her plantation consists of "'barren and ruined acres'" (385), "dead fields erosion gutted and choked with blackjack and sassafrass and persimmon and brier" (402). The house itself has "not been painted in years" (213). Behind it is a "ruined garden" (264), an Edenic image of Joanna's innocent and healthy impulses blighted by her heritage; before it lies a "broken gate" (110), suggestive of the failure of her social isolation. Ironically, when Joe Christmas first sees Joanna's house and plantation, he thinks, "'That one might do'" (213) and later, "'I won't be bothered here'" (221), but given this description, we know that it represents the next fateful step in Joe's calamitous pursuit of his destiny, hardly the sanctuary from his destiny he hopes it will be.
Thinking of the phases of his affair with Joanna near the end of its third phase, Joe imagines:

During the first phase it had been as though he were outside a house where snow was on the ground, trying to get into the house; during the second phase he was at the bottom of a pit in the hot wild wilderness; now he was in the middle of a plain where there was no house, not even snow, not even wind. (254-55)

As R. G. Collins observes, these three phases are "a miniature view of Joe's struggle (and that of the Negro, to an extent) throughout his life, as he conceives it."\(^{14}\) In the first phase Joe's still healthy impulses for life, human identity, and community, are rebuked; in the second, he is made to feel soiled for having these impulses; in the third, he is denied purgation for his defiled body and evicted once more from the human community. This pattern must repeat itself since Joe is as divided as he ever was, he continues to press the same claims he always has, and he is surrounded by a region and a culture which form the nemesis he fled at seventeen when he left the South. But believing that it is "loneliness he was trying to escape and not himself" (213), he is continually surprised to confront avatars from his past in images, actions, and in his double, Joanna Burden. There is, however, one significant respect in which his years at Joanna's differ from his past: here he tries--unsuccessfully, of course--to break the pattern inherited in the past, but neither his healthy energies nor his negative ones will permit him to withdraw from a course which must lead to catastrophe. Each half of his divided nature presses for a confrontation with its other denied half and a resolution of his

\(^{14}\) "Faulkner's Stained Glass Triptych," p. 125.
divided identity. He holds true to the pattern of his past in spite of himself.

Almost all of Joe's first impressions at Joanna's evoke his past, warning of the threatful nature of his chosen sanctuary. Her house seems vaguely confusing, "invisible and dark" (99), of "dimensionless bulk" (215), "hidden in its shaggy grove" (110), reminding us obliquely of McEachern's house, squatting "in the moonlight, dark, profound, a little treacherous. It was as though in the moonlight the house had acquired personality: threatful, deceptive" (160). When Joe climbs in Joanna's window, the obverse image of his departure from McEachern's, the narrator suggests, "Perhaps he thought of that other window which he had used to use and of the rope upon which he had had to rely; perhaps not" (216). And when he instinctively finds "the food which he wanted as if he knew where it would be; that, or were being manipulated by an agent which did know" (216), "memory clicking knowing" recalls McEachern's denial of Joe's hunger so that the man could serve his God with grace prayed in a "monotonous dogmatic voice which I believe will never cease going on and on forever" (217). This memory prefigures the denial he will receive from Joanna throughout phase one. He has come to Joanna's isolated, cold, hungry, in the dark about the nature of his identity, but inside her house, "the all mother of obscurity and darkness" (216), he is surprised by a woman who enters carrying "a candle, holding it high" (218) and says "in a voice calm, a little deep, quite cold," "'If it is just food you want, you will find that'" (218). She will shed only the feeblest light on Joe's condition and will offer neither
warmth nor any kind of nourishment. Even her literal offer of food is tainted by the past and will soon be understood as another betrayal. Joe, of course, attends to none of his impressions.

On the contrary, the Joanna he sees, a reminder of the hard McEachern, seems to offer a kind of dependability and security, as well as sexual gratification: "there had opened before him, instantaneous as a landscape in a lightningfla$h, a horizon of physical security and adultery if not pleasure" (221). What he discovers, of course, is a woman who, also like McEachern, dependably confirms him in his negative identity. Attempting to penetrate her isolation and so escape his own, it is "as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone" (222). The principles of each form the central features of the unconscious roles they play. His principle is the outsider's desire for recognition, hers, resistance to his violation of her privacy. Both are so driven by these principles that the physical union of their bodies, Joe's "object," becomes wholly irrelevant to both. Resisting Joe in the way she does, she confuses him, who thought "he knew so much" (222) about women: "'My God,' he thought, 'it was like I was the woman and she was the man.' But that was not right, either. Because she had resisted to the very last. But it was not woman resistance, . . ." (222). As a consequence of this betrayal of his desires and his role, Joe feels as defiled as he did when women mistook his identity in childhood and adolescence, but now a man, he has the power and the will to force the issue. To satisfy what is ultimately a hunger for life and human relationship, he denies
his hunger by brutally raping Joanna, whispering before "in a tense, hard, low voice: 'I'll show you! I'll show the bitch!'" (223). As he has done in the past, he will punish through sex those he believes defile him. Afterward, he thinks, "'Now she hates me. I have taught her that, at least!'" (223). What he has shown, taught her is what defilement feels like. If she will not admit him as a man, he will bring her down to his delusion of being filthy. Thus he participates in the frustration of his healthy impulses.

After the rape, incapable of knowing she is his psychic twin, he misinterprets Joanna's confusion, expecting her, a white woman, to recoil from the soiling he has administered and turn on him. "'Better blow,' he thought. 'Not give her the chance to turn me out of the cabin too!'" (223). This is why, when he goes to the kitchen door the next evening at dinnertime,

he expected that to be locked also. But he did not realise until he found that it was open, that he had wanted it to be [locked]. When he found that it was not locked it was like an insult. It was as though some enemy upon whom he had wreaked his utmost of violence and contumely stood, unscathed and unscarred, and contemplated him with a musing and insufferable contempt. (224)

The unlocked door is an insult to his racial delusions of her white purity, ironically intact regardless of his intended defilement of her. At the same time, it is also an insult to his power, the potency of his negative energy, since it makes it appear that his rape has had no effect whatever. Feeling belittled, he is again confused and defiled by this man-woman, once the object of desire but now made his enemy by both their pasts. Seeing the food set out for him, a mocking reminder that it is "just food" he will get in this house, he thinks, "Set
out for the nigger. For the nigger" (224). He smashes the food, ministerant to his flesh and natural needs, to strike back at woman, the confuser, as he did to Mrs. McEachern. It is almost as if he is reliving that earlier time, throwing the dishes "as if he were playing a game" (enacting the ritual of the past), speaking to himself as he does so "in the preoccupied and oblivious tone of a child playing alone" (225).

Although unadmitted to Joanna's sanctuary in phase one and believing he should leave, still he remains. When he breaks into her house that first night and stands over her table eating, Joanna makes plenty of noise warning of her approach, and "the open window was at his hand: he could have been through it in a single step almost. But he did not move" (217). The night he rapes Joanna, he puts his razor --his sole possession--in his pocket, steps out the door of the cabin, and is ready to travel one mile or a thousand, wherever the street of the imperceptible corners should choose to run again. Yet when he moved, it was toward the house. It was as though, as soon as he found that his feet intended to go there, that he let go, seemed to float, surrendered, thinking All right All right floating, riding across the dusk, up to the house and onto the back porch. . . . (223-24)

He cannot leave in either instance for the same reason he was drawn to someone like Bobbie Allen--his ambivalent unconscious. On one hand, his healthy energies so hunger for fulfillment that they over- ride consciousness and rational choice, demanding fulfillment at whatever cost, becoming a feature of Joe's calamitous persistance. On the other hand, paradoxically, the unconscious role scripted for him by his past constantly moves him toward a confirmation of and punishment for
what he understands to be his soiled nature. He must remain where such a confrontation is most likely.

Like phase one, phase two of their affair is a constant reminder of the features of Joe's negative identity. In phase one, Joe was treated as an outsider; now his soiled black flesh, the black pit, is insisted upon. Both phases imply that he falls far short of the illusions of white purity he and Joanna share. She provides him with "a tumble down Negro cabin" (32) to live in "below the house" (220) and during phase one never "invited him inside the house proper. He had never been further than the kitchen, which he had already entered of his own accord, thinking, lifted, 'She couldn't keep me out of here'" (221). But he never tries to force himself inside, because to do so would be to defy the illusions of whiteness he loves and hates. Instead of admitting Joe to her sanctuary of spiritual privacy, she descends to him, to the place where blackness and the soiled flesh dwell: "One evening in September he returned home and entered the cabin and stopped in midstride, in complete astonishment. She was sitting on the cot, looking at him. Her head was bare" (227). Even though she is ambivalently trying to build a relationship in phase two, its terms are dictated by her heritage, "the corruption which she seemed to gather from the air itself." On these terms she begins "to corrupt him" (246). His images of carnality matching her own, Joe begins to feel that he is being forced into even further soiling descent. Although "he washed and changed to the white shirt and the dark creased trousers" (242) each night before going to her, he feels "as though he had fallen into a sewer" (242), or been "sucked down into a bottomless
morass" (246), or "was at the bottom of a pit in the hot wild darkness" (255). He is compelled by Joanna's illusions to relive his own distortions of his adolescent encounter with the black girl.

During this humiliation, Joe remains as confused as he was before the orphanage dietitian in her closet, unable to prevent his defilement or to escape it. Then, "he began to be afraid" (246). Anticipating the explosion which has always followed his earlier feelings of corruption he sees "perhaps with foreboding and premonition, the savage and lonely street which he had chosen of his own will, waiting for him, thinking This is not my life. I dont belong here" (244), unaware of just how much this is his life. At other times, he says aloud to himself, "'I better move. I better get away from here.'"

But something held him, as the fatalist can always be held: by curiosity, pessimism, by sheer inertia. Meanwhile the affair went on, submerging him more and more by the imperious and overriding fury of those nights. Perhaps he realised that he could not escape. (246)

His curiosity may, in spite of rationalizations to the contrary, be his tentative recognition now of his twinship with Joanna. Perhaps he wants to see what turns out with her, because that may somehow provide a key to his life. He seeks the secret in her even as the townspeople, following the sheriff to find the secret of her murderer, do in him later. But glimpsing himself objectified in her, perhaps he also recognizes how much one is a prisoner of himself. He, too, ambivalently demands the defilement Joanna presently revels in. Escape from the fury of the pit seems impossible, since even if he runs, it is only to claim once more the negative identity of his years on the "street"—thus he feels "pessimism," "intertia," despair, "stranded as
behind a dying mistral, upon a spent and satiate heath" (248). He can only oscillate in a kind of frantic strasis between his destructive negative identity on the one hand and his apparently soiled healthy impulses on the other.

At the beginning of phase three Joanna offers Joe if not the best then certainly the last opportunity to escape the pattern of his past. When she attempts to "justify" their affair with her suggestion of a child and marriage, "he said No at once" (250), his negative identity rejecting the life, family, and community desired by his other half. Once more he thinks he should hit "the savage street," now to escape being used as the "full measure" (251) of Joanna's damnation. But his protean life impulses, able to adapt to almost any condition just to survive, are not without claim on his consciousness: "... something in him flashed Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this" (250). A permanent sanctuary is all well and good, but it still offers no solution to Joe's divided nature, as he implicitly recognizes, "thinking, 'No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be'" (250-51). Ironically, of course, Joe is much less free than he thinks. It is his unconscious scripted by his past that will not let him choose life and that determines he choose to be less than human. There is, however, a further irony here in light of what follows in phase three, for even as Joe chooses alienation, he asserts an integrity which Joanna has threatened all along and which she will soon attempt to deprive him of altogether. The identity she accepts is his black
half, an identity he rejects along with her demand that he publicly confess the blackness which he earlier confessed in an ambivalent bid for acceptance. When a month later Joanna announces that she is pregnant (a self-delusion), his negative energies having now the upper hand, he tells himself, "'I'll go tomorrow,' . . . I'll go Sunday,' he thought. 'I'll wait and get this week's pay, and then I am gone'" (252). But his healthy energies still continue to hold him in thrall of potential life, no matter how he might rationalize: "When Saturday came, he did not go. 'Might as well have all the jack I can get,' he thought. 'If she aint anxious for me to clear out, no reason why I should be. I'll go next Saturday'" (252). Vulnerable, Joe is waiting for Joanna to make the right move, to invite him into a fully human relationship as she has never really done before. "He waited what he thought was a long time" (252), until finally she sends him a note to come. And although he tells himself that he will go only to announce his departure, yet "when he changed his clothes, he shaved also. He prepared himself like a bridegroom, unaware of it" (253). Joanna, however, is vulnerable, too, and has been waiting for him to claim her soiled humanity and justify her. When he does not, then she must "expiate" in terms determined for her, with Joe as object and agent for this expiation. Now completely a "stranger" (253), when Joe comes in response to her note, she demands for expiation not only that he deny such integrity as his painfully divided life has possessed but that he also forcibly resolve his divided nature so that she may be redeemed. She will not, however, allow him the means to cleanse himself. He must confess that he is "wasting" (253) his life, admit that
he is a "nigger." He who fought whites for calling him black and blacks for calling him white must publicly choose to become his hated half and then become "something between a hermit and a missionary to Negroes" (257). She demands that Joe fulfill the pattern of his negative identity so she can escape her negative identity. For this demand he now hates "her with a fierce revulsion of dread and impotent rage" (257), dreading the identity she would impose yet impotent to successfully oppose her because of his unconscious agreement with her.

If ever Joe should flee it is now, but sensing the crucial moment toward which his divided life has been tending, he cannot. Unable throughout his life to choose an identity and make it stick, he now attempts to force the issue with Joanna, demanding that she recognize and so objectify the human identity he has struggled for, however that identity might be twisted by the illusions of his negative identity. He is held, not as he once was by his healthy impulses, but by his need for the purification and release that have always been offered before. Thus it quickly becomes a matter of the irresistible force and the immovable object:

neither surrendered; worse: they would not let one another alone; he would not even go away. And they would stand for a while longer in the quiet dusk peopled, as though from their loins, by a myriad ghosts of dead sins and delights, looking at one another's still and fading face, weary, spent, and indomitable. (264)

The result of their compulsions has been the apparent still-birth of their healthy impulses seen as sinful, defiling. No more does Joanna set out food for him. No longer does he clean up before going to her, even though "he dared not fail to go" (263) when she summoned him. More than ever before their relationship takes on the qualities of a
ritual as each waits for the other to somehow break the crisis. Joe resists to the end, refusing to actively choose and so be an accomplice to soiling by the shadow dogging him all his life. He turns from the sound of her prayers, "saying what and to what or whom he dared not learn nor suspect" (263) and jerks "his eyes away as if it were death" (264) from Joanna's imagined kneepints on the floor, not daring to acknowledge whatever God she prayed to because the only God he knows has McEachern's definition. But Joe cannot act alone to resolve the crisis, if only because he already believes himself the soiled vessel that Joanna demands he publicly display. Only she can alter the pattern for them both, but claimed as fully by her past as he is by his, she insists upon a calamitous union of their mirroring destinies one August Friday night in her bedroom, drawing her old cap and ball revolver beneath her shawl and forcing a deadly consummation of their affair. Thus, her sanctuary is no sanctuary at all, but a place where the community's compulsions meet and where the community takes its revenge, evicting Joe from the human community. By refusing to define himself in Joanna's terms, killing to resist her definition, he ironically fulfills the community's negative definition of him.

Like Joanna's, the Reverend Hightower's "house, his sanctuary" (293), is a place of death and the dead, where individual and community compulsions collide. If anything, the denial Joanna and Hightower share with the community is insisted upon even more forcefully here. Though in Jefferson, the small "brown, unpainted and unobtrusive bungalow" (52), hidden by "bushing crape myrtle and syringa and Althea" (52) and sitting on a "quiet and remote and unpaved and littleused
street" (53), is even more isolated from life and the living than Joanna's plantation. In its "shabby remoteness from the world" (342), Hightower's house is a mausoleum, filled with "that smell of people who no longer live in life: that odor of overplump desiccation and stale linen as though a precursor of the tomb" (300). Here he traffics in his false images of the past evoked and evaluated for the reader by what he ironically "calls his monument" (52), his sign which he is "no longer conscious of . . . as a sign, a message" (54):

Rev. Gail Hightower, D.D.
Art Lessons
Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards
Photographs Developed (53)

At dusk, with "the low signboard . . . prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage" (441), he enacts in his imagination his grandfather's charge to death, just as the Sartorises enact their heroic past on the "stage" of their plantation. Evoking Hightower's ironic relationship to the community which made him an "outcast" (44), the "dead and empty little street where his dead and empty small house waited" (293) "used to be the main street" (54) of Jefferson. This dead thing lies at the heart of old Jefferson just as the community's sublimated denial of life forms its values.

A slighter version of Joanna's, Hightower's sanctuary shelters a kind of anti-society comprised of Byron Bunch and the minister, who together sit and talk in the evenings, "both their faces . . . just without the direct downward pool of light from the shaded lamp" (71), even as they remain outside of life. The failure of this sanctuary and its tight little society can be charted by several kinds of motion foreign
to both: the intrusion of life, healthy and unhealthy, of supplicants seeking shelter who disrupt Hightower's isolation; Byron's withdrawal and growth into life which disrupts Hightower's anti-society; and Hightower's steady movement into the "downward pool of light" from his lamp, symbolic of his developing recognition of his condition, his place on the edge of the circle of humanity, and his responsibility for his fate.

Byron Bunch is, of course, the chief agent for the destruction of Hightower's sanctuary, the one man in the novel who eventually strives to foster life, create families, and bring together a fully human community. By his offer of sanctuary to Lena, he redefines the term, investing it with some of the aura of holiness it customarily has. Certainly, others offer Lena sanctuary on her journey, but theirs is a grudging gesture due as much to the force of Lena's character and community impulses as to the condition of their hearts.

Henry Armstid will give Lena a ride toward Jefferson, but though she is nine months pregnant, "he does not descend to help her" into the wagon. "He merely holds the team still while she climbs heavily over the wheel and sets the shoes beneath the seat. Then the wagon moves on" (9). He does invite her to stay the night but only with difficulty, anticipating his wife's reception. Perhaps surprising to him, Mrs. Armstid helps Lena, too, but only in a bitter rage, smashing her rooster bank holding her egg money, putting the coins in a sack "reknotted three or four times with savage finality," and telling her husband: "'You give that to her, ... And come sunup you hitch up the team and take her away from here. Take her all the way
to Jefferson, if you want'" (19). The wagon driver who takes Lena to
Jefferson the next morning apparently never once looks "at her, not
even when she got into the wagon" (24). To her offer to share the
sardines she bought at Varner's store, he replies,

"I wouldn't care for none," . . .
"I'd take it kind for you to share."
"I wouldn't care to. You go ahead and eat." (25)

Lena receives the kindest reception so far from Mrs. Beard, who puts
the girl up on a cot in her room. But even as she helps Lena, "her
eyes were not exactly cold. But they were not warm" (79). As Byron
later recognizes, there is little she will "be getting from the white
women in Jefferson about the time [her] baby is due'" (297).

Nor when he first meets her is Byron especially eager to give
Lena the kind of true sanctuary she requires. When she first walks
into the empty planing mill, he behaves toward her as he does with him-
self, attempting to preserve her from harm by keeping her from Lucas
Burch. The smoke from Joanna's burning house seems to him a "warning"
set by "fate, circumstance" (77) against involvement but "he too
stupid to read it" (77). He simply wants, like other townsfolk before
him, to be rid of her: "It just seemed to him that if he could only
get her across the square and into a house his responsibility would be
discharged" (77). He thinks '"how easy it would be if I could just
turn back to yesterday and not have any more to worry me than I had
then"' (76). He helps Lena believing "that it is only pity" (76) he
feels for her.

As other major characters are, Byron Bunch is divided, his grow-
ing love for Lena working at cross purposes to his denial of life.
When at the mill she announces she would like to sit awhile, Byron "almost springs forward, slipping the sack pad from his shoulder. The woman arrests herself in the act of sitting and Byron spreads the sack on the planks. 'You'll set easier'" (47). As they sit and talk, they are described in images which suggest their decorousness and prefigure their eventual union: "The two of them might be sitting in their Sunday clothes in splint chairs on the patina smooth earth before a country cabin on a Sabbath afternoon" (49). Hearing her tale, "already in love, though he does not yet know it," (50) Byron sees her romantically, as "a young woman betrayed and deserted and not even aware that she has been deserted, and whose name is not yet Burch" (48). With this vision of a woman in need of help, he begins to grow, to become "un-Bunched," this growth tracing, as John Longley remarks, "the Christian paradox of the Fortunate Fall."15 Byron sacrifices his cloistered virtue to gain the redemption of a flawed but full and vital humanity.

The first element of his growth is his acceptance of the responsibility he earlier wished to deny. With a look "compassionate and troubled and still" (93), he first seeks shelter for Lena at Mrs. Beard's. Several days later, more deeply involved, he creates not simply a sanctuary but a home for her in the cabin at Joanna's place after first cleaning "it good," preparing the scene of death and self-destructive energies to be a fit place for life and the energies that foster it.

15 *The Tragic Mask*, p. 51.
"She needs a place where it will be kind of home to her. She ain't got a whole lot more time, and in a boarding house, where it's mostly just men . . . A room where it will be quiet when her time comes, and not every durn horsetrader or courtjury that passes through the hallway . . ." (283)

He even attempts to take responsibility for Lena's unborn child, believing that it "deserves more than--better than--" (297) to be a bastard. He proposes marriage in an offer of sacrifice which, though far from selfless, nevertheless contrasts vividly with those who mortify their flesh in fear of it and then egotistically call that self-sacrifice. Byron is quite willing to suffer for Lena, even to the extent of squandering his carefully husbanded good name or enduring a beating by Lucas Burch. Driven by newly awakened healthy compulsions, he has no more time for the old pietistic morality of the self-righteous. Now he feels "like a fellow running from or toward a gun" who "ain't got time to worry whether the word for what he is doing is courage or cowardice" (371). No longer does he define himself solely in terms that the community would approve.

As the second element of Byron's growth into life, he adopts the attitudes, expression, and stature of a man alive. Knowing that Lucas will run again if he brings him to Lena, "through him there seems to go a wave of exultation, of triumph, before he can curb and hide it, when it is too late to try." Now in expectation of winning Lena, his face is "confident and bold and suffused" (290). When he acts decisively against Hightower and the community by taking her to Joanna's place, he is completely changed. It shows in his walk, his carriage; leaning forward Hightower says to himself As though he has learned pride, or defiance Byron's head is erect, he walks fast and erect; suddenly Hightower says, almost aloud: 'He has done something. He has taken a step.' (294)
No longer does Byron "'stumble on the bottom step'" of Hightower's porch. "'You have entered this house on Sunday night,'" Hightower tells him, "'but until tonight you have never entered it without stumbling on the bottom step, Byron'" (294-95). Byron is so involved in life now that when, after his unexplained encounter with the Hines (who else but Byron is fit and willing to receive these wounded strangers?), he brings them to Hightower's, he alone of the four people in the house "seems to possess life" (366). So much has he grown in potency and responsibility that as he fetches a doctor for Lena, "he was cursing himself in all the mixed terror and rage of any actual young father for what he now believed to have been crass and criminal negligence" (374).

The third element of Byron's growth is his withdrawal from Hightower's sanctuary. As he recognizes just before leaving Jefferson for the last time, "'It's like I not only cant do anything without getting him mixed up in it, I cant even think without him to help me out'" (396). To live successfully he must free himself from the abnegating influence of the old minister. Only three days after meeting Lena, Byron has already begun to withdraw, as he reveals when he defends Hightower to himself with more heat than conviction. Overpowered by the smell of Hightower's house, he thinks, "'That is his right. It may not be my way, but it is his way and his right.' . . . 'It is the odor of goodness. Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful'" (282). Although he does not yet recognize that what he smells is death, not a virtuous life, he has already withdrawn from the lifelessness it evokes: The next evening when he returns to announce his
removal of Lena to Joanna's cabin, he declares, "'I knew you would not like it' . . . 'I reckon I done right not to make myself a guest by sitting down'" (298). He has passed the old man by, making decisions without his advice and against his will: Byron "passed from sight walking erect and at a good gait; such a gait as an old man already gone to flesh and short wind, an old man who has already spent too much time sitting down, could not have kept up with" (300). He is now so changed, he thinks to himself five days later, that "'if I could have seen myself now two weeks ago, I would not have believed my own eyes. I would have told them that they lied'" (371). Although his growth is by no means complete—he still misperceives Lena and acts in part from self-interest—he has, nevertheless, grown enough in life to destroy Hightower's carefully devised sanctuary against it.

The old minister's sanctuary fails him because he cannot remain impervious to the successive claims on his humanity that Byron brings into his house; it fails those seeking sanctuary because Hightower will not respond properly or adequately to meet their needs. Time after time he fails those who test his humanity, their presence and their struggle forcing him to confront and relive his past. Lena Grove never does see the inside of Hightower's house and Joe Christmas only sees it when it is too late, but through Byron's intercession they both test him nonetheless. Lena's first test is a small one, a challenge to him as a minister. All she wants to know is, "'Can he still marry folks?' . . . 'Is he still enough of a preacher to marry folks?'" (82). She cannot speculate whether he has the will to be a clergyman or the spiritual right to unite people in the family circle. Joe's
first test of Hightower is also a relatively simple one, asking by implication whether or not Hightower is capable of human feeling, especially compassion. Mrs. Hines presents him with his most difficult test, challenging his ironic relationship to the community and his capacity for self-sacrifice, asking through Byron that he pay the "'price for being good'" (369) and incur public outrage by saying that Christmas was with him the night of the murder. Ironically, this should be the easiest test for Hightower, since twenty-five years before he willingly underwent public outrage. If Hightower could pass each of these tests, he would, with each success, discover increasingly fuller redemption from his past sins of omission and commission.

His response to each test, however, is first a spiritual and physical resistance to and denial of compassion and responsibility and then a descent to self-pity over the great price he has been asked to pay for his sanctuary. This response to life inscribes a rigid pattern which reminds us of those other characters determined by their pasts. His response is not a movement but a repetition of resistance to movement. When Byron first brings news of Lena and Joe to Hightower, he wants so little from the minister--nothing for Joe and only a sympathetic ear and advice for Lena in her plight. Hearing the intertwined stories of passionate striving for life, "there begins to come into Hightower's puzzled expression a quality of shrinking and foreboding" (76) which becomes "shrinking and denial" (77) as he hears more, especially of Byron's growth in responsibility. He "Bunch-es" up, shrinking from life, self-recognition, and responsibility, denying their claims on his mind and spirit. As he struggles against life
threatening from without, "his face about the twin blank glares of the spectacles is sweating quietly and steadily" (85-86), the sweat running down his face like tears" (93). Instead of tears of compassion for what he hears, Hightower's "tears" are physical testimonies to the energies of his resistance. Hightower simply will not hear of the pain of physical life which reminds him so acutely of the passion spent and the suffering endured in his struggle against life. "'I am not in life any more,'" he tells Byron Bunch, making a faulty causal analysis of his isolation. "'That's why there is no use in even trying to meddle, interfere'" (284). That this is not entirely the case is revealed by the strenuousness of Hightower's resistance to compassion here and his response several days later when he hears that Joe Christmas is about to be captured. The counter in the store where he is felt solid, stable enough; it was more like the earth itself were rocking faintly, preparing to move. Then it seemed to move, like something released slowly and without haste, in an augmenting swoop, and cleverly, since the eye was tricked into believing that the dingy shelves ranked with fly-specked tins, and the merchant himself behind the counter, had not moved; outraging, tricking sense. And he thinking, 'I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid.' (292)

Hightower may rationalize that it is not he who has been moved, but we see otherwise. Despite his resistance to life and recognition of responsibility for his fate, his sanctuary is crashing about him, destroyed by the life and potential compassion he still possesses. Similarly, when the Sunday before Joe's death, Byron asks Hightower to perjure himself for Joe's and Mrs. Hine's sakes, the knuckles of his "hands which grip the chairarms are taut and white" and "there begins to emerge from beneath his clothing a slow and repressed
quivering" (368). After Byron's request, Hightower sits before the other three "facing him; almost like a jury" (365), "with his hands raised and clenched, his face sweating, his lip lifted upon his clenched and rotting teeth from about which the long sagging of flabby and putty-colored flesh falls away" (370). He resists self-recognition as much as them, because they are asking him, by their request to incur public outrage anew, to live through the public humiliation of twenty-five years past and his responsibility for that pain.

Given such resistance, Hightower's refusal—a form of self-justification for his isolation—is inevitable. He begins by counseling Byron against his newly discovered responsibility, implicitly explaining away his failure decades earlier of responsibility to wife and church. When Byron anguishes over whether to reveal Lucas Burch to Lena, Hightower advises, "'I still cannot see what you have to worry about, . . . 'It is not your fault that the man is what he is or she what she is. You did what you could. All that any stranger could be expected to do'" (76). Even after he recognizes Byron's love for Lena, he would self-interestedly dismiss her to preserve his little anti-life society: "'The thing, the only thing, for her to do is to go back to Alabama. To her people'" (285).

When these counsels fail, he adopts a defense similar to the one Joanna used against Joe's claims. She defended her sanctuary with the racism which made her sanctuary necessary in the first place; Hightower defends his against Byron with the same self-righteousness employed by those who tried to drive him from town and against whom, ironically, he will later protest for making "the churches of the
world like a rampart, like one of those barricades of the middleages planted with dead and sharpened stakes, against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man" (461). Unwittingly, he describes exactly his own sanctuary's intolerance of life and divided human nature. Concerned with unseemly appearances now, as he was not twenty-five years earlier when he abandoned wife and church to pursue his heroic dream, he refuses to shelter Lena, even though Byron would never ask such a thing, using his distortion of Byron's plea to mask his refusal of aid.

Later, when Byron takes Lena's need for shelter into his own hands, Hightower asks him, "... are you going to undertake to say just how far evil extends into the appearance of evil? just where between doing and appearing evil stops?" (289). When his implications of evil fail, Hightower condemns Byron for breaking up a marriage both know has never occurred: "'Think what you are doing. You are attempting to come between man and wife.'" If Byron persists, he warns, "'There is but one end to this, to the road that you are taking: sin or marriage. And you would refuse the sin. That's it. God forgive me. It will, must be, marriage or nothing with you'" (298).

With his neat either/or argument, he makes even marriage seem tainted, since, after all, Byron would be marrying a fallen woman. "'If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It's not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and now wishes to renge that choice'" (298-99). Can Hightower so easily forget that he once chose a woman and then reneged that choice for a lot less than love for another? If Byron persists further, there can
be only one explanation:

"You don't need my help. You are already being helped by someone stronger than I am."

For a moment Byron does not speak. They look at one another, steadily. "Helped by who?"
"By the devil," Hightower says. (291)

Ironically, of course, it is the former minister who has become the Tempter.

As Hightower's foregoing accusation suggests, he becomes increasingly illogical in his denials, he who has little more than a self-justificatory life of the mind. When his casuistry fails, he is reduced to mocking Byron's attempts to fulfill his responsibility, paying him ironically unintended tribute as "'the guardian of public weal and morality'" (344). And when sarcasm fails to prevent the encroachment of life, all that remains is outright refusal and thus Hightower's failure of each test of his humanity and the failure of his sanctuary for others. After Byron requests aid and counsel for Lena, "across the desk the unbending minister looks at him, waiting, not offering to help him" (284), now as rigid as those who once rejected him. To Mrs. Hines's plea for her grandson's life, he exclaims, "like an awkward beast tricked and befooled of the need for flight, brought now to bay by those who tricked and fooled it" (365), "'It's not because I cant, dont dare to,' ... 'it's because I wont! I wont! do you hear?'" (370). He speaks in the tone of a spiteful child, this aged man who has always been incapable of living in the complex world of conscience and the claims of common humanity. He could endure the shame of claiming to have spent the night with Joe Christmas because he has suffered such charges of unnatural behavior
before. He could dare to do it if he willed, because he dared public outrage before to pursue his dream. Byron, however, exposes High-tower's imposture as a truer Christian than the Calvinists and elicits a response that assigns no reasons because the old minister cannot, dare not face the truly selfish nature of his sanctuary. He could dare if his nature were different, if he were capable of suffering for others, of acting for what he believes. And he knows he is selfish, too. "It aint me he is shouting at," Byron thinks. "It's like he knows there is something nearer him than me to convince. . ." (370). It is this glimmer of recognition—the necessity of facing his selfishness—and with it the recognition of his sanctuary's failure, which torment him after Byron and the Hines leave, "his bald head and his extended and clenched fists arms lying full in the pool of light from the shaded lamp" (370). During the failure of his sanctuary, he has been forced into the light, but he dare not face the compulsions he shares with the community which rejected him.
CHAPTER VII

"THE TRAGIC AND INESCAPABLE EARTH";

PRIMAL INJUSTICE IN _LIGHT IN AUGUST_

There is as little critical consensus regarding the narrative mode and final effect of _Light in August_ as there is regarding its unity, chiefly because the two problems are closely related: to resolve one is almost always to resolve the other. _Light in August_ itself seems to invite controversy with radical swings from comedy to pathos and back and with three final chapters which present three more or less discrete conclusions in three different moods. Contemporary criticism has attempted to resolve this problem of final effect in at least four different ways; it seems to me, however, that each of these approaches suffers from one or more crucial weaknesses.

For different reasons Cleanth Brooks and Richard Adams believe that the novel's final effect is essentially comic. Brooks's reasons are three. First, comedy is the result of the kind of narrative detachment Brooks sees in _Light in August_: "If the view is long enough and the perspective full enough, the basic attitude is almost inevitably comic." Second, the novel is comic because Lena Grove, rather than Joe Christmas or Gail Hightower, "provides the final norm for our judgment." And third, comedy is the result of Faulkner's "basic alignment with society and with the community."[^1] Adams, on the

[^1]: _The Yoknapatawpha Country_, p. 72.
other hand, believes that the novel's problem of unity can be solved only if the novel is read as a comedy: "If we regard Byron [Bunch] as the protagonist, rather than Christmas, the book becomes comedy instead of tragedy, and its structure makes more sense." The comedy "contains a tragedy and assimilates it, as life assimilates disease and death."²

The basic difficulty with these readings, so helpful in other respects, is that they discount completely the response of the majority of readers who feel that Joe Christmas stands defiantly at the center of the novel. His energy and suffering dominate the action; the other characters serve to advance, retard, or comment on his action. His death in Chapter Nineteen profoundly colors our reading of the final two chapters which follow. More importantly, as I hope to show, it is Joe who, through his growth and enlightenment, becomes the final norm for our judgment, not Lena or Byron. To bring either Lena or Byron to the center of the novel's final effect is to mistake analogical commentary on the major action for the action itself. Lena and Byron are comic foils to Joe, heightening by their success our sense of tragic loss at Joe's death. We must not mistake the frame for the portrait it contains and sets off. The community, as I have tried to demonstrate, provides the hostile environment in which the major characters try to make their way; Faulkner by no means aligns himself with community in Light in August. His narrative detachment is the chief device for evaluating and commenting upon community blindness.

² Myth and Motion, p. 93.
According to Irving Howe, who holds a second view of the novel's final effect, *Light in August* "ends with a world irremediably split between the agony of Joe Christmas, a murderer murdered, and the composure of Lena Grove, a country girl whom evil cannot touch nor reflection trouble." "Were one to reflect very long upon the contrast between the lives of Christmas and Lena," Howe continues, "the result would be intolerable; and so Faulkner persuades us to tolerate it through the shifting perspective of the tragi-comic." I would argue, however, that Lena's comic resolution heightens rather than blunts our sense of what Howe calls the intolerable, "the outrage of two fates so disparate that no words can provide justification." 3 Tragedy expresses man's sense of the intolerable. One has only to remember King Lear's final address to the dead Cordelia:

> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
> Never, never, never, never, never. (V, iii, 307-9)

By far the most common interpretation of the novel's final effect suggests that *Light in August* is a tragedy or melodrama of circumstance and suffering. For readers like Alfred Kazin, Richard Chase, Carl Benson, Hyatt Waggoner, Darrel Abel, Michael Millgate, and Peter Swiggart, 4 the circumstance, the environment, and the past are all or almost all. Of the major characters of the novel Kazin observes,


"each . . . is the prisoner of his own history, and is trying to come to terms with this servitude in his own mind."\textsuperscript{5} Trapped by "heredity, environment, neurotic causation, social maladjustment,"\textsuperscript{6} the characters are powerless, doomed victims, Joe chief among them. Christmas, Chase argues, "never has a chance."\textsuperscript{7} He is "entirely subject to circumstances,"\textsuperscript{8} a "man 'things are done to,'"\textsuperscript{9} observes Kazin; "of sufferings alone is he made. . . ."\textsuperscript{10} Because these readers find Faulkner's view to be, in Chase's words, "darkly naturalistic,"\textsuperscript{11} it is perhaps inevitable that they should find the novel's conclusion utterly bleak. Joe's story is "unrelieved tragedy"\textsuperscript{12} in the sentimental use of the term by Hyatt Waggoner. "The quintessential victim,"\textsuperscript{13} in Michael Millgate's words, Christmas can give meaning to no life, not even his own. As such, he is unfit for heroic stature; in him, according to Chase, "we do not celebrate the death and rebirth of the hero."\textsuperscript{14}

While this reading of the novel is compelling because there

\textsuperscript{5} "The Stillness of Light in August," p. 104.

\textsuperscript{6} Chase, "Light in August," p. 105

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 104.

\textsuperscript{8} "The Stillness of Light in August," p. 101.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 106.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 107.

\textsuperscript{11} "Light in August," p. 104.

\textsuperscript{12} From Jefferson to the World, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{13} The Achievement of William Faulkner, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{14} "Light in August," p. 109.
appears to be a wealth of textual evidence to support it, it creates a crucial difficulty when carried to the logical limits it implies. If all are wholly subject to forces outside themselves, then all--persecutors and persecuted alike--are victims of one sort or another. No one, as Darrel Abel says, can be held responsible for Joe's tragedy: "All alike were servants of the general and traditional obsessions which assigned their roles in the tragedy." Thus, this reading skirts one of Faulkner's central concerns, one I suggested earlier in my discussion of Sartoris, namely, the relationship between fate and freedom and the extent of one's personal responsibility for his fate. To absolve Joe and the others of responsibility is to participate in Miss Atkins' moral blindness. Of Joe she says, "It's not his fault what he is, But it's not our fault either'" (126). For Faulkner to fail to hold his characters in some way accountable for their actions is for him to play the same evasive game he has them play. This reading of the novel neglects Faulkner's concern with the ambiguous relationship between fate and responsibility because those who have framed it confuse our twentieth century conception of fate as mechanically deterministic with Faulkner's more classical formulation of character as fate.

John L. Longley argues for the fourth view of the novel's final effect in his essay, "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World." In contrast to those who hold the third view, he argues that Christmas

15 "Frozen Movement," p. 75.

16 The Tragic Mask, pp. 192-206.
is the modern equivalent of a classical tragic protagonist like Oedipus. To argue his conclusions, however, he errs in the other extreme from those who see Joe as purely a victim. While granting the vicious "conditioning" forces which the novel documents, he nevertheless declares that Joe has "absolute" freedom: "... surely it is obvious that the wellspring of all his actions is his refusal to surrender to that conditioning."17 Because of the ambiguity of his color, "Christmas is free to choose what he will be, and his freedom is infinite."18

Having once chosen, Joe "must accept responsibility for the freedom of choice he exercised in his actions and pay the price of that freedom."19 His tragic, not merely pathetic death is the result of this freedom, "of his insistence that he already knows who he is and his persistence in the demand for the right to be himself, to live on the terms of his own self-definition."20

As I intend to show, Longley is surely correct about this tragic resolution to the novel, and correct, too, about Joe's tragic stature and the importance of his acceptance of responsibility for his fate. But Light in August is not quite the kind of tragedy he understands it to be, for the major characters, especially Joe, simply do not possess the kind of freedom he gives them. Their choices are more limited than he will admit. Joe's fundamental difficulty, as I have tried to show in my discussion of his primal energy, is that once imbued by the conflicting illusions of race inherent in his culture, he can only act in

17 The Tragic Mask, p. 196. 18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 199. 20 Ibid., p. 195.
terms of them, whether he affirms or struggles against them. They largely become his nature. "'I don't know,'" he tells Bobbie Allen. "'I believe I have'" (184) black blood. He chooses to believe what his conditioned and now believing unconscious tells him, resisting this belief at the same time primarily because of the stigma attached to blackness by the white values he also believes. His belief in his blackness may represent a choice, but he can never affirm it by acting consistently in terms of it; his racist values will not permit him to. This is the most important point made by the episodes in Chapter Ten documenting his life from ages eighteen to thirty-three. Joe's problem is that not knowing what he is, he can never affirm who he is. The ambiguity of his color prohibits him. If he could affirm a choice in Chapter Ten, the novel would end there, for he can easily pass for black or white.

Instead of a modern version of a classical tragedy, Light in August is a naturalistic tragedy, a paradigm of man's confrontation with his responsibility for a fate not entirely of his own choosing. Man's responsibility in Light in August is an even greater burden than Longley admits because man is called to account even though not free to choose. Only Joe, however, among the novel's deeply wounded characters comes to a full acceptance of this burden during his week on the run after Joanna Burden's murder. It is Joe's resistance to conditioning by the evil forces of his culture and his acceptance of responsibility, though conditioned, which gives him tragic stature. This naturalistic, tragic reading of the novel provides a mean between those, on the one hand, who view the characters only as victims and,
on the other, John Longley, who views Christmas as entirely free. This alternative reading is amply supported by the images of fate, injustice, responsibility, and affirmation which inform the plot.

I. FATE: "THE SAVAGE AND LONELY STREET"

The most insistent images of the fated quality of Joe's and the other characters' lives are the images of the street, the corridor, and the tunnel. Hyatt Waggoner has expressed disappointment with Faulkner's use of this "too prominent image pattern," believing that it "comes to less than it should." Perhaps its chief effect, he argues, is to suggest that "life is a one-way street with no exit, no escape, leading inevitably to defeat and death." To read the images as Waggoner does, however, is to take them only in their most superficial respects. The imagery suggests not simply a mechanistic conception of fate but the extent to which a man chooses and creates his fate. For example, during phase two of his affair with Joanna, Joe thinks he should leave, imagining "the savage and lonely street which he had chosen of his own will, waiting for him" (243-44). At its most accessible level this passage and its image are broadly ironic. Joe's "will" has been profoundly shaped by his experiences in the Memphis orphanage and at McEachern's. He had to choose the street, the image of his fate, his motion, his social isolation. No matter where he travelled before coming to Joanna's plantation, "he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion"

21 From Jefferson to the World, p. 117.
(213), a personification of the negative impulses from the past largely responsible for the character of his choices. But at another level of meaning, the ironic perspective in the image shifts. Joe, like all tragic heroes, is "both creature and creator": "fatefully free and freely fated." The street of his fate is "savage and lonely" because he has willed that it be so, demanding suffering and isolation from community as the price he will pay for his sense of defilement. When Joe first comes to work at the Jefferson planing mill, he has an opportunity for community membership, but flaunting his isolation "as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud" (27), he rejects offers of companionship or kindness. Though having lived only on cigarettes for three days before his arrival at the mill, he scorns Byron Bunch's offer of food, ignoring him with "his indolent and contemptuous attitude" (31) "as if he were another post" (30): "I aint hungry. Keep your muck." Nor the following Monday when he brings food to work will Joe squat with his co-workers to eat at noon. Even after six months, "he still had nothing to say to anyone" (31). To the town he is a "stranger," a "foreigner" (28), who maintains his disconnection "with his dark, insufferable face and his whole air of cold and quiet contempt" (28), an air which allies the town against him in "a sort of baffled outrage. 'We ought to run him through the planer,' the planing mill foreman says. 'Maybe that will take that look off his face"

While Lena Grove creates at least the possibility for community wherever she goes, Joe, with his cigarette smoke "sneering across his face" (31), rebukes the possibility. He may have been driven to his street, but he makes of it what he will according to his nature, "driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred" (213). No matter where he travels, the "thousand streets ran as one street" (210) because on any street Joe would have attempted to escape himself in the same way. In "none of them could he be quiet" (213), wracked as he is by the dilemma of his divided identity.

In similar respects, the images of fateful corridors and tunnels that present the other major characters reveal their natures and conflicts. Evocative of her barren life and fruitless charity, Joanna Burden's is a "gray tunnel" (250). Miss Atkins' life "seemed straight and simple as a corridor" (118) once she discovers a way to resolve the dilemma created by her sexual desire and the sexual proscriptions of her culture. And when Percy Grimm joined the National Guard, "he could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide..." (426). Among the novel's wounded characters, only Gail Hightower does not travel some street, corridor, or tunnel, suggesting thereby his immobility. In contrast to these characters, Lena Grove travels "a peaceful corridor paved with unflagging and tranquil faith and peopled with kind and nameless faces and voices" (4). She may have been compelled to her journey by circumstance, but she makes her fate an emblem of her healthy life and social impulses.
Her fate is different because her nature is different.

Because their fates are not mechanistically determined by forces outside themselves, the characters of *Light in August* possess at least partial understanding of where their streets, corridors, or tunnels are carrying them; not utterly blind victims they see at least dimly the consequences of their choices. "At the far and irrevocable end" of her tunnel, Joanna Burden sees "as unfading as a reproach, her naked breast of three short years ago," aching "as though in agony, virgin and crucified" (250). She understands that no one will ever penetrate her psychic virginity preserved by the masochistic immolation of her flesh. At the end of Miss Atkins' corridor sits Doc Hines, suggestive of their ultimate moral and spiritual kinship. She, like Percy Grimm, whose life at the end of his corridor "opened definite and clear" (426), will escape the complexities of their humanity by surrendering to community compulsions. Each is capable of sensing the dehumanizing effects of his or her choices but is unable or unwilling to change, perhaps because each has made as his highest good something we see as inhuman.

By contrast, Joe cannot envision his fate as these do until just before his surrender, suggesting perhaps that he has been more fully conditioned than they, more completely divided and thereby unpredictable even to himself. Unlike old Bayard Sartoris, who views his destiny as a series of "unturned corners" (*Sartoris*, 93), Joe sees his street filled with "imperceptible corners and changes of scene" (210). Only when he finally realizes that he must kill Joanna and in semidelirium believes he has done so does he achieve a clear sense of
destiny, but still not its end. About to commit the ultimate act of anti-social defiance, he at last feels the release which comes as the culmination of a process: "It seemed to him that he could see the yellow day opening peacefully on before him, like a corridor, an arras, into a still chiaroscuro without urgency" (104). What Joe foresees is that he, too, will die and thus be released from his struggle.

Because Joe and the others have chosen to respond to the unhealthy impulses shaped by others in their unconscious, they enact a collective fate which is theirs yet not theirs. The imagery shows them to be not fully themselves at the most crucial moments of their lives; there is an impersonality to their actions which reminds us of young Bayard Sartoris as he pursues the demands of his tragic mind. The night before Joanna's death, Joe remembers how, when a child, he tried to foil the betrayal of another woman, Mrs. McEachern, by removing the buttons she had sewn on his garments: "With his pocket knife and with the cold and bloodless deliberation of a surgeon he would cut off the buttons which she had just replaced" (100). The next morning, preparing to avenge Joanna's betrayal, he attempts ritualistically to put his present life behind him, destroying his whiskey cache with a "face completely cold, masklike almost" (105). On the run after her murder, when he disrupts the black church service, Joe is "quite cool, no sweat; the darkness cool upon him" (307-8). Similarly, when Joanna in phase three of her affair attempts to use Joe to expiate her defilement, her face is "cold, remote, and fanatic" (253), her voice, "cold, still" (261). And Percy
Grimm, freed from his humanity by the desire to serve community compulsions, becomes, as John Longley says, "Faulkner's equivalent of the classic Nemesis or Furies; machine-like, unerring, impersonal, mindless." He leads his men with "cold ardor" (431) and pursues Joe with "no haste about him, no effort. There was nothing vengeful about him either, no fury, no outrage" (436).

The most important images that present these characters, however briefly, as fate's dehumanized subjects are the multivalent images of the shadow and the phantom. Running through white Jefferson the night before Joanna's murder, Joe is "more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadowbrooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit strayed out of its own world, and lost" (106). Having been made the shadow double for the community and denied a place in the community that a man needs to fulfill himself, Joe is robbed by its compulsions of his substantial humanity. When Percy Grimm pursues Joe "with the delicate swiftness of an apparition" (435), he, too, has lost the shape and weight of substantial humanity. And as Gail Hightower eventually realizes, dedication to his dream has made him perhaps more than all the rest, "a shadowy figure among shadows" (461), the shadows of his parishioners. As this image suggests, not only do fate's subjects become unreal but those they struggle against do as well. In Sartoris, others became "illusions" (Sartoris, 93) in the minds of the family of dreamers. Here others become even more ephemeral; unperceived in the solipsism.

of individual and community alike, the circle of humanity dissolves. This is nowhere more tragically apparent than at the moment Joe kills Joanna. Joanna and her revolver become "monstrous" shadows on the wall. At the climactic moment she ceases to exist both for us and for Joe: "He was watching the shadowed pistol on the wall; he was watching when the cocked shadow of the hammer flicked away" (267). The method of presentation disperses responsibility; subject, object, and agent of fate disappear, obliterated from the present moment by the clash of two opposing patterns shaped in the past.

II. PRIMAL INJUSTICE: THE PLAYER AND HIS GAME

While Joe and the others make many of the choices which turn them into shadows, they certainly do not intend to become so. Things get out of hand, their fates are complicated by others' fates, and they become the victims so many readers understand them to be. And we pity them--especially Joe and Joanna--in their plights. We do not hear the same ironies when they protest the primal injustice of their fates that we hear with the Sartorises, largely self-made victims who are more free than their often ironic protests reveal. Although, like the Sartorises, they often use their protests against fate to evade responsibility for their acts, we are more ambivalent about the characters of Light in August; they are not wholly self-made victims. The Sartorises resist the healthy humanity preventing the achievement of their dreamt destinies; Joe and Joanna resist a nightmarish fate deadly to their healthy humanity. If the Sartorises cannot achieve their
dreamt destinies, the characters of *Light in August* cannot avoid theirs.

All Joe has ever really wanted for himself is "peace," the harmony which derives from a definite sense of one's identity. In contrast to young Bayard Sartoris who desires more than human stature, what Joe wants is freedom to be merely human. But it is his primal injustice that he never gets it: "'That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years'" (313). Of course, Joe is unaware of how much his choices and those of others have robbed him of peace and humanity, but he attempts in his protests during his last weeks to assign responsibility for his past, "all this damn trouble" (110), to account for the simultaneous feeling of guilt and guiltlessness which Richard Sewall calls the source of tragic suffering.  

When, in phase three of their affair, Joanna first threatens him, he thinks he must choose and act: "'I have got to do something. There is something that I am going to do'" (256). But even here, attempting to seize control of events, he senses a foreclosure of options and an inevitability. The more Joanna presses Joe's supposed blackness upon him, the more he feels himself surrendering control to the pattern of the past. Confused, believing himself "the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe" (264), he now thinks, "Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something" (97). "He was saying to himself I had to do it already in the past tense; I had to do it. She said so her-

24 "The Tragic Form," p. 630.
self" (264). Now sensing he has lost control of his fate, he attempts to assign responsibility elsewhere for what will happen, first to Joanna's apparent physical betrayal, menopause--"perhaps that's where outrage lies" (99)--and then to her return to the religion of her fathers which condemns him--"'She would have been all right if she hadn't started praying over me. It was not her fault that she got too old to be any good any more. But she ought to have had better sense than to pray over me'" (99). Later he asks himself, "'What in hell is the matter with me?'" (110), still seeking a rational explanation for events, even as he surrenders control totally to his fate. Now, all he can hear is his "blood . . . talking and talking" (109), the voices of his past, "myriad sounds of no greater volume--voices, murmurs, whispers: of trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places--which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life" (98). And these irreconcilable voices, he realizes in the minutes before he kills Joanna, have been leading him inexorably all his life to this moment, the confrontation of the divided halves of his nature:

The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment; going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had-been would be the same. Then it was time. (266)

His "flat pattern," of course, has been that of desire and betrayal, a pattern which has robbed him of human rhythms and denied him both a past and a future. On the run after Joanna's death, when he puts on the
black woman's brogans—an ironic gesture toward life which he is prevented from understanding—then

it seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving. (313)

He sees himself entirely a victim of the racial, religious, and sexual illusion betraying him. All the streets of his life have been leading him toward his sense of the utter defilement of blackness which he now understands can only hasten his death.

While Joanna Burden does not even try to accept responsibility for her fate in her protests, there is, nevertheless, a real pathos in her struggle to avoid her ancestors' fate, the salvation which is the death of the flesh. At the end of the second phase of her affair she has physically "never been better; her appetite was enormous and she weighed thirty pounds more than she had ever weighed in her life."

But the life which beckons her "out of the darkness, the earth, the dying summer itself" is, as it is not for Lena,

threatful and terrible to her because instinct assured her that it would not harm her; that it would overtake and betray her completely, but she would not be harmed: that on the contrary, she would be saved, that life would go on the same and even better, even less terrible. (249)

What is terrible to Joanna is that she feels herself drawn by this call to a fully human life, "that she did not want to be saved. 'I'm not ready to pray yet,' she said aloud, quietly, rigid. . . . 'Don't make me have to pray yet, Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while'" (250). But even as she begs for her life, the moon, a symbol of man's divided and protean nature and Joanna's primal in-
justice, "poured and poured into the window, filling the room with something cold and irrevocable and wild with regret" (250). Regret it though she may, she must surrender to her family pattern of denial, and when she does, she does not believe that it is she or even her ancestors who are responsible, but God. Of her demand that Joe publicly confess his blackness and bow before the Lord she says, "'I dont ask it. It's not I who ask it. Kneel with me!'" (267).

The reader recalls these pained protests when other characters denounce their own victimization. More and more the others echo in diminished terms Joe and his greater anguish. Hightower protests, not his inability to live in the flesh as Joe and Joanna do, but his inability to escape the body. "'Must my life after fifty years be violated and my peace destroyed...?'" he asks Byron Bunch. When he hears that Christmas is about to be captured,

it goes on beneath the top of his mind that would cozen and soothe him: 'I wont. I wont. I have bought immunity.' It is like words spoken aloud now: reiterative, patient, justificative: 'I paid for it. I didn't quibble about the price. No man can say that. I just wanted peace, I paid them their price without quibbling.' (293)

What he will not give in to, the violation he resists, is compassion for Joe's suffering, ironically thinking he can buy his way out of the fullness of life which, conditioned by his childhood experiences, he stigmatizes as a disease or a crime. The peace he desires is nothing like the peace Joe seeks. At the same time he evades responsibility for his lifeless immunity and failure of compassion by conceiving himself the victim of others.
"I am not a man of God. And not through my own desire. Remember that. Not of my own choice that I am no longer a man of God. It was by the will, the more than behest, of them like you and like her [Lena Grove] and like him [Joe] in the jail yonder and like them who put him there to do their will upon, as they did upon me, with insult and violence upon those who like them were created by the same God and were driven by them to do that which they now turn and rend them for having done it." (345)

While we grant that Hightower has been victimized by a scapegoating community, it is difficult to sympathize with a man who in his own willed inhumanity blames all humanity, the victimizers and their victim, for his plight. Unlike Joe and Joanna's protests, his seems outrageous self-pity. Hightower does not so much protest the injustice of his lifeless fate as attempt to justify it.

Even more outrageous are the protests of the wholly comic victims, Byron Bunch and Lucas Burch. Riding away from Jefferson, Byron reminds us of Joe's elegaic sense of futility as he protests, not the burden of his dividedness but his loss of innocence: "'It seems like a man can just about bear anything. He can even bear what he never done. He can even bear the thinking how some things is just more than he can bear'" (401). Echoing closely Joe's protest against the pit waiting to entrap him, the road of Byron's fate is "like the edge of nothing" where Byron and his mule would become "not anything with falling fast, until they would take fire like the Reverend Hightower says about them rocks running so fast in space that they take fire and burn up and there aint even a cinder to have to hit the ground'" (401). And the "impacable earth" is as oblivious of Byron's suffering as Jefferson is of Joe's: 'Dont know and dont care,' he thinks. 'Like they were saying All right. You say you
suffer. All right. But in the first place, all we got is your naked word for it." (401-2). As Joe is, Byron is isolated from others by his integrity and suffering, having lost what he desires above all else; unlike Joe, however, Byron suffers not as a scapegoat to the very community he has ambivalently sought, but as a lover and community member. One who had to turn his back on his beloved, Lena, and his community. Even at his most pained, then, Byron remains within the bounds of the comic plot. Worse than Byron's comic echoes of Joe's tragic protests are Lucas Burch's outright mockery of them.

All Burch wants is "fair justice" (286), but by "justice" he means the thousand dollars reward for Joe's capture; Joe would never define justice in such terms. Burlesquing traditional tragic style, Burch cries,

aloud, in a harsh, tearful voice: "Justice. That was all. Just my rights. And them bastards with their little tin stars, all sworn every one of them on oath, to protect a American citizen." He says it harshly, almost crying with rage and despair and fatigue: "I be dog if it aint enough to make a man turn downright bowlsheyvick." (415)

As Joe does, Lucas feels he has been betrayed by the scheme of things and is being forced to a kind of negative identity in response to this betrayal. Balked in his every attempt to secure his reward,

his rage and impotence are now almost ecstatic. He seems to muse now upon a sort of timeless and beautiful infallibility in his unpredictable frustrations. As though somehow the very fact that he should be so consistently supplied with them elevates him somehow above the petty human hopes and desires which they abrogate and negative. (411-12)

As tragic figures do, Lucas senses that all his acts have produced the opposite of what they were intended to; he senses a peripety. Joe,
however, never feels, as Burch does, that his suffering makes him somehow heroic.

What are we supposed to make of these comic imitations of tragic protest? While it is certainly true, as John Longley proposes, that these episodes provide comic relief from the tragedy, there is more involved here. The comic burlesque of tragic elements and events is not only a structural device but a thematic one as well. Irving Howe, as I have mentioned, locates the intolerable in our sense of the novel's world irremediably split between comic and tragic fates. The passages I have just quoted, however, suggest that this is not always the case. Our sense of the intolerable in the novel arises from our recognition that comic and tragic fates interpenetrate, that the tragic design is corrupted, as it were, by the comic. Perhaps the clearest, most compact example of this interpenetration occurs early in the novel when, as Byron approaches Hightower's house, the old minister

watches quietly the puny, unhorsed figure moving with that precocious and meretricious cleverness of animals balanced on their hinder legs; that cleverness of which the man animal is so fatuously proud and which constantly betrays him by means of natural laws like gravity and ice, and by the very extraneous objects which he has himself invented, like motor cars and furn­itu re in the dark, and the very refuse of his own eating left upon floor or pavement. . . . (70)

Faulkner here alludes to the banana peel routine, the slapstick bur­lesque show joke, to describe the comic equivalent of the tragic arc: hubris, hamartia, peripety, and fall. In other words, our perception

25 The Tragic Mask, p. 205.
of the tragedy is, in certain significant respects, double. On the one hand we see the folly of Joe's struggle for his humanity against an increasingly implacable fate, a sense of folly increased by the grotesque imitations of the tragic figures by the comic. On the other hand, Joe's very persistance, what Richard Sewall calls the tragic hero's "characteristic mood" of "resentment and dogged endurance," heightens our admiration for him, and that admiration is cast in greater relief by the comic figures: by their smallness, their relentless self-absorption, their self-deceptions, and the banality of their lives. The imagery that enhances Joe's presence reduces theirs. This paradox in our perception is dramatized in *Light in August* by the major images of primal injustice, especially the Player, the game, the ritual, and the conflagration.

Lucas Burch's evocation of the Player and game images remind us of their use in *Sartoris* as largely comic-ironic devices of characterization. Trying to escape Lena and Byron and still get his reward for Joe's capture, Burch stands by a railroad right of way "in brooding and desperate calculation, as if he sought in his mind for some last desperate cast in a game already lost" (410). He has made his last throw in a dice game with fate by sending a black youth to fetch his reward money, and now he thinks to himself that they were all just shapes like chessmen--the Negro, the sheriff, the money, all--unpredictable and without reason moved here and there by an Opponent who could read his moves before he made them and who created spontaneous rules which he and not the Opponent, must follow. (414)

26 "The Tragic Form," p. 630.
Lucas Burch may feel this moment as portentous, but we do not. Just as the spirit of the Sartorises becomes their Player, Lucas Burch has become his own Opponent. Our sense of his fate is the direct result of his own weaknesses and miscalculations, especially entrusting his chances of the reward to "a Negro who may be either a grown imbecile or a hulking yough" (412). The Opponent seems unpredictable and without reason only because he, himself, lacks principle, integrity and common sense. From our first view of Burch working beside Joe, he is presented in comic contrast to Joe as a "disciple" who imitates his "master" (40) but who is nonetheless only a parody of his master, looking, for example "scattered and emptily swaggering where the master had looked sullen and quiet and fatal as a snake" (41). The rules Burch must follow in his fateful game are the unacknowledged lineaments of his character: his emptiness, irresponsibility, and greed. Lucas, like the Sartorises, is almost wholly responsible for the fate he protests as unjust.

When, however, the images of Player and game are evoked by Joe Christmas or applied to Percy Grimm, they acquire new dimensions. Even though the sense of personal responsibility for one's fate evoked by Lucas Burch colors later appearances of the images of the Player and the game, we sense these images evolving into the presence of an implacable fate not subject to human control or choice. The Player becomes as much a player in a blood ritual as a player in a game: Jefferson turns on Joe after Joanna's murder much as the town had on Hightower twenty-five years before, as though "the entire affair had been a lot of people performing a play" who had to "play
out the parts which had been allotted them" (67). As Faulkner first uses them, however, these images of a ritual-game are broadly representational, criticizing community justice. After Joanna's death, Joe becomes a "quarry" in a hunt, pursued "quite by the rules" (312). He committed a crime against community and must be punished by its members. But as a double for the community's compulsions, Joe must first be captured.

"They all want me to be captured, and then when I come up ready to say Here I am Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs they all run away. Like there is a rule to catch me by, and to capture me that way would not by like the rule says." (319)

To surrender to community justice is to refuse to play by the rules of the culture which rigidly divides humanity into citizen and criminal, damned and elect, black and white. No blurring of distinctions is permitted. When by surrendering Joe continues to defy the rules of this game of justice applied to each of the community's shadows, Mottstown is enraged. Confounded by his refusal to fit into the pattern of their social paradigm, the townspeople see him as an outrageous contradiction, as "that white nigger" (326).

He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (331)

To refuse to play society's game and so provoke its outrage is to display the kind of human vulnerability that tragic heroes possess.

The Monday following Joe's surrender, when Grimm pursues him
through Jefferson, the Player and game imagery lose their repre-
sentational features, becoming the means for presenting a fate that
has no rational explanation. Grimm runs in "blind obedience to what-
ever Player moved him on the Board" (437). He is not even human in
his pursuit, "indefatigable, not flesh and blood, as if the Player who
moved him for pawn likewise found him breath" (437). Everything is
"just where the Player had desired it to be" (438), apparently con-
spiring against Joe's escape. And the Player is not sated by merely
destroying Joe--"the Player was not done yet" (439); it must mutilate,
obliterate this man who provoked the Player with his tragic refusal.
In contrast to the particular fate which the Sartorises' Player
evokes, the fate evoked by this Player is general and cultural. The
images of Player and game have become symbols of the negative social,
sexual, and religious energies that have shaped Joe to destroy him;
community fears and compulsions must be given substance in order to
be purged. Joe's castration, in other words, is the embodiment of
his culture's repudiation of the threatening flesh, a denial of any
possibility for the corruption of abstract ideals of purity by cor-
poral existence: "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell!" (439), cries Grimm. Joe may have provoked the Player by his choices
and acts, but in no way could he deserve this. He is a plaything of
forces loose in society and the world, of a death drive mocking man's
desire for fully human life, a scapegoat for the frustration of that
desire. Here our sense of primal injustice crystallizes. We protest
on Joe's behalf in a way we do not for the Sartorises. Whatever he
has done to deserve punishment, Joe should not have to suffer this.
But he does.
Increasing our outrage at Joe's tragic fate are images of religious ritual which elevate to a kind of holy sacrilege the town's sacrifice of Joe on the altar of its unnatural desires. Grimm, the "young priest" (439) of the ritual, leads his procession by conviction "irresistable and prophetlike" (428). The faith he celebrates in his black mass is his and the town's "belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races..." (426). Certain of his role as representative and defender of communal faith, he moves with "blind and untroubled faith in the rightness and infallibility of his actions" (434), as though under the protection of a magic or a providence" (437), and with "that serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows" (437) in his face. Given the fullness of his devotion to the negative communal order, he quickly claims the allegiance of the rest of Jefferson, whose faith differs from his only by degree. Cleanth Brooks takes great pains to exculpate the community of complicity in Joe's death, and while it is legally correct to say that Joe is not lynched, it is equally true that the town unconsciously sanctions Grimm's deeds (whatever revulsions the community may feel afterwards when forced to confront the physical manifestations of its darkest corruption):

So quickly is man unwittingly and unpredictably moved that without knowing that they were thinking it, the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs. (432)

27 The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 51-52.
Gathering before the court house where the Grand Jury is hearing Joe's plea, the townspeople signal their participation in the bloody rite to come, moving "with almost the air of monks in a cloister" (393).

This motif of ritual and sacrifice brings us to the question of whether or to what extent Faulkner intends Joe Christmas to remind us of Christ. Given the conflicting evidence in the novel and Joe's character, perhaps the most that can be said of the Christ-Christmas analogy is that Faulkner picked and chose among the various elements of the Christian version of the almost universal myth of the death and rebirth of a god. As he said at the University of Virginia: "Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as a part of his Christian background will in time draw from that. There was no deliberate intent to repeat it [in Light in August]. That the people to me come first. The symbolism comes second." For our purposes here, there is at least one respect many readers have recognized in which Joe is Christ- or god-like and therefore tragic: he dies as a scapegoat, a double, for the community's guilt, particularly that engendered by its love-hatred of the flesh. The Reverend High-tower seems to understand this tragic irony as he hears the Protestant church music, a sonorous and austere cry, not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed

28 Faulkner in the University, p. 117.

29 Holman, "The Unity of Light in August," p. 122; Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 32; Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 103; Thompson, William Faulkner, pp. 77-78.
man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of the two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. 'And they will do it gladly,' he says, in the dark window. He feels his mouth and jaw muscles tauten with something premonitory, something more terrible than laughing even. 'Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible.' (348)

In this way does Christmas become a Christ-like embodiment of our intolerable sense of the tragic injustice of life. But as scapegoats have a way of doing through their suffering, Christmas manages to judge the community at the moment of his sacrifice. Running into Hightower's house, Joe raises his crown of thorns, his "armed and manacled hands full of glare and glitter like lightning bolts, so that he resembled a vengeful and furious god pronouncing doom" (438), not only upon Hightower, whom Joe strikes down, but upon his pursuers as well who, like the minister, have spurned life in their rejection of Joe. To explicate the image of Joe's handcuffs and understand his role as a scapegoat, we must remember what Christ said of his role as a judge of mankind:

"So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but who ever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:32-34, RSV)

As an image of light, conflagration, and elemental disturbance, this image of Joe's shackled hands organizes our sense of primal injustice, of the tragic irony of Joe's death, in another, more thematically significant respect. The destiny and inevitable death to

30 Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 147.
which Joe is manacled\textsuperscript{31} symbolizes something terribly wrong or awry in the scheme of things. In biblical terms, there are signs and portents in the heavens and on earth. When Joe is captured in Mottstown, news of it "went here and there about the town dying and borning again like a wind or a fire" (330). When he flees in the middle of the Jefferson square, "'Turn in the fire alarm,' Grimm shouted back. 'It don't matter what folks think, just so they know that something . . .'" (434). As Joe runs, his "hands glint once like the flash of a heliograph as the sun struck the handcuffs," "his manacled hands high and now glinting as if they were on fire" (436). The mob rushes into Hightower's house "bringing with them into its stale and cloistral dimness something of the savage summer sunlight which they had just left. It was upon them, of them: its shameless savageness. Out of it their faces seemed to glare with bodiless suspension as though from haloes. . ." (438). Through images of light and fire Faulkner signals a tortuously rent cosmos, one in which the light in August is evoked both by the tranquil, serene faith of Lena Grove and the savagery of a Jefferson gone mad with blood lust. The same light that shines benignly ("primrosecolor") at the birth of Lena's child glares on the scene of Joe's death, a light revealing the terrible paradox of the human condition and the dreadful ironies of an individual's struggle to create himself in the face of opposing forces whose injustice seems fundamental and thoroughly tragic. Given the nature of Faulkner's presentation of this primal injustice, it is no wonder that so

\textsuperscript{31} Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 147.
many readers find *Light in August* so bleak here and the consolation of Lena's triumph unavailing or, worse, irrelevant.

III. AFFIRMATION: THE CIRCLES OF LIFE

*Light in August* would be bleak were it not for Joe's tragic affirmation of his humanity and acceptance of responsibility for his fate, an affirmation and acceptance which, by contrast with Reverend Hightower's struggles, increase our sense of tragic loss at Joe's death while at the same time affirming the value and significance of his struggle. The images which present the conclusions of the Christmas and Hightower stories echo each other but do so ironically; Hightower is incapable of responding to his moment of *anagnorisis* as Joe does to his.

JOE CHRISTMAS

Those who find Joe's death merely pathetic rather than tragic do so because they see his life as a pattern of failure from beginning to end. Carl Benson argues that although Joe "tries to attain selfhood as a moral agent, he is doomed to failure." For Richard Adams, Joe "represents failure, denial of life, and failure to change or develop or, in any meaningful sense, to move." Walter Slatoff believes that "we cannot really feel he has achieved any resolution of his problem" during his week on the run. For C. Hugh Holman, "in his ineffectual death is no solution. His is a futile and meaningless expiation of his 'guilt.'" Ilse Lind finds Joe "spiritually enervated, ... inadequate." Alfred Kazin argues that "there is no redemption"
in his death. And, finally, Richard Chase says "there is no new life, no transfiguration anywhere that would not have occurred without Joe Christmas. There is no new religious consciousness or knowledge. In Joe Christmas we do not celebrate the death and rebirth of the hero." I would argue, however, that during his week on the run Joe does develop, gaining new consciousness and knowledge, resolving the problems of his divided identity, and taking responsibility for his fate. He dies a death which is potentially redemptive and becomes the symbolic source of further recognition and new life. Joe's affirmation of his humanity and his acceptance of responsibility are presented by the same images which evoke Lena's wholeness and healthy impulses, the images of the earth and the circle. Joe must choose to live, however; Lena lives instinctively.

Upon his flight from the scene of Joanna's murder, he is the Joe Christmas these readers see, desiring the same punishment for his defiance he demanded in the past. "Running straight as a railroad" (310), his "trail was good, easily followed because of the dew. The fugitive had apparently made no effort whatever to hide it" (310). Just to make sure the posse knows where he is, he disrupts the black church meeting, goading community wrath there by perhaps killing again and by writing an obscene message for the sheriff.

But when Joe trades his shoes for the black woman's brogans, he makes, as I suggested earlier, an instinctive gesture toward survival and life. He understands his gesture as analogous with death, and he is ironically correct. But in another, equally important sense, by figuratively losing his life he gains it, since his gesture brings him to earth, the source of the life energy driving Lena Grove. Thus, as Walter Slabey suggests, Joe comes near the end of his "night journey, a ritual of death and rebirth, of withdrawal and return."\(^{33}\)

Wearing the brogans, he emerges from the woods at dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted,' he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. (313)

Becoming one with the natural scene, he achieves a sense of his physical life that one part of him has always resisted. Some readers assume that here Joe is surrendering to Negrohood, the false definition with which society has hounded him all his life,\(^{34}\) but this is true only in the sense that physical life has, for Joe, always been associated with blackness. But it is his corporeal existence which he now accepts, moving beyond the false and abstract distinctions of black and white. Feeling the "old earth" stirring within him, he gains a purpose for his flight and a new rhythm to his motion:


It is as though he desires to see his native earth in all its phases for the first or the last time. He had grown to manhood in the country, where like the unswimming sailor his physical shape and his thought had been molded by its compulsions without his learning anything about its actual shape and feel. For a week now he has lurked and crept among its secret places, yet he remained a foreigner to the very immutable laws which earth must obey. (320)

The immutable laws Joe surrenders to at the end of his week of flight are the natural compulsions ineluctably a part of life, a surrender made easier by his earlier purgation of the unnatural physical compulsions so much a part of his life for thirty years and most often associated with food. At the beginning of his flight, he gathered and ate rotting and wormriddle fruit; . . . He thought of eating all the time, imagining dishes, food. He would think of that meal set for him on the kitchen table three years ago and he would live again through the steady and deliberate backswinging of his arm as he hurled the dishes into the wall, with a kind of writhing and excruciating agony of regret and remorse and rage. Then one day he was no longer hungry. It came sudden and peaceful. He felt cool, quiet. Yet he knew that he had to eat. He would make himself eat the rotten fruit, the hard corn. . . . It was not with food that he was obsessed now, but with the necessity to eat. (316)

He now eats simply to survive. Food is a physical necessity, no longer an unconscious image of sickness and betrayal. "... the body's need for food and rest," remarks Olga Vickery, "erases all the illusions that the mind creates and perpetuates. The stage beyond, where even food becomes unnecessary, gives to Christmas the human dignity all his violence could not seize." Symbolic of his affirmation of his fleshly humanity, the only real meal he eats during his week on the run is at a Negro cabin, what Walter Slatoff calls a kind of "Last

35 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 73.
Supper." That even this isolated black family should flee him, "'of their brother afraid'" (317), foreshadows his reception in Motts-town. To be fully human in this novel is to stand outside virtually every community circle.

By accepting the circle of his humanity Christmas has been preparing himself to accept the limits and potentials of that larger social circle, the community he has defied and fled. He begins his preparations, as John Longley has observed, "by reaccepting the limitations of one of the most human and communal inventions: time." He must discover what Lena already knows intuitively about man in time, which for her is "all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured threat being rewound onto a spool" (6). Unlike Aunt Jenny Du Pre in *Sartoris*, for whom the rewinding spool is an image of injustice and approaching death, the spool exemplifies for Lena her harmonious acceptance of her allotted cycle of life. For Joe, on the other hand, his past thirty years have been lived "inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets, and . . . one night he went to sleep and when he waked up he was outside of them" (314). His time has been linear, regular only in its inexorable march to the vague horizon it shares with his street. Both images, like the orphanage fence of his childhood, represent barriers to self-fulfillment. His request of the farm wife for the day of the week is part of "the old habit" (314)

36 *Quest for Failure*, p. 140.

37 *The Tragic Mask*, p. 199.
of reckoning time. It is only when he flees her threat to call her husband that he begins to discover the circle of his life and thus his place in the world. He runs for his life, "of and toward some destination that the running had suddenly remembered" (315), until he collapses in physical exhaustion, purging his old image of constraining time: "Time, the spaces of light and dark, had long since lost orderliness. It would be either one now, seemingly at an instant, between two movements of the eyelids, without warning. He could never know when he would pass from one to the other. . . ." (315). A complete revolution occurs in Joe's vision of his world, "as if the sun had not set but instead had turned in the sky before reaching the horizon and retraced its way" (316).

Having been purged of his old compulsions of linear time, the "flat pattern" once understood as his fate, Joe is now capable of accepting responsibility for his acts and rejoining the community circle alternately sought and defied. The night after eating at the black cabin, "a strange thing came into his mind":

It was strange in the sense that he could discover neither derivation nor motivation nor explanation for it. He found that he was trying to calculate the day of the week. It was as though now and at last he had an urgent need to strike off the accomplished days toward some purpose, some definite day or act, without either falling short or overshooting. (317)

Here Faulkner seems to allude to Book Two of the Nicomachean Ethics, where Aristotle argues through his famous archery metaphor that happiness and virtue are only achieved by first living in harmony with one's nature and then by following the Golden Mean between extremes of behavior. For the first time in his life Joe desires this kind of
harmony and gains the purpose which comes from accepting it, namely, the willingness to take responsibility for his fate, nature, and deeds. Having accepted his limitations, the circle of life, Joe at last discovers a mean between slavish acceptance of the social definition foisted upon him and his life-long defiance of it. His recognition has no derivation or motivation because it is foreign to his past life and springs spontaneously from his healthy instincts never fully suppressed. With Lena, Joe moves in harmony with the circle of time. Now, almost ready to rejoin community and submit to the justice which he understands as the price of his admittance, he prepares himself for that community and, unwittingly, his sacrifice. First, he shaves painfully at a spring and, then, upon his arrival in Mottstown, "they shaved him and cut his hair and he paid them and walked out and went right into a store and bought a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat. . ." (331). Capping Joe's courtship of the community, one of the townsfolk says, "It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set out to get married!" (330). Given community compulsions, however, there is no possibility of the comic resolution in marriage.

Having accepted two circles encompassing his life, Christmas is, in a moment of anagnorisis, granted a vision of a third, the ironic circle of his fate. Riding toward Mottstown and surrender, Joe is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled farther than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been farther in these seven days than
in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' he thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of Negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves. (321)

His street, certain critical views notwithstanding, has led to his growth in knowledge and as a human being. Erik Erikson suggests that to develop in a healthy way, an identity must be "committed to some new synthesis of past and future: a synthesis which must include but transcend the past."38 This is surely the process Faulkner describes here. Seeing his past, the pressure he has exerted against the circles constraining him, Joe senses his death is imminent. However, seeing his life whole provides him with a meaning, a transcendence denied others. He does not so much submit passively to inevitable death here as display the "readiness" of the tragic hero in the face of his destiny. Having accepted life, Joe does not turn away from it or the consequences of its furious motion.

This reading of Joe's growth, amply supported by the novel's imagery so far, seems to be contradicted, however, by the final moments of Joe's life. If he senses his death, if he is prepared to meet his destiny and take responsibility for his acts, then why does he break and run in the Jefferson square? There are two prevalent theories about his flight, both incorrect it seems to me. The first, held by Lawrence Thompson, Richard Adams, François Pitavy, Leonard Neufeldt,

Walter Slatoff, Richard Chase, and Peter Swiggart, follows the suggestion bantered about by Jefferson townspeople the night of Joe's murder: "It was as though," they speculate, Joe "had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide" (419). But this reading makes no sense if, as I am arguing, a fundamental change has occurred in Joe's life. As the sheriff asks in perplexity, acknowledging this change, "How did I know he aimed to break, would think of trying it right then and there?" . . . 'When [Gavin] Stevens had done told me he would plead guilty and take a life sentence'" (433). Besides, we should know by now that any Jefferson theorizing about Joe's motivations is highly suspect in light of community compulsions and distortions and the reader's superior knowledge of Joe.

Those who hold the second theory, especially Cleanth Brooks, subscribe more or less to Gavin Stevens' interpretation of events. According to the lawyer, Mrs. Hines told her grandson he could find sanctuary at Hightower's. He believed her, took his best opportunity, and tried to escape. But Joe's black blood (by which Stevens supposedly means his self-destructive impulses, in contrast to his life impulses, the white blood) will not let him save himself. It brought him to a gun even as his white blood led him to Hightower's. There his black


The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 375-77n.
blood drove him to a final act of defiance before deserting him at the moment of Percy Grimm's arrival. This theory, too, makes no sense. Not only does it contradict what Stevens knows to be Joe's intentions but defies probability as well. Why should Joe believe the obviously mad woman who visits him in his cell? He is no fool. And he cannot know she is his grandmother. Willing to plead guilty, why should he need a sanctuary? Further, the black blood-white blood explanation of Joe's flight is ridiculous, as Lawrence Thompson has shown by applying it to the equally driven Percy Grimm. Rather, it is merely a convenient means for Stevens to avoid confronting the community's responsibility for Joe's death. After all, he is a community member who comes from a family sharing community compulsions: "His family is old in Jefferson; his ancestors owned slaves there and his grandfather knew (and also hated, and publicly congratulated Colonel Sartoris when they died) Miss Burden's grandfather and brother" (419-20). And even if Joe were so driven, how could he find Hightower's sanctuary? Could Mrs. Hines, a stranger to Jefferson who visited Hightower only at night, have given Joe directions or an address? How could Joe find Hightower without either? He did not know the minister. Even if he had directions or an address, neither would have done Joe any good, since he came to Hightower's from behind, through a garden and in his back door (438). It appears that Gavin Stevens is, as so often, merely talking to hear himself talk.

Joe runs simply to save his life newly found. He may sense his

41 William Faulkner, p. 79.
imminent death, but this is not to say he wants to die. He is very human and very believable here. As Faulkner said of the escaped slave in the story "Red Leaves": "... man will cling to life, that in preference--between grief and nothing, man will take grief always." Joe fears the lynching about to take place. He will accept responsibility before what Stevens calls a "Force, a principle" (421) of law but is not about to be "burned or hacked or dragged dead by a Thing," the community's lust for vengeance. Ironically, of course, Force and Thing become the same thing in the person of Percy Grimm, upholder of community "order" in more ways than he comprehends. On the day of Joe's court appearance he is led through "the midst of a throng of people thick as on Fair Day," a crowd "feeling, sensing without knowing" (433) the lynching about to take place, the culmination of the community's fate. The officials are so sure of Joe that they hardly need to guard him. He is sent "'across the square with one deputy and not even handcuffed to him'" (433). They fail to recognize that it is Joe, not the citizens, who needs protection. And so, for the last time in his life, Joe must attempt to take responsibility for himself. He comes to Hightower's house quite by chance during his flight, although it is certainly symbolically appropriate that he should die there. As Cleanth Brooks suggests, Hightower, "like Joe, is a murderer and an exile from the human community. The two men are brothers." It is appropriate too, that

42 Faulkner in the University, p. 25.
43 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 377n.
Christmas should die in a house emblematic of the denial of life shared by Hightower and the community. He knocks the old minister down only because Hightower stands in the path of his flight but will kill neither him nor Percy Grimm, as he did Joanna Burden, to save his life. His growth into humanity is too complete. But in an almost classic example of peripety, the deadly fate he once willed, the suffering he once sought, the community he defied, all overtake him. His refusal at the moment of his death to repudiate his acceptance of life, community, and fate is, John Longley observes, Joe's "final gesture of human reconciliation." By his death he affirms heroically and tragically the humanity he struggled to achieve.

GAIL HIGHTOWER

Asked why he put Gail Hightower's final chapter where he did, immediately following Christmas' death, Faulkner said: "It seemed to me that was the most effective place to put that, to underline the tragedy of Christmas's story by the tragedy of his antithesis, a man who--Hightower was a man who wanted to be better than he was afraid he would." His is a failed life, flanked at the end of Light in August by Joe's tragic affirmation and Byron and Lena's comic triumph; he is anything but the redeemed man that so many readers, among them Cleanth Brooks, take him to be. Brooks argues that Hightower is reborn,

45 Faulkner in the University, p. 45.
46 Langston, "The Meaning of Lena Grove and Gail Hightower,"
brought back into the life of the community, by his participation at the birth of Lena's child: He "has finally dared some thing and has broken out of his self-centered dream." I would argue, however, that Hightower's apparent growth is, finally, as ephemeral as the dream he serves. He has lived outside the circles of life and community for too long; he is offered opportunities for rebirth and for recognition of his responsibility for his fate but, in Faulkner's words, fails "to match the moment." He fails, as Joe does not, to move within the circles of life, community, and responsibility.

His brief participation in the circle of life results not from any fundamental change or new awareness—as happens to Byron Bunch—but because "the past week has rushed like a torrent and ... the week to come, which will begin tomorrow, is the abyss..." (348). He is trapped by the rush of events and the passions of others. "'It is because so much happens. Too much happens. That's it. Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That's how he finds that he can bear anything'" (283)—even life, Hightower should add, providing it catches him unaware and lasts only for a day. He is abruptly awakened by Byron long before dawn on the


47 The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 69-70.

48 Faulkner in the University, p. 45.
Monday of Christmas' death and the birth of Lena's baby. Byron then leaves him, semi-conscious, with no opportunity to raise his defenses: "'Byron! Byron!' He didn't pause, didn't answer" (373). After helping Lena give birth, he does not know how to respond to this participation in life: "'Luck. I don't know whether I had it or not'" (380). He only knows that what he has done has left him profoundly unsteady, unstable, "as if there were something in his flabby paunch fatal and highly keyed, like dynamite'" (380). This "fatal" thing stirring within is life. Arriving home after passing through a waking Jefferson, Hightower finally surrenders for a moment to the potent life within, to rhythms like those Joe surrenders to,

"a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. 'I showed them.' he thinks. 'Life comes to the old man yet, while they get there too late. They get there for his leavings, as Byron would say.' But this is vanity and empty pride. Yet the slow and fading glow disregards it, impervious to reprimand. He thinks, 'What if I do? What if I do feel it? triumph and pride? What if I do?'" (382-83)

Hightower's tragedy is that, though he feels the triumph and pride of life, he does not know how to respond properly to the rhythms of this life; he still behaves toward others in terms of his life-denying past. Hightower's true primal injustice is that life has come to him too late. He returns to Lena the afternoon after the birth of her child, with on his face "that ruthlessness which she has seen in the faces of a few good people, men usually, whom she has known" (388). There he begs her to renounce and release Byron.

"Let him go. Send him away from you." They look at one another. "Send him away, daughter. You are probably not much more than half his age. But you have already outlived him twice over. He will never overtake you, catch up with you, because he has wasted
too much time. And that too, his nothing, is as irremediable as your all. He can no more ever cast back and do, than you can cast back and undo." (389)

In spite of the changes that have already occurred to Byron before Hightower's eyes, he denies his friend the capacity for growth because he cannot grant that capacity in himself. Byron's thirty-five years of "nothing" must not be "violated" (389). And so when Lena tells him, as she believes, that Byron has gone for good, Hightower stands over the weeping girl apparently comforting her but in fact "thinking Thank God, God help me. Thank God, God help me" (391).

In an ironic gesture of self-sacrifice, Hightower would give up his only friendship to preserve that friend from the complex life he fears. He thanks God for sparing Byron from life and asks God's help in the loneliness which will result from this sacrifice, suggesting thereby that his life after Byron's departure will be as isolated as it always has been. His is hardly the prayer of a man redeemed by life.

Nor is Hightower redeemed when surrounded by the social circle at Joe's death. Asked to match the moment by acknowledging, as Joe has done, the interdependence of individuals, Hightower fails. It is too late when Hightower cries to the frenzied Grimm that Christmas was with him the night of the murder. Nor is Hightower redeemed later that night when forced to acknowledge the circles of life, community, and responsibility which he has sought to deny for so long. He recognizes that he has failed himself, his wife, and his church, but with each new recognition, "Thinking begins to slow now. It slows like a wheel beginning to run in sand, the axle, the vehicle, the power
which propels it not yet aware" (462). His wheel of thinking, produ-
ducing a revolution in his knowing, conscious life, \(^{49}\) bogs down in
the reality of his responsibility for himself and the "halo . . .
full of faces" (465) which he will not bear. He acknowledges his
failed responsibility but cannot accept that acknowledgement be-
cause to do so he must first admit the painful humanity upon which re-
sponsibility depends and which his whole life has denied: "I know
that for fifty years I have not even been clay" (465). Thinking
brings knowledge, and knowledge brings guilt, but he lacks the will
for the surrender which would bring release to him as it did for Joe.
And so "the sandclutched wheel of thinking," resisting with "I dont
want to think this. I must not think this. I dare not think this"
(464), becomes "a mediaeval torture instrument, beneath the wrenched
and broken sockets of his spirit, his life" (465). Broken by the
knowledge he has for so long resisted, that he has been in turn "in-
strument of someone outside myself" (464), "then it seems to him that
some ultimate dammed flood" of guilt

within him breaks and rushes away. He seems to watch it, feel-
ing himself losing contact with earth, lighter and lighter,
emptying, floating. 'I am dying,' he thinks. 'I should pray.
I should try to pray.' But he does not. He does not try. 'With
all air, all heaven, filled with the lost and unheeded crying of
all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children
among the cold and terrible stars. . . . I wanted so little. I
asked so little. It would seem . . . ' The wheel turns on. It
spins now, fading, without progress, as though turned by that
final flood which had rushed out of him, leaving his body empty
and lighter than a forgotten leaf and even more trivial than
flotsam lying spent and still upon the window ledge which has no
solidity beneath hands that have no weight; so that it can be now
Now. (466).

Hightower finds release neither in death—unlike Joe, whose death the first sentence of the foregoing passage echoes—nor prayer. He does not pray because he cannot confess, cannot ask forgiveness for failing a responsibility he will not accept. He will not admit that surrounded by lost and unheeded crying it is far too much to demand the isolation he has sought. Having failed for the last time to surrender to the humanity which would follow from compassion for the circle of wounded mankind around him, he is ironically released to the fate he has sought, the nothingness, the insubstantiality of one moment of death out of the past that has been his life's desire.

IV. REBIRTH: "OF ITSELF ALONE SERENE, OF ITSELF ALONE TRIUMPHANT"

Because Joe alone of the three wounded characters has been able to trace all of the circles demanded by life, only he is permitted in death to inscribe another. Affirming the value of life by his willingness to give his rather than take another's, he regains life through three figurative rebirths. He is Christ- or god-like in another sense than that discussed earlier. Faulkner insists that we see Joe reborn in Lena's son, born in the closest thing Joe has had to a real home on the day of Joe's death. Upon her arrival, the mad Mrs. Hines mistakes Lena's child for Joe, reliving her thirty-year-old struggle for her grandson's body and soul, confusing Lena about her baby's father in the process. This time, and in

50 Robert Slabey makes much the same point in "Myth and Ritual," p. 335.
spite of her grandson's death, Mrs. Hines wins the contest, in triumph holding Lena's son "high aloft, her heavy bearlike body crouching as she glared at the old man asleep on the cot" (381). "He's not going to take it away this time," she cries. We know that while both children bear community stigma as outcasts, Lena's baby has the same opportunity to escape the stigma early in life that Joe finds late. Lena's son will grow up nurtured by the love Joe never had and in harmony with the "old earth" which Joe only achieved after great struggle. Further, the union of Lena and Joe in Lena's baby validates both their lives, the serenity and the struggle.

Joe is also reborn, if only by analogy, in the person of Byron Bunch, who grows in the comic world as Joe does in the tragic. Like Joe, he confronts the reality and value of physical life. When he hears Lena's son cry once, "something terrible happened to him" (377). He is purged of his illusions of Lena's "physical inviolability" and the unreality of her lover, Lucas, by this "clawed thing" (379), life, as he tries to serve her: "Then a cold, hard wind seems to blow through him. It is at once violent and peaceful, blowing hard away like chaff or trash or dead leaves all the desire and the despair and the hopelessness and the tragic and vain imagining too" (402-3). All that remains in him is his responsibility, like Joe's, to life and the living, the truly human community he has discovered. And in the comic world, this responsibility--the action of the comic hero--ends in marriage. The close of *Light in August*, a married couple lying in bed discussing Byron Bunch's "ridiculous and
wonderful courting dance,"^{51} affirms in the comic world the circles of life Joe Chistmas affirmed in the tragic.

Perhaps most important, Joe is reborn in the minds of the the townspeople who destroy him. For a long moment before he dies, he looks up at his murderers

with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket. . . . (439-40)

His eyes are peaceful because he is free at last from the persecutions of a lifetime. They are unfathomable not simply because the living cannot understand the peace that comes to the dying but because the community does not yet know what he knows about the nature of life. They are unbearable because they hold the meaning and mirror the source of his suffering. This message of Joe's humanity is carried to his persecutors through the sight of his black blood, chief image throughout the novel of Joe's fleshly humanity. Though dying, he is resurrected as his spirit and the important of his suffering ascen into his persecutors' conscience and consciousness:

upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. (440)

When, as we know it must be, it is too late for him, Jefferson at

last recognizes Joe as he has demanded recognition all along, as merely but fully "the man." Having once seen it, they will never forget his humanity; it will abide to influence their lives and shape the heritage they pass to their children. Joe triumphs in death and on his own terms, independent of social definition and proscription, enduring in spite of the grotesque world which destroyed him, his serenity the mark of his tragic transcendence as Lena's serenity marks her comic transcendence. Thus, Faulkner concludes his novel of communities and social institutions by affirming the power of individual man, the value of his suffering, and his capacity for growth. In this last respect, especially, Light in August is a more optimistic novel than Sartoris which dissolves in death and delusion. It is also, I think, a more optimistic novel than Absalom, Absalom!, because in this later novel Faulkner probes still more deeply the nature and causes of the stain on the Southern landscape and psyche.
PART IV
CHAPTER VIII

"THE PRIMARY FIRE":

PRIMAL ENERGIES IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

Absalom, Absalom! presents a number of the same dynastic and aristocratic themes that occur in Sartoris: the dream of transcendence, genealogy as an emblem of immortality, the struggle against time, the curse of the dream for its heirs, and the decline and fall of aristocracy. This is not to say, however, that the later novel is a reworking of the earlier or that the two central families are similar in more than superficial respects. Thomas Sutpen is certainly no Bayard Sartoris III and he possesses only a few similarities to Colonel John Sartoris. The families are driven by different compulsions and decline and fall in different ways and for different reasons. Equally important to our concern with the evolution of Faulkner's tragic vision is the obvious superiority of Absalom, Absalom! to Sartoris. In the later novel, Faulkner's vision is more penetrating, his presentation of tragic themes is more complex, and the images he employs to evoke these themes are not only different but developed with greater force and density. The tragedy of Thomas Sutpen might be more profitably compared with that of Joe Christmas. Both men possess little in the way of a humanly enriched past; both are profoundly shaped by childhood trauma; both strive through intense acts of will to create identities in the face of a community which has rejected them; and both, finally, are hounded to
destruction by a seemingly implacable fate. When pressed too far, however, this comparison breaks down as completely as that between Sutpen and the Sartorises. Sutpen is not, in Jefferson at least, a pariah at the bottom of the social ladder. He excels, however gracelessly, in a community which excludes Joe. Like the Sartorises, he balances arrogantly, if precariously, at the top for much of his adult life, and even when after the war he falls, he still manages to dominate his world in a way Christmas does not. Nor, for Sutpen, is the community an ever-present nemesis, as it is for Joe.

In Absalom, Jefferson recedes into the background—a microcosm of and metaphor for the larger South, the true field of Sutpen’s action—or emerges at the periphery of the action as narrators of Sutpen’s rise and fall, taking, as Irving Howe suggests, "the parts in a chorus." In Sartoris, Faulkner’s concerns are largely familial, in Light in August, social, in Absalom, ultimately metaphysical. The community’s choric function in this tragedy of man’s struggle against the very order of the universe reveals, in turn, a fundamental formal difference between Absalom, Absalom! on the one hand and Light in August and Sartoris on the other. Absalom, Absalom! presents us with an almost pure example of John Keats’s negative capability. Except for changes of scene and indications of the passage of time in the choric frame story, the authorial narrator is almost totally absent. In contrast to Sartoris and Light in August, Faulkner makes few comments, ironic or otherwise, about his narrators’ distortions of the Sutpen legend. This

1 William Faulkner, p. 225.
narrative method brings us to the first of two problems confronting almost every reader of the novel: in a novel riddled with factual contradictions and self-interested distortions, with so little to guide us to the truth, how can we be sure, not simply of the facts of Sutpen's tragedy, but more importantly, its meaning?

Many contemporary critics argue that this question is precisely the point of the novel: we cannot and are not supposed to know the "truth" of Sutpen's tragedy. According to these readers, Faulkner's artistic concerns here are with historiography, the nature of historical truth, and, ultimately, with epistemology itself. As Frederick Hoffman bluntly puts it: "Absalom is not the story, but the meaning it has for those who tell it."² For Hyatt Waggoner, the novel's uniqueness is to be found "in the fact that it takes form from its search for the truth about human life as that truth may be discovered by understanding the past . . . ."³ Joseph Reed defines Faulkner's priorities in Absalom in this way:

". . . the book is not about what happened but about arriving at or understanding what happened . . . In other words [Faulkner] brings the process of formation downstage, outlines beliefs, standards, and ideals for the narrative, and makes them not just a part of the drama but the main attraction. It is a narrative about narrative."⁴

Emphasizing knowing rather than what is known, those critics who take this view stress the ultimate subjectivity of our knowledge of Thomas

² William Faulkner, p. 76.
³ From Jefferson to the World, p. 150.
Sutpen. For Michael Millgate, Sutpen is "essentially unknowable." He is unknowable, Walter Statoff observes, because "none of the narrators is really trustworthy or entirely consistent with the others in his reports or interpretations." No narrator, Hyatt Waggoner notes, "speaks with any 'special authority.'" Ilse Lind carries this line of reasoning a step further: by "projecting their distortions upon their narrations, [Faulkner] achieves a reality which rests upon unreality." Believing this subjectivity informs the novel's shape and content, James Guetti argues that a consistent theme of Sutpen's and the narrators' stories is "that human experience cannot be understood, that order cannot be created."

Given their assumptions, it is not unexpected that these critics often end by analyzing Sutpen's tragedy as little more than a trope for revealing the narrators' states of being. According to John Paterson, Sutpen's story "must necessarily retreat into the background, its reality as an action giving way to and obscured by the reality of the narrators as characters." What we know of Sutpen, Michael Millgate

6 Quest for Failure, p. 198.
7 From Jefferson to the World, p. 149.
8 "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," p. 282.
suggests, is his "meaning for, and effect upon" Quentin Compson. To Olga Vickery, the narrators' "three quite distinct legends of Sutpen "reveal as much about the narrators as Sutpen." But Richard Poirier, John W. Hunt, and Richard Adams most clearly reveal the logical conclusion of this belief in the absolute relativity of Sutpen's story. Poirier argues that the novel's emphasis "is primarily upon Quentin, that neither Rosa [Coldfield] nor Sutpen can serve as the dramatic center of this novel." Quentin is "the dramatic center of this novel." Similarly, Hunt says that "what the backstage action [Sutpen's story] both is and means is how it occurs to Quentin." And for Adams, "the heart in conflict with itself is that of Quentin." All elements of the Sutpen story are "more or less objective correlatives of Quentin's frustration and despair." It is certainly true, as these critics argue, that Absalom presents us with quite distinct stories--Sutpen's story and the narrators' search for a satisfying explanation of him--but in their often useful


12 The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 86.
15 Myth and Motion, p. 181.
emphasis upon the narrators, these critics have fallen prey to their own critical ingenuity. To bring Quentin or his fellow seekers to the center of attention is to confuse the more difficult with the more important story, to mistake the weavers with the tapestry they weave communally. Worse, such a reading plays false with the novel's affect on our sensibilities. As Irving Howe rightly argues, "no other Faulkner character rules a book so completely as does Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!" Quentin's and the other narrators' stories are subordinate to and part of the controlling tragedy of Thomas Sutpen. While at Charlottesville, Faulkner himself suggested this relationship:

"The central character is Sutpen, yes. The story of a man who wanted a son and got too many, got so many they destroyed him. It's incidentally the story of Quentin Compson's hatred of the bad qualities in the country he loves. But the central character is Sutpen, the story of a man who wanted sons." We read primarily for the story of Sutpen, however, difficult his story may be to know. To arrange the novel's priorities in any other way is to finally distort, as I hope to show in my discussion of the novel's primal injustice theme, the actual relationship between Sutpen and those who tell about him.

There is also a curious circularity to this primary concentration on the narrators. To emphasize them is to emphasize their misinformation about and distortions of Sutpen. No wonder these readers so often conclude that Sutpen's story lacks meaning; all they see are the narrative dead ends. To concentrate wholly on Sutpen's tragedy, however,

16 William Faulkner, p. 222.
17 Faulkner in the University, p. 71.
is to be struck by a number of important similarities among the apparently conflicting views of it. Sutpen may be demon, madman, ogre to Rosa, uncomplex and heroic victim to Jason Compson, innocent to General Compson, and variously all these and more to Shreve McCannon and Quentin, but supporting their various identifications are a number of image constellations describing Sutpen's character, energy, and actions which all narrators share and which provide the foundation for a coherent and reasonably objective reading of Sutpen and his tragedy. The dissonance of the facts about Sutpen are counter-balanced by the consonance among the narrators' images of him. He is not necessarily synonymous, then, with the distortions of him. Conversely and ironically, these shared images and the facts of Sutpen's life validate in ways not always understood by the narrators their conflicting perceptions of him.

Sutpen is at once innocent, hero, and demon, a view of him supported by Faulkner's narrator who evaluates Shreve and Quentin's synthesis of these disparate views: "Dedicated to that best of rationalization which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's morality and Miss Coldfield's demonizing," 18 Shreve and Quentin create "between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere" (303). But, in one of his few narrative intrusions, Faulkner assures us that though they have "invented" their tragic tapestry, it nevertheless is "probably true enough" (335).

18 P. 280. All quotations from Absalom, Absalom! are taken from the 1964 Modern Library College Edition. Future references will be included parenthetically in the text.
What they create, a Sutpen who, though dead, "is a thousand times more potent and alive" (280), both dominates and supersedes the more fragmentary views of preceding narrators. In the course of the novel, the narrators' attitudes become ours, their contradictory truths existing in narrative suspension as our multi-faceted truth. And that, Faulkner suggests, is as close to historical truth as we can get. Speaking of Absalom, Absalom!'s multiple narrators at the University of Virginia, he said:

I think that no individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact.19

This view of truth is the source for Faulkner's shift in narrative technique after Sartoris and Light in August. In the earlier novels meaning emerges from an ironic resonance between the narrators' observations and the facts as presented objectively. Here meaning emerges as the result of a process of narrative concatenation. The "perhaps" and "seems" of Light in August's narrative manner give way to the multiple narrators of Absalom.

Our solution to this formal problem, however, only complicates the second problem faced by most readers of Absalom, Absalom!: Why and how does Sutpen's design fail? What is the causal force in his tragedy? If he is different things to different narrators and the sum of these to us, how can we discover the source of his failure? Speaking to General Compson in 1864, after his design has already failed him twice, Sutpen quizzically asks, "Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or

19 Faulkner in the University, pp. 273-74.
misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate" (263). Readers of the novel have been prolific in their attempts to locate this "mistake" and its source, most finding it, as Ilse Dusoir Lind does, in Sutpen's "innate deficiency of moral insight" which is supported by his remark: "Whether it was a good or bad design is beside the point" (263). Other readers agree that his basic failure derives from an innate incapacity, but locate its source elsewhere. John Longley suggests that it "springs from a defect of human feeling," Lawrence Thompson that it results from a defect of love. Melvin Backman and Cleanth Brooks find the source in Sutpen's innocence, Backman in his "Adamic innocence," Brooks, in his "innocence about the nature of reality."

Still other readers see Sutpen as a more active failure. Michael Millgate believes his flaw to be "man's inhumanity to man inherent in the recent history and structure of the south." Hyatt Waggoner and Irving Howe locate it in Sutpen's pride. In Howe's words, "Sutpen's life is a gesture of hubris" marked by his domination of men.

20 "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," p. 278.
21 The Tragic Mask, p. 113.
22 William Faulkner, p. 63.
23 The Major Years, p. 107.
24 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 296.
25 The Achievement of William Faulkner, p. 50.
26 From Jefferson to the World, p. 83.
27 William Faulkner, p. 223.
There is abundant evidence in the text to support each of these interpretations; they are not inconsistent as parts of an explanation of Sutpen's hubris. Sutpen looks for his tragic error--his "mistake"--without seeing the hubris that produced it. In his blindness he commits outrage upon outrage against man and environment in his futile quest for an identity impervious to time and affront. He demands this identity even though the creation of it would shatter the order of his world and the cosmos. The novel's imagery--in specific details not traced by these critics--insists upon this view of Sutpen's failure. His mistake is in his own nature, the character of his primal energy determining that he should dare, achieve, and fall in ways that justify the narrators' conflicting estimates of him: innocent, hero, and demon--to be discussed in that order.

I.

We have no reason to distrust General Compson's assertion that "'Sutpen's trouble was innocence'" (220). It is amply supported by Sutpen's unconsciously ironic account of his life before coming to Jefferson. The real problem is the precise character of this innocence. A number of readers assume as, Melvin Backman does, that Sutpen's innocence is Adamic and look to his boyhood home, what John Longley calls his "Eden," to prove their point. We would do well,

28 The Major Years, p. 98.
29 The Tragic Mask, p. 115.
however, to reexamine this "mountain paradise" (Ilse Lind)\textsuperscript{30} where "certain fundamental human values" (Olga Vickery)\textsuperscript{31} are supposedly stressed. Cleanth Brooks's belief that Sutpen's childhood home is "quite as close to Hobbes as to Rousseau"\textsuperscript{32} seems nearer the truth. Sutpen's forebears are by no means West Virginia cousins to that noble hill family of Sartoris, the MacCallums. Portrayed more realistically, the Sutpen's live a primitive frontier life.

The mountain people Sutpen once knew lived in log cabins boiling with children like the one he was born in—men and grown boys who hunted or lay before the fire on the floor while the women and older girls stepped back and forth across them to reach the fire to cook, where the only colored people were indians and you only looked down at them over your rifle sights. . . . (221)

Here are the simplest of caste systems dividing humanity into men, women, and children on the one hand and friends and enemies on the other. There is little time for anything but eating, sleeping, procreating, and surviving. Because life is lived so close to the edge, there is little opportunity and even less need to refine a primitive and broadly materialistic conception of reality. To do so, in fact, would be suicidal. In this world, where physical survival is the paramount goal, a man achieves identity and is measured exclusively in physical terms, "by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room!" (226). The closest approximation to law is "the law of nature," the survival of the fittest. The closest approximation to an ethic is the belief that

\textsuperscript{30} "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," p. 297.

\textsuperscript{31} The Novels of William Faulkner, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{32} The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 426n.
the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'This is mine' was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to take and keep. . . . (221)

Not a very pleasant life, surely, but a necessary one in the mountains at the turn of the nineteenth century.

This is the meager culture and simple conceptions of knowing and being which Sutpen brings with him when he and his family descend into the Virginia tidewater region, the intellectual tools he must use to try to understand this new world. He could have no other tradition, having no idea "just where his father had come from, whether from the country to which they returned or not, or even if his father knew, remembered, wanted to remember and find it again" (223). When, still in the mountains, he first hears of this tidewater world so morally, socially, and physically different from his own, his naive materialism is useless to help him comprehend it: "there was nothing in sight to compare and gauge the tales by and so give the words life and meaning" (222). Once there, he spends long, secret afternoons watching Pettibone, the plantation owner, seeing him in purely physical terms:

And the man was there who owned all the land and the niggers and apparently the white men who superintended the work, who lived in the biggest house he had ever seen and who spent most of the afternoon (he told how he would creep up among the tangled shrubbery of the lawn and lie hidden and watch the man) in a barrel stave hammock between two trees, with his shoes off, and a nigger who wore every day better clothes than he or his father and sisters had ever owned and ever expected to, who did nothing else but fan him and bring him drinks. (227-28)

To Sutpen, land and men are divided only physically; the tidewater is "a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins hap-
pened to be and what they happened to own" (221). He cannot comprehend that this elegant physical order rests upon a moral and social order far different from that one left in the mountains. How things came to be the way they are, the mechanism for this division of land and men, is to him a matter of pure luck: "he just thought that some people were spawned in one place and some in another, some spawned rich (lucky, he may have called it) and some not, and that . . . the men themselves had little to do with the choosing and less of the regret" (222). Cleanth Brooks is correct: Sutpen is dreadfully innocent of reality—but more precisely, innocent of social, moral, and psychological reality.

This definition of the limits of Sutpen's consciousness helps us understand what General Compson calls his "fall" into the tidewater country and his discovery of evil at Pettibone's plantation door. With only their materialistic frontier ethic, the Sutpen family lacks the powers of moral and social discrimination necessary to successfully adapt to or oppose the tidewater's social corruption. And so, as the Sutpen family descends the mountain, it disintegrates beneath incomprehensible social and environmental pressures,

skating in a kind of accelerating and sloven and inert coherence like a useless collection of flotsam on a flooded river, moving by some perverse automotivation such as inanimate objects sometimes show, backward against the very current of the stream, across the Virginia plateau and into the slack lowlands about the mouth of the James River. (223)

We cannot be sure of the source of these water images—whether Sutpen himself, General Compson, Jason, or Quentin Compson—but whoever their source, they are important for our purposes since they are
employed in various ways by each narrator to describe and define Sutpen's relationship with the world. He lives all his life in "a tide in which . . . strange . . . faces swam up and vanished and were replaced: the earth, the world, rising . . . and flowing past" (224). As the multivalent images of the circle do in Light in August, images of water and tides in Absalom, Absalom! evoke the essential character of reality. Here the images reveal what Sutpen soon comes to see as his family's powerlessness and utter worthlessness, borne along and threatened with annihilation by the crest of forces he cannot comprehend. As the family descends, the evil new world—in reality, the corrupt old world—takes its toll: Sutpen's father becomes an "insensible" drunkard, spending the journey either at the back doors of taverns or lying "flat on his back in the cart, oblivious among the quilts and lanterns and well buckets and bundles of clothing and children, snoring with alcohol" (224). One unmarried sister gives birth to a bastard while other sisters and brothers die from mysterious illnesses (227).

At the same time, Sutpen becomes confused, disoriented, as he descends into this "world which even in theory he knew nothing about" (53). First he loses his sense of place. For a few weeks, his frontier "instinct kept him oriented so that he could have . . . found his way back to the mountain cabin in time. But that was past now, behind him the moment when he last could have said exactly where he had been born" (227). Soon he loses his place in time: "he became confused about his age and was never able to straighten it out again, so that . . . he did not know within a year on either side just how
old he was. So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why" (227). "He was just there, living . . . beside a big flat river that sometimes showed no current at all and even sometimes ran backward" (227), a stranger in a strange land where even the physical world he thinks he understands defies reason. The tide of living will confound him in the same way, so much so that forty years hence he will still be doggedly trying to apply his naive frontier materialism to make sense of a world he has both shaped and been shaped by.

But none of these confusing impressions truly registers in Sutpen's mind until the "monkey nigger" turns him away from Pettibone's plantation door. Before coming there with a message from his father, Sutpen is totally unself-conscious, "still nimbused with freedom's bright aura" (228), "no more conscious of his" pauper's rags "or of the possibility that anyone else would be than he was of his skin" (229). Like Adam before the Fall, he is unaware of his nakedness before corrupt and inscrutable social conventions and innocent of his actual place in the social scheme. But when Pettibone's black butler stands "barring" the door and "looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes" (232), it is as if "something in him had escaped and--he unable to close the eyes of it--was looking out from within the balloon face [of the butler] just as the man who did not even have to wear the shoes he owned" (234). He becomes exquisitely conscious, not of the social order which decrees his nakedness--he cannot see this--but of himself, seeing himself objectified through the butler's and Pettibone's eyes as Joe Christmas does through
the dietitian's eyes in *Light in August*. As a naive materialist, his rags become the badge of his identity, of his caste, of his shame as unforgivably poor. Outward signs become the manifestation of his being; he is his rags. Even more "terrible" (237), he later realizes, it apparently makes no difference to anyone whether Pettibone ever received the message his father sent him to deliver:

... and so whether he got it or not can't even matter, not even to Pap; I went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to that front door again and I not only wasn't doing any good to him by telling it or any harm to him by not telling it, there ain't any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him. It was like that, ... like an explosion—a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse; just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument. ... (237-38)

Not only has Sutpen been made aware of his nakedness; his place in his physical universe has been annihilated at the same time. Feeling the futility of any action he might take, it seems to him as if he never were. All that remains to him is his ragged innocence, his ignorance of social reality, the subtle social distinctions of the Virginia tidewater. Still worse, he soon discovers what he believes to be the source of his and his family's pain, degradation, and lack of position. Looking through Pettibone's eyes, he sees his own family "as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutely evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound, fill space and earth" (235). As it is for Joe Christmas with his racist values, the only terms Sutpen has to conceive reality make his life disgusting to him. It seems to him that the fault lies not with Pettibone and the social system he maintains but in the
Sutpen's physical nature. The Sutpen family is humiliated, the butt of a joke perpetrated by the invisible social scheme which Sutpen personifies in the black butler as "a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it, a face slick and smooth and distended and about to burst into laughing" (230). The boy justifiably wants to strike at this smiling nemesis which has stripped him of his humanity but feels powerless to act; his materialistic consciousness cannot identify the moral and social agent of his pain. His father and sisters have tried to make blacks the scapegoats for their sense of inferiority, but he at least knows that "the nigger was just another balloon face slight and distended with that mellow loud and terrible laughing so that he did not dare to burst it . . . ." (234). He dare not burst this balloon because, he senses, to do so would be to initiate an encounter with a power larger than he could understand and leave him even more vulnerable. His mountain ethic, however, demands an eye to gouge: "He knew that something would have to be done about it" (234), even if his gesture were just as "vain" as throwing something at "the actual dust raised by the proud delicate wheels" (231) of the planter's carriage which once almost ran his sister down. Unlike Joe Christmas who is given a definite social identity, however confusing and burdensome, and has a whole host of enemies to oppose, Sutpen has neither identity nor recognizable enemy.

Out of this experience is born Sutpen's primal energy, the conscious will to be and the need to confirm his existence in the only terms he knows. With the physical image of his bestiality and shame graven on his mind,
all of a sudden his discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead. (220)

Richard Poirier suggests that the design which follows this compulsion is, "like the violence of Joe Christmas in Light in August, . . . directed as much against a terrifying sense of his own insufficiency as against a society which apparently standardizes that insufficiency by caste or class systems." Sutpen designs a "vindication" for that "little boy who approached that door . . . and was turned away" (274). But as the above passage reveals, his design at its inception is, like the Sartorises' dream, ambiguously more than a grand defense mechanism. Sutpen is motivated in part by compassion and the need for integrity and self-respect, what Jason Compson calls some of "the old virtues" (121), and would redeem his abused and dehumanized forebears and protect his heirs from future abuse. He may have lost his place in the world, but, ironically in light of the tragedy he precipitates, he has not yet lost his sense of family membership. In his magnanimity, he would even prevent future humiliation of children not his own. If a boy were to come to his door someday, "he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it" (261). Defining what it is that rouses the tragic hero to action, Richard Sewall remarks:

... the tragic hero sees a sudden unexpected evil at the heart of things that infects all things. His secure and settled world has gone wrong, and he must oppose his own ambiguous nature against what he loves. Doing so involves total risk, as the chorus and his friends remind him. He may brood and pause, like Hamlet, or he may proceed with Ahab's fury; but proceed he must. 34

Sutpen proceeds with Ahab's fury. As in classical peripety, however, the action he takes to ensure the security of his children destroys them, an example of the tragic arc.

Sutpen's design is tragically doomed at its inception by his conception of reality. Until he can see beyond physical manifestations of the social system he opposes to the inner corruption they reveal, his "driving fury" is just so much jousting at windmills. But "the last thing in the world he was equipped to do" (220) is understand the world he is opposing. He lacks the moral sense necessary to recognize that things, the counters for his design, cannot successfully oppose social corruption until they are informed with moral purpose. He is unable to see that moral reality is definitely not "beside the point." Whether his is a "good or bad design" is very much to the point. In his scheme of things, of objects rather than subjects, "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). In place of the moral sense which could provide human limits and possibilities within reality's flux, he substitutes rigid rationalism and a kind of hyper-consciousness:

34 "The Tragic Form," p. 631.
that unsleeping care which must have known that it could permit itself but one mistake; that alertness for measuring and weighing event against eventuality, circumstance against human nature, his own fallible judgment and mortal clay against not only human but natural forces, choosing and discarding, compromising with his dream and his ambition like you must with the horse which you take across country, over timber, which you control only through your ability to keep the animal from realizing that actually you cannot, that actually it is the stronger. (53)

As the foregoing simile reveals, once Sutpen has lost his sense of frontier economy and primitive balance, he cannot live life naturally; he must try to manage it by design. To fail to dominate his threatening world as the rider does an uncontrollable horse is to reveal the vulnerability he felt at the plantation door. Thus, in his despair life seems to him to be a risky game of chance at which one succeeds only through deception and a kind of organic luck which must one day come his way even as it has for the Pettibones of this world.

His was that cold alert fury of the gambler who knows that he may lose anyway but that with a second's flagging of the fierce constant will he is sure to: and who keeps suspense from ever quite crystallizing by sheer fierce manipulation of the cards or dice until the ducts and glands of luck begin to flow again. (160-61)

Joe Christmas cannot comprehend the rules of the game decreed by community; neither can Sutpen. But Joe at least recognizes there are rules governing social relationships; for Sutpen the humanity of others becomes a "trump card" (274) to be manipulated at will. In the tradition of the American innocent, Sutpen will try to "fix things right" (220) by tinkering with mankind, by "putting the fix" in the game of social forms. In Absalom, unlike Sartoris and Light in August, the tragic hero is not a pawn subject to Player-fate; here Sutpen becomes the Player, using others for pawns.
Attempting to comprehend his newly born compulsion, "he was seeking among what little he had to call experience for something to measure it by, and he couldn't find anything" (233). He only has a simplistic rifle analogy to guide him: "'If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn't it?'" (238). And although he realizes that his physical analogy will "not make sense" (234) of what is really a moral dilemma, he presses it anyway in his debate with himself: "'But this aint a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see?'" (238). Having only an "eye for an eye" conception of justice, Sutpen adopts the ends of a corrupt social system to oppose its means, the incomprehensible social forms. This is his hamartia. His design, which originated in compassion, one of "the old virtues," thus becomes the ironic expression of his blindness and his fear (like the Sartorises' fear) of annihilation, as well as the emblem of his sacrifice of what Rosa Coldfield calls "the soft virtues": pity and gentleness and love" (154). There are, however, even more significant ironies here. In order for Sutpen to "fix things right," he must deny the social and familial past which he now misperceives as a threat to his place in the world. He leaves the night of his humiliation at the plantation door and never sees any of his family again, shutting "that door himself forever behind him... on all that he had ever known" (261). To rescue the Sutpen name, he must,
as Jay Gatsby does with his Platonic dream, recreate his family "out of that blind chancy darkness we call the future" (317), the darkness symbolic of his ignorance of the refractory human complexity he would manipulate and of his ignorance of the terrible consequences of his manipulations. All he can see is the immortality which his dynastic design would seem to confer: "he, even after he would become dead, still there, still watching the fine grandsons and great-grandsons springing as far as the eye could reach" (271). To achieve this immortality, Sutpen, his children, and his "boy-symbol" must be "riven forever free from brutehood" (261), from the flesh which Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower, and young Bayard find so oppressive.

II

As Oedipus does, Sutpen takes it wholly upon himself to decide who he will be. Having an image of himself he must reject, he must remake himself in his own image, twisted by Rosa to "the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment" (171), created ex nihilo, "out of thin air" (32). He would cause his identity and destiny to shape itself to him like his clothes did, like the same coat that new might have fitted a thousand men, yet after one man has worn it for a while it fits no one else and you can tell it anywhere you see it even if all you see is a sleeve or a lapel. . . . (246)

As Sutpen's latest analogy ironically reveals, his self-creation is an attempt according to his materialistic consciousness to find physical equivalents for his spiritual and psychological nakedness. In Sartoris and Light in August, man's duality is presented through
images of mind and body; here it is presented by images which suggest
a division of matter and spirit. Sutpen wants a disguise which will
stand for personality but creates one instead which becomes "like the
mask in a Greek tragedy" (62). He attempts to learn from books the
manners of the well-born, not only because he desires the respect of
the planter community, but because he needs to consciously demonstrate
to himself his mastery of the invisible social forms that once humil-
iated him. Jason Compson remarks condescendingly of him to Quentin:

"Yes, he was underbred. It showed like this always, your grand-
father said, in all his formal contacts with people. He was like
John L. Sullivan having taught himself painfully and tediously to
do the schottische, having drilled himself and drilled himself
in secret until he now believed it no longer necessary to count
the music's beat, say. He may have believed that your grand-
father or Judge Benbow might have done it a little more effort-
lessly than he, but he would not have believed that anyone could
have beat him in knowing when to do it and how." (46)

For this kind of self-respect he requires, not a sense of self-worth
purchased with self-knowledge, but the physical expressions of value:
the big house, "the stainless wife and unimpeachable father-in-law,
on the license, the patent" (51), a plume worn in his "broken and
frayed and soiled" (231) military hat, and a "black stallion named
out of Scott" (80) ridden beneath self-designed regimental colors
"sewed together out of silk dresses" (80).

What saves Sutpen from becoming more than faintly ridiculous in
his jerry-built identity is the strength of his primal energy, his
dogged endurance, and the gaudy grandeur of the heroic design which
has become an end in itself. He validates Jason Compson's uncon-
sciously ironic estimate of him as "'integer for integer, larger, more
heroic . . . not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex'"
(89). He is a figure beside whom the Colonel Sartoris of Sartoris, who was after all the maker of his own myth, is a pale shadow. Even Rosa Coldfield stands in awe of his "grim and unflagging fury" (42), of his "solitary despair in titan conflict with the lonely and foredoomed and indomitable iron spirit" (167). Because he is the involuntary servant of his "compelling dream," Rosa believes that "anyone could have looked once at his face and known that he would have chosen," if he could, banditry on the Mississippi River "and even the certainty of the hemp rope, to undertaking what he undertook even if he had known that he would find gold buried and waiting for him in the very land which he had bought" (17). After the Civil War she sees in him a seemingly "herculean" capacity for endurance enabling him to bargain and cajole "hard labor out of men like [Wash] Jones" and keeping him "clear of sheets and hoods and night-galloping horses" (166). He neither asks nor gives quarter, depending only on "the courage to find him will and strength" (273). Nor is his "fierce and overweening vanity" mere human vanity, creating as it does the dream of a mansion of "grim and castlelike magnificence" (38), the "triumphant coronation of his old hardships" (102). Conjuring the hubris ironically sprung from Sutpen's despair of his humanity, Wash Jones muses about him: "A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like" (282). According to the design of his "wild braggart dream" (165), Sutpen tries to transcend painful humanity and control hostile social reality, "drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the
up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be
Sutpen's Hundred like the Oldentime Be Light" (8-9). No longer the
embodiment of the desire to shelter a "forlorn nameless and homeless
lost child" (267), his design is a material tribute to his escape from
humanity; he owns Sutpen's Hundred "lock stock and barrel, everything
he could see from a given point, with every stick and blade and hoof
and heel on it to remind him (if he ever forgot it) that he was the
biggest thing in their sight and in his own too" (363). The Sar-
torises' heroic gestures prompt our ambivalent admiration of them.
And while we may, with Miss Rosa, stand in awe of Sutpen's gestures,
Faulkner does not permit us to admire them; he presents Sutpen's
arrogance more directly and critically than he does Colonel John's
in Sartoris.

III

Presented in this way, Sutpen validates the third estimation
of him, the demon Miss Rosa believes him to be. Instead of tran-
scending what he conceives to be brutish humanity, Sutpen turns
demonically against it, opposing all life and the sorts of healthy
primal energies Joe Christmas ambivalently struggles to surrender to.
Miss Rosa refers to herself but might just as well mean Sutpen when
she describes "the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant" which
wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and
veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as
the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats
(repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent
sphere) all of space and time and massy earth. . . . (142)
Both would rescue their striving souls from putrescent, fleshly life, this "seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing" (142). The course of Sutpen's life is a withdrawal into his bright dream until, when he returns from the Civil War, his corporeal being is little more than "a dream-cloudy shell" (163). As a result of his struggle "to hold clear and free above a maelstrom of unpredictable and unreasoning human beings" (275), to be "beyond all human fouling" (287), Sutpen neglects what Rosa calls the

touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both--touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own. (139)

He abandons all possibility of breaking down the "intricate channels" of the social order oppressing him. The only force which could effectively obliterate this "decorous ordering" is his recognition of others' full and fleshly humanity, their "central I-Am," "the articulated mud" (278) or "old mindless sentient undreaming meat" (349) which, in Faulkner's ontology, is the ground of being. But Sutpen resists the "touch of flesh with flesh," never learning "how to ask anybody for help or anything else"(273), depending only on the men he owns "body and soul," trusting "no man nor woman," having "no man's nor woman's love" (103). There is no equivalent in Absalom, Absalom! for Lena Grove, but Faulkner has not abandoned her life as one human ideal, an ideal Sutpen forsakes.
Instead of purifying himself of his brutishness, however, Sutpen willfully extinguishes that which would provide him with a truly human identity. General Compson speculates that when he subdued the rebellious slaves in Haiti, they must have fled in horror from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have. (254)

Sutpen has exchanged primary fires; for the energy of his compulsion and the spark of his dream he has traded "that spark, some crumb to leaven and redeem that articulated flesh, that speech, sight, hearing, taste and being which we call human man" (166). Now, it is "as if he were run by electricity" (42). After the war, with Sutpen's Hundred decaying around him, a part of him encompasses "each ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib; himself diffused and in solution held by that electric furious immobile urgency" (160). Having lost the human spark, Sutpen quickly assumes the life-denying attitudes and features of Simon McEachern and Doc Hines of *Light in August*. He becomes a "grim rocklike man" (329), with eyes "like pieces of broken plate," "hard and pale and reckless" (45).

The fleshly life and energies which remain to him become corrupt. When Sutpen opposed the Haitian rebels, he received a wound which "came pretty near leaving him a virgin for the rest of his life" (254). It may have been better for those he destroys if he had been emasculated, since he ironically conceives of his potency as a "cannon"
What James Guetti calls Sutpen's "imaginative and metaphorical" fatherhood is, like the sublimation of Gail Hightower's sexual energy, devoted wholly to bringing forth his design, "begotten upon the wood and brick" of his mansion which he "compelled . . . to accept and retain human life" (85). His only desire, to sire sons, is "lust for vain magnificence" (162), his only fear, that the "design to which he had dedicated himself would die still born" (248). The men and women he impresses on the rigid form of his design are to him only abstractions, "shadows" of the clearer, simpler material manifestations of his identity. Ironically, however, "shadows" come back to haunt in Absalom even as they do in Light in August.

Unlike the tragic heroes who precede him in Faulkner's fiction, Sutpen not only defies the human and social order but the order of the cosmos as well, what Rosa Coldfield calls "all of space and time and massy earth" (142). Before he and other plantation owners conceive their design, the earth is "tranquil" (8), "blind unsentient . . . itself which dreams after no flower's stalk, nor bud, envies not the airy musical solitude of the springing leaves it nourishes" (155). Each thing has its place in the natural scheme. But when the planters come, this fundamental and harmonious order is affronted. In the West Indies Sutpen stumbles upon what is to him an incomprehensible epiphany of human evil and chaos, a place where the "civilized land and people . . . had expelled some of its own blood and thinking

35 The Limits of Metaphor, p. 89.
and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer, and set it homeless and desperate on the lonely ocean" (250-51). Here the corrupt social system is revealed in vicious clarity, the islands

a theater for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed—a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea. (250)

Here where the soil is "manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation" (251) and the air filled with the smell of "hatred and the implacability" (247) and "burdened still with the weary voices of murdered women and children" (253), Sutpen first participates in the social corruption, "he overseeing it, riding peacefully about on his horse" (251). Blind and deaf to moral outrage, it is no wonder he cannot reckon what he does to the land and mankind when he comes to Jefferson, struggling "with the stubborn yet slowly tractable earth" (162), dragging "house and gardens out of virgin swamp" (40), manuring his land with the sweat and blood of his slaves, "ravished by violence" (250) like their Haitian brothers. He is more alienated from the order of things than Joe Christmas can ever be. In Light in August, imbalance in the social order precipitates the hero's suffering and death; in Absalom, the hero's action precipitates suffering in the social order and unbalances the cosmos. Thus does Sutpen justify Shreve's sarcastic estimation of him as "this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub" (178). We pity the striving Joe Christmas-Faustus; we fear the demonic Sutpen-Faustus.

Sutpen's calamitous persistence in his design is also an af-
front to the fundamental law of the cosmos, the rhythmic, harmonious flow of all things in the stream of time. All his life he has tried to order time and the times to fit the "schedule" (264) for his design. After the purgation of outrage in the Civil War, the times demand that he abandon both schedule and design, but he refuses, still pursuing his dream with "that quality of gaunt and tireless driving, that conviction for haste and fleeing time" (36). The old Bayard Sartoris and the older Aunt Jenny Du Pre, wearied by time, offer only despairing, muted protest against times' flight; though old and despairing, too, Sutpen still has the energy and will to defy time. Now an "ancient varicose and despairing Faustus" (182), his time about up although he has yet to ensure his immortality, he returns home seeming

> to project himself ahead like a mirage, in some fierce dynamic rigidity of impatience which the gaunt horse, the saddle, the boots, the leaf-colored and threadbare coat with its tarnished and flapping braid containing the sentient though nerveless shell, which seemed to precede him. . . . (159)

Past sixty, "with but one more son in his loins" (279), with his plantation in ruins, Sutpen struggles "as though he were trying to dam a river with his bare hands and a shingle: and this for the same spurious delusion of reward which had failed (failed? betrayed: and would this time destroy) him" (162) twice. We see the folly of his attempt to block reality's flow—a ten-year-old can see it. But it is not in the character of the tragic hero either to perceive that his actions are producing the opposite of what intended, peripety, or to abandon his defiance.

Poisoned by Sutpen and his fellow planters' crimes, the social
body and natural order reveal their imbalance and pain. To live in this plantation society is to sicken. Rosa Coldfield may misperceive its source and nature, but she is correct to believe that there is a "sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme" (143). It breeds in the tidewater region where Sutpen's "sisters and brothers seemed to take sick after supper and die before the next meal, where regiments of niggers with white men watching them planted and raised things that he had never heard of" (227). This disease of caste afflicts Sutpen's father as he breaks "into harsh recapitulation of his own worth . . . as when people talk about privation without mentioning the seige, about sickness without ever naming the epidemic" (230-31). It consumes Sutpen himself upon his arrival in Jefferson: "he looked like a man who had been sick. Not like a man who had been peacefully ill in bed . . . , but like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just fever. . . ." (32). At this pain and the greater anguish of slavery, the cosmos groans. In Haiti Sutpen does not know

that what he rode upon was a volcano, hearing the air tremble and throb at night with the drums and the chanting and not knowing that it was the heart of the earth itself he heard, who believed . . . that earth was kind and gentle and that darkness was merely something you saw, or could not see in; overseeing what he oversaw and not knowing that he was overseeing it. . . . (251-52)

Nor can he understand that "nature held a balance and kept a book and offered recompense for the torn limbs and outraged hearts even if man did not" (251). The cosmos must right itself, purge itself of pain and outrage.
CHAPTER IX

"THE OLD INERADICABLE RHYTHM": SOCIAL CENTERS AND SANCTUARIES IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

In contrast to the houses and plantations of the preceding novels, Sutpen's Hundred is paradoxically a sanctuary and a social center. In Sartoris, the Sartorises' plantation and MacCallum's hill farm are refuges from a society which has rendered both places anachronisms, the social center outside imitating without really sharing the romantic values held by those in reach of the sanctuaries. In Light in August, Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower may unwittingly possess community racial values and social illusions which make their sanctuaries inhospitable to outsiders seeking shelter, but they created their sanctuaries primarily as a refuge from a hostile society. Unlike the Sartorises, who scorn the notice of Jefferson, or Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower, who try to avoid notice, Thomas Sutpen in his sanctuary commands recognition by the gaudy magnificence of his design, the ruthless energy with which he pursues it, and, ironically, by the very gestures of his disregard of the community. Built in defiance, Sutpen's Hundred is at once a defense against a world Sutpen perceives as threatening and the clearest manifestation of the falseness of the community energies and values which drove him to create a sanctuary in the first place. Faulkner's portrayal of this relationship between sanctuary and social center in Absalom, Absalom! represents his sharpest and most
comprehensive denunciation of the destructive values held by the inhabitants of each.

I.

By the time Sutpen arrives in Jefferson, attempting for the second time to achieve his design, he has long since lost the benign desire for "mere shelter" (261) which first motivated him after his rejection at the plantation door. With community complicity, if not aid, he soon builds his sanctuary "where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather" (16). What Sutpen now wants is sanctuary from his past. Faulkner's tragic heroes in the preceding novels feel themselves bound to their past whether they would be or not; for Sutpen, however, the past is a kind of Gordian Knot, which, like Alexander, he would sever. Safe in his sanctuary, he would, as Richard Poirier suggests, "belong only to the future," being forefather and chief heir to his design, great grandfather and great grandson. But of course, such sanctuary and design must fail—betraying his children early and him late. No matter how grand his design, great his courage, shrewd his mind, or intense his will, Sutpen can no more deny his past than young Bayard Sartoris or Joe Christmas can theirs.

This is not to imply, however, that _Absalom, Absalom!_ develops the same relationship between past and present that _Sartoris_ and _Light_
in August do. In Sartoris and Light in August, the relationship between past and present is largely psychological, a bond created in the minds of the characters. Through the imaginative powers of the Sartoris story tellers the past is made to operate in the present. In Light in August, the past shapes the present through the powers of each character's unconscious memory. In Absalom, Absalom!, on the other hand, the relationship between past and present is metaphysical and cosmic. Absalom shares some of the deterministic language of Sartoris and Light in August, but the imagery of the later novel, different from that in the earlier novels presents a different conception of fate. As Quentin ventures to Shreve in images which organize the particular tragic structure of this novel:

Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm. . . . (261)

Faulkner here presents us with a more complex and dynamic vision of the circles of man's life, social relationships, and fate than he does in Light in August. Water, as we have already seen, is his image in this novel for the matrix of life and reality. All men are connected, immersed in and filled by this flow. And this, Robert Penn Warren argues, "is the central fact in Faulkner's work, the recognition of the common human bond, a profound respect for the human." One man may differ

2 Selected Essays, p. 78.
radically from another in temperament, experience, or belief but let the first man commit a certain act and that act will resonate in the second man's life sometimes even more fully than in the first's. It must happen this way, because this is the fundamental condition and order of the cosmos. All mankind is united by actions and their consequences. This is how Sutpen becomes afflicted with the disease of caste, "that fever mental or physical" (34) which he brings with him to Jefferson. Pettibone, the tidewater planter, is the first carrier, communicating the disease to Sutpen at the plantation door, infecting him through the cord of life which binds both men. Sutpen may think he can sever this cord, but he is still tied, still infected, and doomed to manifest the symptoms of Pettibone's disease, whatever his illusions, and to transmit them to his children.

This infection explains why, when Sutpen comes to Jefferson, he creates a sanctuary from the town's social forms which is the perfect image of Pettibone's plantation and his corruption. He tries to create a mirror image of his past, an image which will reverse and thus abrogate his denial at Pettibone's front door, but ends up creating a perfect double of Pettibone's plantation. As such, his action is in direct contrast to young Bayard's attempt to claim his family's heroic identity by exactly duplicating the pattern of the past. But in both instances the consequences are the same: Sutpen intends his sanctuary to be a compensation for his past, but "the old ineradicable rhythm" cannot be broken nor the disease shaken; young Bayard Sartoris fulfills the despairing pattern of his great-grandfather's life. Sutpen first tries to gain material compensation for his humble origins by subduing
nature, making it as neat and ordered as it is at Pettibone's. His mansion complete, it stands for

three years more surrounded by its formal gardens and promenades, its slave quarters and stables and smoke-houses; wild turkey ranged within a mile of the house and deer came light and colored like smoke and left delicate prints in the formal beds where there would be no flowers for four years yet. (39)

In size, his mansion, rivals Pettibone's. To the boy Sutpen, the tide-water planter's was "the biggest house he had ever seen" (227); as an adult, he designs a house "almost as large as Jefferson itself at the time" (38). "He lived in the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself. . . " (39). Just as Pettibone bends everything and everyone on his plantation to his will, so Sutpen fills his with his "living spirit, presence" (27), "as though his presence alone compelled that house to accept and retain human life; as though houses actually possess a sentience, a personality and character. . . " (85).

He also tries to use his sanctuary to gain social compensation. Miss Rosa may misperceive Sutpen's motives for seeking shelter in Jefferson, but she describes accurately enough the social goals of his quest when she observes:

He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable . . . and it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that. (15)

In her demonizing, Rosa assumes that Sutpen seeks sanctuary from past crimes and from the justice he must richly deserve—and ironically, she is right, inasmuch as the stranger who comes seeking him is the son whom he has denied and who now demands justice. But we know, too, that he
seeks an impregnable barrier of respectability to protect him from what he understands to be hostile social forms and at the same time to provide him in its "formal opulence" (40) with adequate repayment for his social humiliation at Pettibone's. Thus he chooses Ellen Coldfield for his wife, a woman as blind to social reality as he and with as great a capacity for self-delusion as his own. Once married, she "escaped at last into a world of pure illusion in which, safe from any harm, she moved, lived, from attitude to attitude against her background of chatelaine to the largest, wife to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate" (69). While Sutpen constantly searches for the grand gesture, the heroic stance, that which will endure, he, like his wife the "social butterfly" (85), inevitably seizes upon the least significant, the most ephemeral elements of social reality to give substance to the heroic role he has created for himself. When at Pettibone's, Sutpen and his sister were once almost run down by two ladies of the manor in their carriage:

it was all dust and rearing horses and glinting harness buckles and wheel spokes; he saw two parasols in the carriage and the nigger coachman in a plug hat shouting: 'Hoo dar, gal! Git outen de way dar!' and then it was over, gone: the carriage and the dust, the two faces beneath the parasols glaring down at his sister. . . .

Now the lord of his own sanctuary-plantation, Sutpen re-enacts this episode of social arrogance, balancing the two according to his materialistic ethic. He rides to church giving the other churchgoers a glimpse like the forefront of a tornado, of the carriage and Ellen's high white face within it and the two replicas of his face in miniature flanking her, and on the front seat the face and teeth of the wild negro who was driving, and he, his face exactly like the negro's save for the teeth (this because of his beard, doubtless)--
all in a thunder and a fury of wildeyed horses and of galloping and of dust. (23)

Finally, Sutpen tries to make his sanctuary provide him compensation for the powerlessness he felt at Pettibone's door; he is now the arbiter of his own caste system, owning "body and soul" (40) the black balloon faces like the one which once betrayed him with laughter, fighting with them on occasion "toward the retention of supremacy, domination" (29). To confirm what he trusts is the now unbridgeable chasm between himself and his supposedly shameful origins, he takes for a retainer a doppelganger for himself in his boyhood--Walsh Jones. As Sutpen was, Jones is sick with fever, "gaunt . . . malaria ridden" (87). As the Sutpen family was in the tidewater, Walsh Jones is given a "rotting" shack "in the river bottom" (125) to live in. Once, Sutpen's father served Pettibone, who whiled away afternoons in a barrel stave hammock; now it is "Sutpen in the barrel stave hammock and Wash squatting against a post, shortling and guffawing" (125). Now Jones, as James Guetti observes, bears the same relationship to the humiliating balloon faces that Sutpen once did. He endures his humiliation by identifying with the agency of his pain, with "the gallant and proud and thunderous" (287) Sutpen, striking out impotently against the black faces laughing at his pretense of being above them, just as Sutpen's father once did, crying,

"'Git outen my road, niggers!' and then it would be the outright laughing, asking one another (except it was not one another but him): 'Who him, calling us niggers?' and he would rush at them with a stick and them avoiding him just enough, not mad at all, just laughing" (281).

3 The Limits of Metaphor, p. 90.
Jones has a "morality . . . that was a good deal like Sutpen's, that told him he was right in the face of all fact and usage and everything else" (287). Sutpen has chosen his retainer-double with more irony than he consciously realizes.

Having adopted Pettibone's mysterious social forms to gain physical, social, and psychological compensation, Sutpen sends "the old ineradicable rhythm" of moral imbalance resonating further into the world about him. As a consequence of his actions and gestures of hubris, he effectively annihilates others as he was annihilated at Pettibone's, whether it be Eulalia Bon, whom he puts aside as not "adjunctive or incremental to his design" (240), or the Indian from whom he "skulldugged" (178) his land, or the slaves he drives "like a pack of hounds" (36), or the architect he keeps prisoner, or the white wife he seeks "exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves" (42) and upon whom "without gentleness" (9) he begets two children "so glib to the design he might have planned" (262) them, or Rosa Coldfield whom he proposes to breed like "a bitch dog or a cow or a mare" (168), or the "starved gaunt men" (189) he commands to drag his tombstones, the "bombastic and inert carven rock" (189), throughout a year of the Civil War--all are either cogs that mesh or do not mesh with the machinery of his design or the beasts that Sutpen felt himself and his family to be Pettibone's. Thus does Sutpen's

sanctuary become a barricade, not against the social forms he opposes, but an "impregnable barricade" opposing fully human life.

Two forceful examples of the inhumane consequences of Sutpen's tragic pursuit of sanctuary are his debasement and annihilation of his two doubles, his son Charles Bon and Walsh Jones. When he rejects the part black Eulalia Bon and their son he sets in motion an ineradicable rhythm of revenge not unlike that set in motion when Pettibone symbolically rejected him. All his attempts "to balance his moral ledger" (297), to repair "whatever injustice" (264) he might have done to them by his rejection--the money he gives Eulalia Bon, the land, the name he designs for Charles as part of the cleaning up" (265)--cannot begin to blunt the energies his action produces. She refuses to be "paid off and discharged" (265), her primal energies for revenge like Sutpen's desire for compensation, "a kind of busted water pipe of incomprehensible fury and fierce yearning and vindictiveness and jealous rage" (298). Both are consumed by a flood of passion mocking the flow of life they spurn. From this flood is sprung a dehumanizing "design" (330), "schedule," and a moral balance sheet rivaling and opposing Sutpen's own:

Today Sutpen finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. $25,000. At 2:31 today came up out of swamp with final plank for house. val. in conj. with land 40,000. 7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. minus nil. unless quick buyer. Not probable. Doubtless conjoined with wife same day. Say 1 year . . . : Son. Intrinsic val. possible though not probable forced sale of house & land plus val. crop minus child's one quarter. Emotional val. plus 100% times nil. plus val. crop. (301)

What Sutpen creates, she would destroy, both manipulating their children
to the end of their designs. Charles has no reality to her except as he is incremental to her design. When a child, he was a man that hadn't even arrived yet, whom she had never seen yet, who would be something else beside that boy when he did arrive like the dynamite which destroys the house and the family and maybe even the whole community aint the old peaceful paper that maybe would rather be blowing aimless and light along the wind or the old merry sawdust or the old quiet chemicals that had rather be still and dark in the quiet earth like they had been before the meddling guy with ten-power spectacles came and dug them up and strained, warped and kneaded them. . . . (306)

Both make their children into potentially destructive instruments, something vastly different from what they could and should be. Because Eulalia Bon has created her son in terms of her design, he becomes a man who is, in a number of ironic respects that Cleanth Brooks enumerates, "a mirror image, a reversed shadow" of the man she would destroy. Charles is spiritually his father's son, though with his one/sixty-fourth part black blood he is legally his mother's son. Like his father, he appears in Jefferson without a past, "almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time and, [once] vanished, leaving no bones or dust anywhere" (75). Like Sutpen, he bears an identity which, though culturally different from his father's, has been created from the ashes of an earlier human annihilation. As Sutpen is during his descent from the West Virginia mountains, Bon is confused as he is advanced beyond his knowing along the course of his mother's design,

aware of the jigsaw puzzle picture integers of it waiting, almost lurking, just beyond his reach, inextricable, jumbled and unrecognizable yet on the point of falling into pattern which would reveal

5 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 302.
to him at once, like a flash of light, the meaning of his whole life, past... . . . (313)

Certainly, Bon and his father are not exactly alike; there are differences between them that I will consider elsewhere. But a fundamental likeness is insisted upon. In *Light in August*, Joe Christmas resembles his grandfather and stepfather as the result of his conditioning. In *Absalom*, Faulkner implies that Bon resembles his father because it is part of the order of the cosmos and the nature of life that he should, that he echo his father in character, desire, word, and deed. Bon is part of his father's peripety.

When, a "mental and spiritual orphan" (124), Charles comes to Sutpen's Hundred after recognizing that Henry might be his half-brother, he consciously seeks an identity, what Sutpen took for granted when he went to Pettibone's plantation door.

... he knew exactly what he wanted; it was just the saying of it—the physical touch even though in secret, hidden—the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood which it had bequeathed him to warm his own flesh with, to be bequeathed by him in turn to run hot and loud in veins and limbs after that first flesh and then his own were dead. (319)

He wants recognition of his true identity: to feel the tug of the life cord which Sutpen had attempted to sever, the human touch Sutpen cannot give, to be immersed in the flow of life from which he has been excluded by his father's design for untainted immortality and mother's for revenge. He wants the only kind of immortality a man can have, to be simply one of the feeding pools in the flood of human generations.

What he receives, of course, is not the identity he seeks. Foreshadowing Charles' rejection by his father, Bon feels Sutpen's presence before he sees him, "a wind, something, dark and chill, breathing upon
him" (333). And when he does meet his father, instead of the physical touch he desires, all he receives is the look of Sutpen's "expressionless and rocklike face, . . . the pale boring eyes in which there was no flicker, nothing, the face in which he saw his own features, in which he saw recognition, and that was all" (348). As Charles later tells Henry, his reception exactly echoes his father's reception at Pettibone's: "'But he didn't tell me. He just told you, sent me a message like you send a command by a nigger servant to a beggar or a tramp to clear out'" (341). But the greatest irony here is that if Sutpen could have acknowledged his son, he could have preserved his design—albeit now in altered form, infused with humanity—and could have truly balanced the moral ledger first unbalanced by Pettibone:

He stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it and no monkey-dressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away. . . . (267)

Charles would have gone, leaving the sanctuary of Sutpen's Hundred unviolated. But Sutpen cannot acknowledge his son, for to do so would be to acknowledge his tie to his own outcast past, which, in his confusion, he has long misperceived as the brutish source of his pain. Thus, as Richard Poirier suggests, Sutpen "comes totally to express the very inhumanity and injustice which he would have us believe compelled the 'design' in the first place."6 Further compounding the ironies, Bon's appearance reveals the folly and illusory character of Sutpen's attempt to transubstantiate moral reality and protect himself from life.

6 "'Strange Gods,'" p. 18.
Although Sutpen thinks he has been building in granite, his design can be annihilated as easily and completely as he once was: "he must have felt and heard the design--house, position, posterity and all--come down like it had been built out of smoke, making no sound, creating no rush of displaced air and not leaving any debris" (267).

The demand for human recognition by Sutpen's second double, Wash Jones, offers him his last chance either for deviltry or humanity. Sutpen is wrong; he does have a "monkey-nigger" to bar the door, his own daughter Clytie. When during the war Wash comes to the plantation bearing vegetables to feed the Sutpen women, "Clytie would not let him come into the kitchen with the basket even, saying, 'stop right there, white man. Stop right where you is. You aint never crossed this door while Colonel was here and you aint going to cross it now'" (281).

Not wanting to besmirch with his presence the house of his alter-ego, the man in whom Wash lives and moves and has his being, he is not outraged by his rejection. What finally does provoke him is Sutpen's debasement of Wash's one genuine tie to the flow of life, his granddaughter Milly. When Sutpen makes her pregnant with his bastard child and then rejects her for her inability to produce a son on demand, Wash feels the same chaos Sutpen once felt:

... for a second Wash must not have felt the very earth under his feet while he watched Sutpen emerge from the house, the riding whip in his hand, thinking quietly, like in a dream: I kaint have heard what I know I heard. I just know I kaint thinking That was what got him up. It was that colt. It aint me or mine either. It wasn't even his own that got him out of bed maybe feeling no earth, no stability, even yet. ... (288)

Wash, too, is annihilated by the rejection of the man he has admired:

"Better that all who remain of us be blasted from the face of [the
earth) than that another Wash Jones should see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire" (290). Unlike Sutpen, however, Wash Jones expunges the source of his affront from the earth rather than trying to compensate for the affront, not because he has more highly developed moral sensibilities than Sutpen, but because he believes that after the affront neither man is worthy of Sutpen's design.

It is appropriate that the most striking symbol for the deadly nature of Sutpen's sanctuary is his tombstone, which he sets "upright in the hall of the house, where Miss Coldfield possibly (maybe doubtless) looked at it every day as though it were his portrait" (190). Having rejected life, Sutpen in his sanctuary has become the very picture of death; his sanctuary itself asserts an "incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong" (85). He has not broken the deadly rhythms of his past.

II

Thomas Sutpen is, however, bound by the "umbilical watercord" (261) of life to more than his past and the consequences of past actions; he is bound as well to the present—to his community and region. His sanctuary, expressing the values that he shares with the community, becomes a social center for Jefferson and the larger South. He, certainly, will admit no bond, anymore than he will confess that Charles Bon is his son. As Miss Rosa declares, he has created his sanctuary as a barricade against the past and "even against the men
who had given him protection on that inevitable day and hour when even
they must rise against him in scorn and horror and outrage" (15).
While she may, as we shall see, misperceive community motives and the
source of its outrage, she understands Sutpen well enough here. He
wants little to do with any community. When he first appears in
Jefferson, in 1833, "apparently it was only by sheer geographical
hap that Sutpen passed through town at all" (35). Once settled out-
side Jefferson, he pursues his design with "utter disregard of how his
actions which the town could see might look and how the ones which the
could not see must appear to it" (72). And after the war, with the
South reeling before an invasion of carpetbaggers, he refuses to join
his fellow Southerners in resistance, "telling them that if every man
in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restora-
tion of his own land, the general land and South would save itself"
(161).
Nor, except in time of war or social unrest, is Jefferson eager
to admit any ties with Sutpen or claim him as one of its own. Some of
the townsfolk occasionally hunt his game with him, dine at his table,
drink his liquor, or come to watch him fight his slaves, but to their
way of thinking he lacks the requisites for community membership. He
has none of the necessary social virtues: "They did not think of love
in connection with Sutpen. They thought of ruthlessness rather than
justice and of fear rather than respect, but not of pity or love. . . ."
(43). Nor does he possess the necessary social connections: "He wasn't
even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name
which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own any more
than the horse was his own or even the pistols. . . " (14-15). To
most he is a suspicious stranger "who rode into town out of nowhere"
(16). Not surprisingly then, the town is affronted to realize that he
is "getting it involved with himself" (43) through his partnership with
Goodhue Coldfield and courtship of his daughter. "Completely outraged"
(46) by his threatened involvement, the townsfolk at last attempt to
repudiate him.

Further complicating any relationship Sutpen might have with
Jefferson are the explicit differences between them. Sutpen is much
greater than anyone in town, both in raw energy and the scope of his
dream. Implicitly contrasting his energy with the town's, Miss Rosa
likens his arrival to "a quiet thunderclap" abruptly "upon a scene
peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color" (8). Unbound by
the social constraints of "civic virtue" (44) and the social compul-
sions necessary for community, Sutpen is a man who, "given the occasion
and the need . . . will do anything" (46) and whose design is much
greater than anything the more modest burghers of Jefferson can con-
ceive: theirs is just 'a village then: the Holston House, the court-
house, six stores, a blacksmith and livery stable, a saloon frequented
by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences"
(32).

Cleanth Brooks carries his analysis of the differences between
Sutpen and the South even further, arguing that many readers, seeing
a relationship where none exists, have misread Sutpen's character in
relation to his society." Sutpen differs not only in degree but in kind, chiefly in his "optimism, his abstraction, and his innocence," an "innocence about the nature of reality" which creates other differences isolating him from the community and provoking its "deep suspicion and some consternation": the separate, secular code by which he lives; his abstract attitude toward manners, the past, race tradition; and the optimism which he expresses through his implicit refusal to trust to God or luck. Sutpen's innocence, which Brooks calls "par excellence the innocence of modern man," determines that he is hardly an antebellum Southerner at all. We must, Brooks continues, be prepared to take into account these traits of his "if we attempt to read the story of Sutpen's fall as a myth of the fall of the Old South. Unless we are content with some rather rough and ready analogies, the story of the fall of the house may prove less than parallel." And Brooks finds few parallels, finally arguing that Sutpen's fellow Southerners "avoided [his] kind of defeat and were exempt from his special kind of moral blindness." To find significant parallels we ought rather "to attend to the story of Sutpen's children." 

7 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 296.
8 Ibid., p. 427n.
9 Ibid., p. 296.
10 Ibid., p. 297.
11 Ibid., p. 297.
12 Ibid., p. 306.
13 Ibid., p. 318.
Yet in spite of Sutpen's disdain of Jefferson and its attempted repudiation of him, in spite of the very real differences dividing them, there are ironic parallels in the lives of Sutpen and his fellow Southerners which are more significant than the rough and ready analogies Brooks dismisses. These similarities are revealed, at least in part, by Sutpen's curious, unspoken relationship with the community, which Brooks neglects. Jefferson expresses suspicion of and consternation towards Sutpen not only as Brooks suggests, because he lives by a different code or disregards theirs, but because in his very excesses, the most obvious differences between Sutpen and the community and the differences which most disturb the townsfolk, he reveals just how much he actually shares with them. Only a recognized but unacknowledged psychological bond fully explains their reception of him: a peculiar mixture more of fascination and outrage than what Brooks sees as suspicion and consternation. In the first weeks after his arrival in Jefferson, Sutpen fills the community's consciousness, absorbing the interests of everyone, no matter what his station: "the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen" (32). During the building of his plantation, parties of horsemen make the long ride to Sutpen's Hundred, apparently leaving families and work, simply to "sit in a curious quiet clump as though for mutual protection and watch his mansion rise" (37). Sutpen comes to so dominate their minds that five years later, when he returns to Jefferson with the furnishings for his mansion, a member of the community "came, a little wild-eyed and considerably slack-mouthed, into the Holston House bar
one evening and said, 'Boys, this time he stole the whole durn steamboat!'" (44). He need not even be named to be known; he is simply "he." When the ironically titled "vigilance committee" rides to arrest him for theft, most of the rest of the male members of the community join the posse, "clotting behind the eight original members of the committee" (47). As they return with him to town, all Jefferson is drawn into his wake,

with the ladies and children and house niggers watching from behind curtains and behind the shrubbery in the yards and the corners of the houses, the kitchens where doubtless food was already beginning to scorch, and so back to the square where the rest of the able-bodied men left their offices and stores to follow. . . . (47)

Of those who come to watch Sutpen fight his slaves, Miss Rosa claims, "it was as if God or the devil had taken advantage of his very vices in order to supply witnesses to the discharge of our curse not only from among the gentlefolks, our own kind, but from the very scum and riffraff" (28). In her demonizing rage, however, she cannot understand that the community is here more than a chorus to the tragedy of the Sutpen family, that Jefferson is an active protagonist in a tragedy of its own, which Sutpen's anticipates and dramatizes for them. His "vices" mirror their desires, if not always their deeds.

How else explain the ambivalence of the community's reception of him? On the one hand their "civic virtue" (44), their decorum and morality, is affronted by his excesses. On the other, the community participates actively and vicariously in these very excesses. At his Sunday carriage races to the church there were plenty to aid and abet him; even he could not have held a horse race without someone to race against. . . . it was not even public opinion that stopped him. . . . it was the minister himself,
Of those who come to watch Sutpen's slave fights, Cleanth Brooks says, "It is significant that they come as to something extraordinary, a show, an odd spectacle; they would not think of fighting with their own slaves."\(^{15}\) For Brooks, this is one episode which decisively sets Sutpen apart from his neighbors.\(^{16}\) But the passage he alludes to suggests otherwise. Miss Rosa says that Sutpen "set up a raree show which lasted five years and Jefferson paid him for the entertainment by at least shielding him to the extent of not telling their womenfolk what he was doing" (18). A raree show is not an "odd spectacle" but a peep show, a spectacle for the vicarious fulfillment of desires made illicit by community morality. It is significant that the womenfolk, keepers of public and private morality, at least in the minds of their menfolk, must be kept from knowing not only that Sutpen's raree show takes place but also who the spectators are. The men come in guilty fascination to the matches held "in the stable where the men could hitch their horses and come up from the back and not be seen from the house because he was already married now" (259). It is significant, too, that these illicit demonstrations of male potency are treated as ironically as Sutpen's sexual potency. For Sutpen and his community, potency lies not in the creation of life but in actual and ritual dominion over it.

In his life, values, actions, and sanctuary, then, Sutpen performs as a kind of double for Jefferson, not created by it as Joe Christmas is

\(^{15}\) The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 300.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 299.
by another Jefferson, but enacting nonetheless its own destructive impulses suppressed before the keepers of conventional morality. Sutpen represents the South to itself. He is a walking, breathing epiphany of its own moral disorder; his sanctuary, "the size of a courthouse" (16), is an emblem and indictment of its outsized aspirations as well as his own. Richard Poirier suggests that Sutpen "unknowingly abstracts... evil tendencies from the controlling fiber of the community and its traditions..."\(^\text{17}\) The community recognizes that his tendencies are really its own, which is why it eventually tries to cast him out, even as the civilized land and people cast out the Carribean island to which Sutpen flees: "some of its own blood and thinking and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer" (250-51). But the community does not turn on their brother until he makes public and official his unacknowledged bond with it by joining in partnership with Coldfield and wedding his daughter. Then "public opinion which at some moment during the five preceding years had swallowed him even though he never had quite ever lain quiet on its stomach, had performed one of mankind's natural and violent and inexplicable voltefaces and regurgitated him" (52). Sated with Sutpen's bold enactment of their own desires to manipulate and dominate reality, the community repudiates him. The public morality at odds with their suppressed desires can no longer stomach him. To swallow him whole, to permit themselves to absorb him into the tissue of the community is impossible; the community by definition can tolerate his excess only to a point.

\(^{17}\) "'Strange Gods,'" pp. 18-19.
Professor Brooks's analysis notwithstanding, Sutpen represents the South not only to himself, but, as so many readers have recognized, he represents it to us as well. One problem with many of these readers' analyses, however, and the reason they are often vulnerable to Brooks's criticism, is that they fail to explore the roots of Sutpen's ironic relationship with the South, concentrating instead upon the poisonous fruits of the compulsions he shares with it. All recognize that both share in a fundamental failure of humanity and many explore in great depth and detail the tragedies which follow from these failures. Too few, however, explore the enabling agents of these parallel tragedies, the hamartia they share. His fellow Southerners share with Sutpen key elements of those very qualities that Brooks insists separate him from them: they are innocent about the nature of reality, uphold abstractions, are morally blind, act inhumanly as a result of their innocence and blindness, and suffer a similar tragic fate.

To begin with, their innocence, like Sutpen's the source of their errors in judgment, expresses itself as an ironic and paradoxical naive materialism. The Jefferson into which Sutpen comes in 1833 is little different from the mountain home he left as a boy, a place of "lawless opportunity" (43) in the vanguard of the westward movement of American

society and civilization. Here, as revealed by Jason Compson's evocation of Henry Sutpen's university school mates, all share a common, if crude and unsophisticated humanity, the planters' sons "only in the surface matter of food and clothing and daily occupation any different from the negro slaves who supported them--the same sweat . . . ; the same pleasures . . . ; the same parties" (97-98). But the Jefferson planters see neither the present reality of their community nor the bond they share with their slaves. Instead, with "that aptitude and eagerness of the Anglo-Saxon for complete mystical acceptance of immolated sticks and stones" (56), they dream of transcending their material existence. Sutpen may not, as Brooks argues, be capable of their mysticism and religious beliefs, but they are certainly capable of his heroic, flesh-immolating visions. At the beginning of the war, almost everyone in the region comes to Oxford to watch the gallant mimic marching and countermarching of the sons and the brothers, drawn all of them, rich and poor, aristocrat and redneck, by what is probably the most moving mass-sight of all human mass-existence, far more so than the spectacle of so many virgins going to be sacrificed to some heathen Principle, some Priapus--the sight of young men, the light quick bones, the bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter of brass and plumes, marching away to a battle. (122)

Unlike the heroic Sartorises who ambivalently court death to master their fear of it, to give shape and meaning to their lives, these worship a heroic death because only thereby will they be assured of the same immortality Sutpen seeks. Life, symbolized here by the god of procreative power, son of Dionysus and Aphrodite, is a principle foreign to them. Like Miss Rosa, "bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the
also-dead" (65), they would escape the frustrations of physical existence, the limits of their humanity, by "embalming blotting from the breathable air the poisonous secret effluvium of lusting and hating and killing" (169).

At the same time, however, Jefferson uses the material world and fleshly life to signify its transcendence. The stuff of reality becomes almost wholly symbolic: Sutpen and Colonel Sartoris design the regimental colors, "which Sartoris' womenfolk had sewed together out of silk dresses" (80); the community creates the company's colors, "the segments of silk cut and fitted but not sewn," to be carried "from house to house until the sweetheart of each man in the company had taken a few stitches in it" (123). Even the blood is not exempt from this symbolic transfiguration. The Southern lady, Jason Compson tells us, lives

on the actual blood itself, like a vampire, not with insatiability, certainly not with voracity, but with that serene and idle splendor of flowers abrogating to herself, because it fills her veins also, nourishment from the old blood that crossed uncharted seas and continents and battled wilderness hardships and lurking circumstances and fatalities. (86)

The Southern woman may look to the past and Sutpen to the future to create their destinies, but both twist the "umbilical watercord" of life to the same transcendent end. Such behavior by the men and the women the soldiers leave behind evokes a heroic, romantic Jefferson; physically it may be the humble Jefferson of Light in August, but spiritually it has more in common with the Jefferson of Sartoris. But the community of Sartoris differs from the Jefferson of Absalom insofar as the urban philistines of the earlier novel do not really believe the
role they play; the dream belongs only to the Sartorises. Here, however, it is shared by all. Further, the role the Jeffersonians of Sartoris play is the stuff of comedy and social commentary. Here it is used to advance the tragic design. The ironic materialism the townsfolk of Absalom, Absalom! use to symbolize their transcendence is, as we shall see, at the root of their moral blindness and consequent inhumanity.

So, too, the urban, down-river Southerner shares with Sutpen and Jefferson, if not the same dream, a dream nonetheless and the same perversely innocent materialism which expresses it. Jason Compson suggests this in his lengthy and wholly conjectural account of Henry and Charles' trip to New Orleans following Henry's denial of his birthright at Christmas, 1860. The problem with this lengthy episode, comprising more than one third of Chapter IV, is that it contains almost no shred of truth about Henry and Charles. The question for most readers is why Faulkner goes to such great lengths to mislead us? And the answer, I think, is that this episode is misleading only if we expect to learn something about Charles and Henry. Jason Compson knows little of real significance about Henry and less about Charles: "Shadowy, almost substanceless," "he is," Compson says, "the curious one to me" (93). What Compson does know about, we can assume, is the urban, aristocratic South, and it is this that he evokes here. In his account of Charles' justification of his octoroon mistress to Henry, Charles is not so much a particular man as a type of Southerner; his world represents the style of life of a whole class of men. Here in this world of "great and easy wealth measured by steamboat loads in place of a tedious inching of
sweating human figures across cotton fields," where men appeared in "linen a little finer and diamonds a little brighter and in broadcloth a little trimmer and with hats raked a little more above faces a little more darkly swaggering" (110), the images of material wealth differ from those of upriver Jefferson, as the dream itself differs. But the impulses to dream and design remain the same. While the Jefferson planters use the material world to transcend fleshy reality, the urban aristocrats live wholly in it but transmute it, each man his own Priapus. Believing that the "strange and ancient curious pleasures of the flesh" are all—"there is nothing else" (116)—they rarify their pleasures, reclaiming them from "crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum" (115) through the "principles of honor, decorum and gentleness applied to perfectly normal human instinct" (116). Their partners in this transmutation, as well as the emblems of it, are their mistresses: but "not whores," Charles says. "And not whores because of us, the thousand" (115) white aristocrats of New Orleans. "Raised and trained to fulfill a woman's sole end and purpose: to love, to be beautiful, to divert" (117), these products of adolescent sexual fantasy become, through the instruction of their masters, "the only true chaste women, not to say virgins, in America, and they remain true and faithful to that man not merely until he dies or frees them, but until they die" (117). The Jefferson planter may court death and his down-river sounterpart court his mistress, but both are driven by a need to dominate material reality and life; in both instances, the life which exemplifies the attainment of their inhuman ideal exists only as a symbol of that transcendence. For Sutpen, the planters, and
the urban aristocrats, life is without essence until imbued by their dreams.

The same charge of naive materialism can also be laid to that inflexible, abnegating moralist, Goodhue Coldfield, who, as Cleanth Brooks remarks, resembles Sutpen despite "all the appearance of antithetical differences." He is drawn to Sutpen in the first place by "that hundred miles of plantation which apparently moved" him. Coldfield views even his church materialistically, as a kind of bank. He would use the church into which he had invested a certain amount of sacrifice and doubtless self-denial and certainly actual labor and money for the sake of what might be called a demand balance of spiritual solvency, exactly as he would have used a cotton gin in which he considered himself to have incurred either interest or responsibility, for the ginning of any cotton which he or any member of his family, by blood or by marriage, had raised—that, and no more. (50)

Like Sutpen and his fellow Southerners, he cannot let things be themselves or permit them to perform their characteristic functions, material or spiritual, not even the money he so mightily aspires to:

Doubtless the only pleasure which he had ever had was not in the meager spartan hoard which he had accumulated ...--not in the money but in its representation of a balance he believed would some day pay his sight drafts on self-denial and fortitude. (84)

For him, too, material reality, "the symbol of fortitude and abnegation" (84), is nothing more than a necessary agent for the transcendence of the grim features of his physical existence. Unable to grant reality its own meaning and value, Coldfield, like his partner, becomes abstract in his approach to life. People and things are only counters to be manipulated; his children, especially Rosa, are little more to him than

19 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 301.
servants of his design. His grandchildren are nothing more than a "draft on his conscience" to be "discharged" (67) by yearly visits to them. And his slaves, though freed as soon as he comes into possession of them, have little intrinsic value, even his gesture in freeing them, as much a business transaction as one of moral value. He writes "out their papers of freedom which they could not read and put . . . them on a weekly wage which he held back in full against the discharge of their current market value" (84). For Goodhue Coldfield, as for Thomas Supten, human relationships are solely a matter of credits and debits, established and maintained by the same methods one uses to balance a checkbook.

Cleanth Brooks may absolve the rest of the South of Sutpen and Coldfield's kind of abstraction and moral blindness, but Absalom's imagery suggests that we should not. Absorbed by the "brave trivial glitter" of their heroic dream of transcendence, the planter society blinds itself to the reality and consequences of its acts. To these "figures with the shapes of men but with the names and statures of heroes" (19), war is a "black night not catastrophic but merely background" for heroic gestures. For these heroes "as obsolete as Richard or Roland or du Guesclin, who wore plumes and cloaks lined with scarlet at twenty-eight and thirty and thirty-two and captured warships with cavalry charges but no grain nor meat nor bullets" (345-46), the Civil War is not primarily a war to be won nor even a struggle for survival so much as a series of opportunities for heroic achievement. For these who would whip three separate armies in as many days and then tear down their own fences to cook meat robbed from their own smoke-houses, who on one night and with a handful of men would gallantly
set fire to and destroy a million dollar garrison of enemy supplies and on the next night be discovered by a neighbor in bed with his wife and be shot to death-- (346)

there are no sides, no issues, no right and wrong, only moments of heroism in ironic counter-point to the body's desires which must be served. Thus it is that these men become "a set of bragging and evil shadows" (289), turning blindly and destructively on their own. They are positively evil in Faulkner's present scheme, as they were not in Jenny Du Pre's recreation of Bayard Sartoris I, because having turned away from their material existence they blindly violate the harmonious order which is an absolute element of that existence and which, for Faulkner, is the source of moral sense. Like Sutpen, who honors only cunning and shrewdness, these are "men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder," Miss Rosa asks, "that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?" (20). In Sartoris, heroism and courage are presented as virtues, ennobling man in the trivialized world of Colonel Sartoris' descendents. From the less ambivalent moral and tragic perspective of Absalom, Absalom!, however, courage and strength are insufficient. Unlike Sartoris, where they are obscured by the needs of the family story-tellers, ends are more important than the spirit in which they are pursued. If the ends (caste, slavery, the rape of the land) are wrong, all the heroic spirit in the world cannot compensate for that fact.

While the planters and their followers reduce themselves to posturing abstractions, the New Orleans aristocrats reduce their mistresses in pursuit of their evil dream. Quentin accuses Sutpen of "picayune splitting of abstract hairs" (271) for his attempt to deny Eulalia
Bon's claims upon him, but he might just as easily have been speaking of the urban aristocrats' hollow justification of their relationships with their kept women. Charles Bon denies they are whores: they are "creatures taken at childhood, culled and chosen and raised more carefully than any white girl, any nun, than any blooded mare even, by a person who gives them the unsleeping care and attention which no mother ever gives" (117). He declares, the "white race would have made them slaves . . . , laborers, cooks, maybe even field hands, if it were not for this thousand, these few men like myself" (115). At the height of his arrogance, he argues that this thousand is saving that which God has neglected:

He does not even require of us that we save this one sparrow, any more than we save the one sparrow which we do save for any commendation from Him. But we do save that one, . . . Yes: a sparrow which God himself neglected to mark. Because though men, white men created her, God did not stop it. (116)

But all his pettifoggery does not deny these girls' condition, what their keepers are, or the incredible presumption implicit in his abstract arguments. The thousand accuses the puritanical of befogging their fall from grace into sensuality with "Heaven-defying words of extenuation and explanation, the return to grace heralded by Heaven-placating cries of satiated abasement and flagellation" (116), but they are no less guilty of self-blinding rationalizations. They have created, not fully human women, as they suppose, but fragile abstractions, attenuated, pared, and broken to the shape of their illusions of transfiguration: "the eternal female" (114), "a female principle" (116), "enthroned and immobile . . . like painted portraits" (110).

Blind like Sutpen, the South is finally allied with him in its
efforts to sever the "umbilical water cord" of life. The South, Faulkner tells us in one of the few authorial intrusions, lost the war in large part "because of generals who should not have been generals, who were generals not through training in contemporary methods or aptitude for learning them, but by the divine right to say "Go there' conferred upon them by an absolute caste system" (345). These, like Sutpen and Pettibone, "set the order and the rule of living" (290) and so interrupted the natural flow of life. Similarly, the urban aristocrats set self-serving rules for the lives of their mistresses: "We--the thousand, the white men--made them, created and produced them; we even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh seven eights of another kind" (115). Having denied the blood bonds of common humanity, they find it easy enough to set aside any marriage ties that might pretend to bind those of different races: "A formula, a shibboleth meaningless as a child's game," Bon says, "a ritual as meaningless as that of college boys in secret rooms at night, even to the same archaic and forgotten symbols" (117-18). Denying life to themselves, white Southerners inevitably deny it to others, dehumanizing them. It is outrage enough that the maintenance of the South's illusions of transcendence should depend upon chattel slavery. What is worse is that those not permitted to share in this dream should be so completely bestialized in their servitude. To the slave planters, too many slave women are little more than "sweating bodies" (110) beckoned from the fields into the trees, exchanging one form of degradation for another. The octoroon mistresses of New Orleans may differ in the ease of their lives from their slave sisters, but in fact they
stand only slightly above them on the ladder of caste, as "the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale" (112), "more valuable as commodities than white girls, raised and trained to fulfill a women's sole end and purpose" (117). To Miss Rosa, holder of aristocratic pretensions, the Wash Jones who literally saves her from starvation during the war is nothing more than a "brute" (134), an "animal" (135). Sutpen's French architect is little more than a beast to be hunted to earth with dogs when he escapes--and not by Sutpen alone: "And Grandfather . . . brought some champagne and some of the others brought whiskey and they began to gather out there a little after sundown, at Sutpen's house. . . " (219). Jefferson joins Sutpen in his "holiday" (219), celebrating with him his dominion over other men.

Goodhue Coldfield appears to be a special case here. True, he degrades his children, grandchildren, and servants, denying life to himself and others in pursuit of his design. But he does not participate in the South's general and moral excesses; a choric figure, he protests slavery and the war and retreats from them. It would seem that he cannot be indicted here with his fellow Southerners. If we examine his protests, however, we see that, like the South's excesses, his protests lack moral energy and human concern. Like the Burdens and Gail Hightower's father in *Light in August*, he protests the right things for the wrong reasons and in the wrong spirit; his cries are just one more expression of his tawdry materialism, "Sutpen's morality
turned inside out,” as Cleanth Brooks puts it. With war almost at hand, he objects "not so much to the idea of pouring out human blood and life, but at the idea of waste: of wearing out and eating up and shooting away material in any cause whatever" (83). Human blood is merely matter to him. This morality, "the impregnable citadel of his passive rectitude" (63), is, like Sutpen's sanctuary, a gesture against life. He turns actively against his community and region, not because they are slave-owners or fighting an immoral war, but because he hates his conscience and the land, the country which had created his conscience and then offered the opportunity to have made all that money to the conscience which it had created, which could do nothing but decline; hated that country so much that he was even glad when he saw it drifting closer and closer to a doomed and fatal war. (260)

He wants the South to suffer for making him suffer. He finally retreats to his attic to watch the South pay for its outrage against him but only after he has been physically violated, his symbolic hoard--his store--plundered by a company of strange troops. It is ironically fitting that he should eventually commit suicide by starvation after "a mental balancing of his terrestrial accounts" (84), since his whole life has been spent denying the flesh. It is fitting, too, that his only physical legacy is the "coffin-smelling gloom" (8) of his house, a place of death like Sutpen's mansion. Both men are destroyers of life, their own and others'.

Bound together, Sutpen and the South share a common destiny in spite of the differences often dividing them: "the destiny of Sutpen's family . . . would be the land's catastrophe too" (74). Brooks's

20 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 301.
suggestion that these destinies are different is true only in a narrow sense. Both Sutpen and the South are destroyed, their dreams reduced to the "ruined, the four years' fallow and neglected land" (161) once representing their transcendence of the land. The returning soldiers had risked and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land, not the same men who had marched away but transformed—and this the worst, the ultimate degradation to which war brings the spirit, the soul—into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped. (157)

Sutpen may lack the capacity for pity but he, too, turns upon his own, violating anew those already violated by his false dream. All participate in the general outrage against mankind, the earth, and the cosmos; the suffering of all seems a consequence as the cosmos purges itself of disorder.
CHAPTER X

"THAT FATEFUL INTERTWINING":

PRIMAL INJUSTICE IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

At the beginning of this discussion of Absalom, Absalom! I took issue with those who argue that Quentin Compson, not Thomas Sutpen, is the focus of the reader's interest in the novel. An almost inevitable companion, if not corollary, to their argument is that Thomas Sutpen lacks tragic stature. While this second argument is supported with a variety of reasons, perhaps the most serious and frequently given concerns Sutpen's failure to recognize the secret cause of his suffering and fall. 1 Perhaps the best example of this argument—because of its clarity and moderation—is Richard Sewall's. In The Vision of Tragedy, he observes that Sutpen comes to us "for all his dreary end, with some of the qualities and many of the trappings of a tragic hero," a man

1 Walter Slatoff argues that the "agony" of Faulkner's characters "almost never leads them or those who outlive them to any wisdom or understanding of their own or the human condition" (Quest for Failure, p. 202); Peter Swiggart, that "the moral inflexibility that frustrates [Sutpen's] life's design also makes self-understanding impossible for him. In spite of his tragic role, Sutpen lacks the status of a tragic hero able to recognize the source of destruction" (The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 149); Irving Howe suggests that what prevents Sutpen "from rising to the greatness of the tragic hero is a failure in self-recognition." Faulkner withholds from him "the cleansing ritual of tragedy" (William Faulkner, p. 223); John Paterson argues that Sutpen is "capable neither of guilt nor growth" ("The Prosaics of Tragedy," p. 36).
possessed of strength of will, bravery, pity, honor, and leadership.  

"The dimension lacking, of course, is what made Oedipus suffer twice--'once in the body and once in the soul'; the fearful echoes that thundered in Faustus' ears; that which in Job and Lear made them long for 'instruction': which made Ahab see himself as 'a forty years' fool'; and what Dmitri meant when he called the Karamazovs philosophers."  

In spite of his greatness, "Sutpen's innocence never comprehended 'soul.' At least we are not shown that it did." The arrival of Charles Bon at Sutpen's Hundred brought Sutpen "as near an actual spiritual struggle as he ever came," but "how real he felt his dilemma to be, to what extent it opened up for him those dark areas of the soul which tragic heroes know, we are not told."  

"The spiritual ordeal of this hero, the 'war in the cave' from which Job (and Oedipus and Faustus and Hester Prynne) emerged with calmer mind and deepened insight, is only hinted at and its results never articulated. It is not that Sutpen had 'forgotten the infinite'; he never knew it."  

While Quentin is no tragic hero either, Professor Sewall believes, nonetheless, that the tragedy of the novel is his insofar as the secret cause of the Sutpen family's fall is revealed in his "sensitive and brooding consciousness."  

I suggest, however, that even if one does accept Sewall's analysis of his character, Thomas Sutpen possesses tragic stature and that the tragedy of the novel is still his. If he is tragic in the respects  

3 The Vision of Tragedy, p. 140.  
4 Ibid., p. 141.  
5 Ibid., p. 142.  
6 Ibid., p. 142.  
7 Ibid., p. 137.
Sewall mentions and in others which I suggested in my examination of his primal energies, then we do him and his story an injustice by denying him tragic stature because he fails to fulfill one requirement of the tragic hero— even though this one requirement may be the most important. While I do not wish to underestimate the contribution of tragic recognition to the completion of some tragic forms, to require it of every tragic hero is to define the tragic hero and the possibilities of tragedy too narrowly. Faulkner did not write tragedy according to the book. Not all tragic heroes are capable of recognition. The Agamemnon of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is a hero quite different from his son, but he is as arguably tragic as Orestes, even though he lacks the capacity or opportunity for recognition. More to the point, modern tragedies often work without a recognition scene. One needs only think of *The Great Gatsby*— practically a Yankee analogue for *Absalom, Absalom!* -- *The Death of a Salesman*, or *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Faulkner has created both kinds of tragic figures and plots, those like Joe Christmas, in *Light in August*, who gain recognition, those like Sutpen, in *Absalom*, who do not. Each is tragic in his resistance to necessity and the reversal to which that resistance brings him. But Joe recognizes in his surrender the inevitable failure of his quest for identity; Thomas Sutpen neither recognizes nor surrenders. The point here is that there are other ways of dramatizing the kind of meaning essential to what we call recognition, as Professor Sewall, himself, suggests. In "The Tragic Form," published before *The Vision of Tragedy*, he declares:

... the perception which completes the tragic form is not drama-
tized solely through the hero's change, although his pilgrimage provides the traditional tragic structure. The full nature and extent of the new vision is measured also by what happens to the other figures in the total symbolic situation. . . .

Indeed, it has been pointed out that, in an age when the symbol of the hero as the dominating center of the play seems to have lost its validity with artist and audience, the role is taken over by the artist himself, who is his own tragic hero. That is, "perception" is conveyed more generally, in the total movement of the piece and through all the parts.8

Professor Sewall is correct to observe that Sutpen lacks "soul," that he never knows the "infinite," but though incapable of recognition, himself, he is nevertheless the means by which perception is conveyed. When, in 1864, he comes to visit General Compson, he struggles like Othello among the "supersubtle" Venetians to discover the flaw in his design that enables Charles Bon to return from the limbo where he thought he had responsibly consigned him and so easily threaten to topple all he has worked for: "house, position, posterity and all" (267). He has always understood that there is a relationship between a man's past and his present, that

a man builds for his future in more ways than one, builds not only toward the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but toward actions and the subsequent irrevocable course of resultant action which his weak senses and intellect cannot foresee but which ten or twenty or thirty years from now he will take, will have to take in order to survive the act. (243)

What he never understands is that a man's actions may have more than personal consequences. And so, Bon's arrival is, for Sutpen, "not moral retribution you see: just an old mistake in fact which a man of courage and shrewdness could still combat if he could only find out what the mistake had been" (267-68).

But he will never understand his mistake because, as we have already seen, he is ignorant of the nature of reality. His ignorance is his mistake. And he is ironically right to call his *hamartia* a mistake, for it is exactly that, an error in judgment about reality, which leads to actions and the consequences of actions that can hardly be dismissed as mistakes. To possess recognition here or later in the course of his tragedy, Sutpen would have to recognize what he cannot: that all creation forms a harmony, that all things are bound by the "umbilical watercord" of life, and that a man's choices echo in an "inerradical rhythm" not only within his own life and time but within the lives and times of others as well. Sutpen's tragedy springs from the very source of his greatness, his assertion of autonomy, his defiance, which would not permit him to surrender to social constraints, not at Pettibone's door and not anywhere else. Tragically and ironically, however, this self-assertion leads him to the illusions of self-sufficiency and self-containment, to, in other words, *hubris* and the tragic posture. He believes "that the thread of shrewdness and courage and will ran onto the same spool which the thread of his remaining days ran onto" (279). Unlike Aunt Jenny Du Pre of *Sartoris*, whose thread of life ties her to her family past and present, and Lena Grove, whose thread binds her to nature and all mankind, Sutpen assumes that his thread and the consequences of his life begin and end with him. Lacking this sense of the "infinite," the root of recognition, he cannot possess, as Old Bayard Sartoris, his grandson, Aunt Jenny, and Joe Christmas do, a sense of the primal injustice of his fate. He cannot call the collapse of his design "retribution, no sins of the father come
home to roost; not even call . . . it bad luck." To him it is "just a mistake" (267).

But we the readers feel this sense of primal injustice and even pity him, not because he is primarily a victim like Joe Christmas or Joanna Burden, but because we know how intractable reality can be, how often we, too, are guilty of Sutpen's kind of solipsism. As Faulkner suggested at Charlottesville,

To me he is to be pitied. He was not a depraved—he was amoral, he was ruthless, completely self-centered. To me he is to be pitied, as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, of the human family, is to be pitied.9

We also feel a sense of primal injustice for Sutpen, I think, precisely because he is never granted recognition and knowledge of his error, because as Dan Vogel suggests, he is "demeaned by a bafflement so complete that he does not know he is baffled."10 Quentin and Shreve evoke this sense for us as they imagine Sutpen and Wash Jones after their deaths:

. . . just now and then something, a wind, a shadow, and the demon would stop talking and Jones would stop guffawing and they would look at one another, groping, grave, intent, and the demon would say, 'What was it, Wash? Something happened. What was it?' and Jones looking at the demon, groping too, sober too, saying, 'I don't know, Kernal. Whut?' each watching the other. Then the shadow would fade, the wind die away until at last Jones would say, serene, not even triumphant: 'They mought have kilt us, but they aint whupped us yit, air they?' (186-87)

For all the outrage and pain he has caused, we believe Sutpen still deserved to recognize the lives he has defiled, to confront the shadow he has ignored, to know what happened; he deserves his recognitions because

9 Faulkner in the University, pp. 80-81.
10 The Three Masks of American Tragedy, p. 74.
we know, as Wash does not, that Sutpen's destruction involves a waste of power and great potential.

Having presented us with a man unable to see this secret cause, Faulkner must dramatize it instead, conveying it through Sutpen's peripety. Professor Sewall, in "The Tragic Form," affirms this kind of dramatization as a legitimate form of recognition: "... perception is all that can be summed up in the spiritual and moral change that the hero undergoes from first to last and in the similar change wrought by his actions or by his example in those about him."\(^{11}\) Having betrayed his own flesh and that of others in pursuit of his design, Sutpen is, in turn, betrayed by his flesh, as Gail Hightower is in *Light in August*. After the war, as he tries for a third time to realize his design, it is as though what everyone had called

> the fine figure of a man had reached and held its peak after the foundation had given away and something between the shape of him that people knew and the uncompromising skeleton of what he actually was had gone fluid and, earthbound, had been snubbed up and restrained, balloonlike, unstable and lifeless, by the envelope which it had betrayed. (81)

As the "Creditor" begins to re-establish the order Sutpen has upset, Faulkner reveals a tragic design quite different from the one in *Light in August*. There the "Player" exemplifies all that is irrational, savage, and random in man and the cosmos, a force victimizing the individual, frustrating him as he strives for fulfillment. With the "Creditor," on the other hand, we have an image of that force in the cosmos which checks individual excess and prevents a man or mankind

\(^{11}\) "The Tragic Form," p. 631.
from transcending the limits of his humanity. Sutpen, persists in his
design even though he has no hope of fulfilling it, "only old age and
breathing and horror and scorn and fear and indignation" (363) left to
him. Almost paradoxically, while the community is a central concern
of Light in August, as Cleanth Brooks has so ably demonstrated, Faulk­
ner's tragic vision in Absalom, Absalom! is, from one perspective, per­
haps more social. In the earlier novel he dramatizes the community's
threat to the individual and the individual's struggle against con­
fining and dehumanizing social values. Here, however, Faulkner drama­
tizes an individual's threat to communities of all sizes: families,
towns, and a whole region.

The "Creditor" ensures that this threat is finally frustrated,
not only by Sutpen's mortality but also by the flood of time and chang­
ing times. Thomas Sutpen, in a gesture toward stasis, tries to freeze
present time, attempting to capture one perfect moment at his planta­
tion door to mirror and thus reverse his humiliating past. He is, how­
ever, unaware of the extent to which he is time's subject, his life
analogous to "that of the show girl, the pony, who realizes that the
principle tune she prances comes not from horn and fiddle and drum but
from a clock and calendar" (181). Even as Sutpen plays his compulsive
role in his artificial moment, "behind him Fate, destiny, retribution,
irony--the stage manager, call him what you will--was already striking
the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes
of the next one" (72-73). It is appropriate, then, that Wash Jones
should be the one to bring Sutpen down. Ironic figure of Father Time
wielding a scythe lent him by Sutpen himself, shabby image of the ruin
time has wrought upon Sutpen's design, symbol of the scorn and pretense which time has also brought to Sutpen, and a mocking doppelganger for Sutpen as a child on Pettibone's plantation--Wash Jones is the agent of retribution for Sutpen's attempt to stop time and failure to redeem his past.

It is also appropriate that Wash Jones be the Creditor's agent insofar as Jones is a father, grandfather, and great grandfather. Worse than anything else he has done, Sutpen, like Agamemnon, has committed outrage upon outrage against the primary community, the family. Originally intended as a defense of his family, Sutpen's design is ultimately the cause of the destruction of seven actual or potential families: his and Eulalia Bon's, his and Ellen Coldfield's, the ones which could have resulted from Charles' marriage to Judith and Sutpen's to Miss Rosa, Goodhue Coldfield's family, Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon's, and Wash Jones'. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, is revealed Sutpen's "calamitous persistence in [his] ways." He intended his design as a bulwark against predatory tidewater society where his sister was seduced and abandoned, but he ends up seducing Milly Jones and then abandoning her when she fails to produce for him a male heir: "'Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable!'" (185). At last, "exasperated beyond all endurance" (178), the Creditor strikes him down through Wash Jones, who manages with one blow to do what Sutpen has failed his whole life to do and what he originally set out to do, defend

his family from degradation and affirm the ties of family and the claims of love. Sutpen has effectively refused the bond of love throughout his life, but is touched by it at his death:

'Stand back. Don't you touch me, Wash.'--'I'm going to tech you Kernel' and [the midwife] heard the whip too though not the scythe, no whistling air, no blow, nothing since always that which merely consummates punishment evokes a cry while that which evokes the last silence occurs in silence. (185)

Of Sutpen's end Faulkner remarked: "He said I'm going to be the one that lives in the big house, I'm going to establish a dynasty, I don't care how, and he violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion, and the fates took revenge on him."¹³

The final phase of Thomas Sutpen's personal tragedy and the image upon which our recognition of that tragedy is based is the negation of his design and reimposition of the natural order. Although he attempted to transcend brute life, it is brute life which brings him unceremoniously to earth on his last ride: "so he rode fast toward church as far as he went, in his homemade coffin, in his regimentals and saber and embroidered gauntlets, until the young mules bolted and turned the wagon over and tumbled him, saber plumes and all, into a ditch..." (186).

Once in the earth, he and his monuments are reclaimed by nature:

Both the flat slabs were cracked across the middle by their own weight (and vanishing into the hole where the brick coping of one vault had fallen in was a smooth faint path worn by some small animal--possum probably--by generations of some small animals since there could have been nothing to eat in the grave for a long time) though the lettering was quite legible: Ellen Coldfield Sutpen. Born October 9, 1817. Died January 23, 1863 and the other: Thomas Sutpen, Colonel, 23rd Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died August 12, 1869: this last, the date, added later, crudely with a

¹³ Faulkner in the University, p. 35.
chisel, who even dead did not divulge where and when he had been born. (188)

Unlike the Sartoris family after Colonel John's death, no one remains in the Sutpen family who is able or willing to maintain the emblems of his design. His tombstone—like his house, "a shell marooned and forgotten in a backwater of catastrophe" (132)—becomes a ruined, neglected monument to Sutpen's futile gestures of identity and immortality. In Sartoris, the family monuments are graven in "enduring" (Sartoris, 376) stone; in Absalom, all things are subject to decay. Sutpen's Hundred, itself, "had reverted to the state and had been bought and sold and bought and sold again and again and again" until reclaimed by "a jungle of sumach and persimmon and briers and honeysuckle" (213).

II.

Although finally checked and brought to nothing by the Creditor, Sutpen nevertheless leaves a legacy for his heirs. H. D. F. Kitto's observations that in Hamlet crime "spreads from soul to soul, as a contagion" and that Shakespearean tragedy in general presents "the complexive, menacing spread of ruin"14 certainly applies to Absalom. Absalom! In this dynastic tragedy the suffering, the process of Dike by which cosmic order is reimposed, and the need for recognition do not cease with Sutpen's fall. He is as tied to the future by the "umbilical water-cord" of life as he is to the past and the present. Thus, his

children have to play their parts in his tragedy, try to correct his error and recognize what he cannot. As Shreve remarks:

"Whatever the old man has done, whether he meant well or ill by it, it wasn't going to be the old man who would have to pay the check; and now that the old man was bankrupt with the incompetence of age, who should do the paying if not his sons, his get, because wasn't it done that way in the old days?" (325)

So much has Faulkner's vision of his heritage matured that, unlike Sartoris, where the family descendents repeat the past to perfect it, the Sutpen children are compelled to repeat the past to purge, correct, and escape it, if they can. But the tragedy does not end even here, since it is regional as well as dynastic. The narrators of the Sutpen story are implicated by their heritage, and as their part in the process of Dike, they must attempt to meaningfully articulate the secret cause which Sutpen's children recognize and accept. Thus, the tragic form is fulfilled in time and in the lives of Sutpen's legatees, part of the "ineradicable rhythm." As ironic corrective to his crimes against time and life, each generation repeats the past but adds to the tragic process something of its own humanity until balance has been restored and meaning created.

Sutpen tries to shape his children "out of that blind chancy darkness which we call the future" (317) and thus in Richard Poirier's words, to "make history begin in his own image." Through his children he would "fend and shield" himself "against the day when the Creditor would run him to earth for the last time and he couldn't get away" (179). He is unaware, however, that to shield him effectively they

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would first have to be shielded effectively against him. Unaware of just how blind and chancy this business of shaping history is, he cannot foresee accurately the features of the image he impresses upon his children, how much they resemble him and are thus unsuited to defend him. Nor is he aware of the extent to which they differ from him, how much his "ironic fecundity of dragon's teeth" (62) threaten by their humanity the very design they were created to embody. Pettibone's house Negro broke Sutpen's humanity at the plantation door; Sutpen, in turn, rends his children's humanity, making them incomplete persons, "just illusions that he begot" (348). As the result of Sutpen's repudiation, his eldest son Charles is a man without a legacy, heritage, or an identity, who has therefore "neither love nor pride to receive or inflict, neither honor nor shame to share or bequeath..." (315). "Created" outside the nourishing bond of family by his mother and her lawyer--"two people neither of whom had taken pleasure or found passion in getting him or suffered pain and travail in birthing him"--it seems to him that "he never had a father" (339). All he truly knows about himself before meeting the Sutpens is that he is the product of "some obscure ancient general affronting and outraging" (299), "blotted onto and out of" his mother's "body by the old infernal immortal male principle of all unbridled terror and darkness" (313). He arrives in Jefferson "apparently complete, without background or past or childhood" (93), "shadowy, almost substanceless" (93).

Judith, Henry, and even Clytie may possess the identity Bon lacks, but they are no more complete than he. Almost all they have is that identity. Impressed upon their father's design, they become "half
phantom children" (167), identities without substance. Sickened as a child when he watched his father's symbolic battle with his slaves, Henry grows up "unworldly" (100), retreating into that abstract "heritage peculiarly Anglo-Saxon . . . of fierce proud mysticism," a "grim humorless yokel out of a granite heritage where even the houses, let alone clothing and conduct are built in the image of a jealous and sadistic Jehovah" (108-09). Judith, "who slept waking in some suspension so completely physical as to resemble the state before birth" (70), grows up "dreaming, not living, in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness" (70). She lives so far from the fullness of life that it seems to Quentin that she "had chosen spinsterhood already before there was anyone named Charles Bon" (182). Least of all does Clytie possess a full life. Although she is the single reminder in the Sutpen household of the union of flesh and mind, she, "the cold Cerberus of his [Sutpen's] private hell" (136), holds as firmly as her father to his abstract design.

But although the Sutpen children have been denied a fully human life by their father's long shadow, they do not turn, as he did in his childhood cave, from its possibility. They have not, as their father did, extinguished the human "spark." They repeat his struggle against annihilation, but as part of the process of Dike, theirs is a struggle for a harmony of matter and spirit, mind and body, identity and being. Charles, of course, can find this wholeness only through membership in Sutpen's family, for to be a member of a particular family is to certify one's membership in the larger family of man. All Sutpen has to do is write:
'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it. Or if not that, a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand, and I would know what he meant and he would not even have to ask me to burn it. Or a lock of his hair or a paring from his finger nail and I would know them because I believe now that I have known what his hair and his finger nails would look like all my life, could choose that lock and that paring out of a thousand. (326)

All Bon wants is to have his human identity confirmed, either directly with a name or indirectly by possessing something of his father's corporeality. As if to suggest the magical powers of such human recognition, his desires echo the primitive belief that to possess the smallest part of a man is to possess him completely. Charles will do almost anything to get Sutpen to admit, in his words, "that I am" (327), willing even to surrender to Sutpen the definition of his humanity: "All right. I am trying to make myself into what I think he wants me to be; he can do anything he wants to with me; he has only to tell me what to do and I will do it" (330).

The presence of Judith and Henry, however, only complicates Charles' quest for recognition. At first they are only abstract counters to be used to further his end, just as his father once viewed his mother as incremental to his design. Of Henry he thinks, "What cannot I do with this willing flesh and bone if I wish" (317). Incest with Judith he first sees as a means to force recognition by Sutpen and God:

Who has not had to realize that when the brief all is done you must retreat from both love and pleasure, gather up your own rubbish and refuse--the hats and pants and shoes which you drag through the world--and retreat since the gods condone and practice these and the dreamy immeasurable coupling which floats oblivious above the trammeling and harried instant, the: was-not: is: was: is a perquisite only of balloony and weightless elephants and whales: but maybe if there were sin too maybe you would not be permitted to escape, uncouple, return. (323-24)

Being created in the sex act is not important to Charles. He knows
he "is." His problem is to have that being recognized. But as an individual in his own right, possessing a humanity in spite of its denial by Sutpen, Charles is confounded in his quest for recognition by the growth of love: "'Only, Jesus,,'" says Shreve, "'some day you are bound to fall in love. They just wouldn't beat you that way. It would be like if God had got Jesus born and saw that he had the carpenter tools and then never gave him anything to build with them'" (323). As a condition of his humanity, Charles must love. At the same time, however, as Quentin's father realizes, Charles also loves something

   even more than Judith or Henry either: perhaps the life, the existence, which they represented. Because who knows what picture of peace he might have seen in that monotonous provincial backwater; what alleviation and escape for a parched traveler who had traveled too far at too young an age, in this granite-bound and simple country spring. (108)

Tragically, Charles is more parched traveler than lover; he must quench his thirst for recognition before all else. In the inverted world of Sutpen's South, then, love becomes "the corruption itself" (115), actually frustrating desire. Bon does not recognize, as Sutpen as well does not, that sanctuary from annihilation can be found only within the bounds of love. In order to cancel their father's outrage against love, the Sutpen children must love one another and become a family.

While Charles Bon's motives regarding the Sutpens are clear enough, Henry and Judith's--especially Henry's--regarding Bon are not. What does he see in Bon? Why does he seek him out? And what kind of a relationship does he desire? Critical opinion is divided here, Richard Adams suggesting on the one hand that Henry has a homosexual attraction
to Bon.16 On the other hand, John T. Irwin, in his always ingenious and often brilliant comparative study of Absalom, Absalom! and The Sound and the Fury, argues that Henry's motives, especially as they are understood by Quentin Compson, are primarily incestuous: "... Henry vicariously satisfies his own desire for his sister Judith by identifying himself with her lover..."17 Which is the correct reading? The novel seems to justify both. Occasionally Jason Compson, Quentin, and Shreve conclude that Henry's desires are primarily homoerotic. According to the elder Compson, Henry first sees Charles with "knowledge of the insurmountable barrier which the similarity of gender hopelessly intervened" (95). Still, he gives Bon "that complete and abnegant devotion which only a youth, never a woman, gives to another youth or a man." Shreve and Quentin imagine Henry turning his back on his birthright even though understanding "with complete despair the secret of his whole attitude toward Bon from that first instinctive moment when he had seen him a year and a quarter ago: he knew, yet he did not, had to refuse to, believe" (334). While not abandoning this view of Henry's motives, each of these narrators more often conceives of Henry's relationship with Bon as a form of doubling, with Bon as the surrogate for Henry's unacceptable incest desires. Compson suggests, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose

16 Myth and Motion, p. 195.
17 Doubling and Incest, p. 31.
for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. (96)

Compson believes that Henry tries to seduce Judith "to his own vicarious image which walked and breathed with Bon's body" (107). Similarly, Shreve imagines Henry saying to Charles:

'I used to think that I would hate the man that I would have to look at every day and whose every more and action and speech would say to me, I have seen and touched parts of your sister's body that you will never see and touch: and now I now that I shall hate him and that's why I want that man to be you.' (328)

But to say simply that Henry sexually desires sister and half-brother is hardly a satisfactory explanation of the complexity of his motives. It anchors desire primarily in the glands, neglecting mind and spirit. As such, this whole motif seems to have little to do with the novel's tragic pattern or theme. I would argue, however, that far from having over-active glands, Henry, as well as Judith, simply desire the same human wholeness Charles Bon seeks, but while Bon seeks a name to complement his physical being, Henry seeks to "be something" (347), to inform the identity he already possesses with being. John Irwin suggests that as Charles and Henry are projections of Quentin's imagination and his incestuous desires for his sister, they are "two aspects of the same figure." While this is certainly true of Quentin, it is also true that Henry and Charles are two aspects of the humanity riven by Thomas Sutpen. To complete himself, each wants what the other possesses. Judith becomes the physical symbol for an arena where a union of Charles and Henry's divided humanity might be consumated; she is "the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not

18 Doubling and Incest, p. 28.
the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be" (119-20).

Just as Mr. Compson's dramatization of Henry and Charles' trip to New Orleans functions largely as a metaphor for the urban South, so do the narrators' incest and homoerotic motifs symbolize Charles, Henry and Judith's desire for wholeness, the depth of their desire, and the illicit character of such desire in their father's morally inverted world. The novel's imagery tends to confirm this view.

Charles Bon, "the living man, was usurped" (97) by Henry and Judith, becoming the image of their need, "shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all" (107). According to their myth, Bon is a feminine image of life in the flesh, his experience and being, an ironic and distorted echo of the Lena Grove of Light in August. Henry first sees Bon in the "almost feminine garments of his sybaritic privacy," a man who wore "a gown and slippers such as women wore, in a faint though unmistakable effluvium of scent such as women used, smoking a cigar almost as a woman might smoke it" (317). To Henry, it is

as though [Bon] were a hero out of some adolescent Arabian Nights who had stumbled upon a talisman or touchstone not to invest him with wisdom or power or wealth, but with the ability and opportunity to pass from the scene of one scarce imaginable delight to the next one without interval or pause or satiety. (96)

Judith sees Bon "with exactly the same eyes as" Henry does, only her vision of Bon is a

maiden meditative dream ridden up out of whatever fabulous land, not in harsh stove iron but the silken and tragic Lancelot nearing
thirty, ten years older than she was and wearied, sated with what experiences and pleasures, which Henry's letters must have created for her. (320)

If Bon is body, woman, life, and experience, Henry and Judith are mind, man, abstraction, and inexperience, the three of them representing together the false duality which Faulkner explores in other ways in *Sartoris* and *Light in August*. Judith is, in certain respects, another of Faulkner's masculine women, with her father's eyes (65) and "the Sutpen with the ruthless code of taking what it wanted provided it were strong enough, . . . as Henry was the Coldfield with the Coldfield cluttering of morality and rules of right and wrong" (120). Should Henry refuse her the hand of Charles Bon, she would fight "the matter out with Henry like a man first, before consenting to revert to the woman, the loved, the bride" (92). In spite of this distinction between them, Henry and Judith are almost one, a "single personality with two bodies" (91-92), "curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity" (172). They have a rapport not like the conventional delusion of that between twins but rather such as might exist between two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred: the solitude, the shadow of that father. . . . (99)

At Henry's lead they strive to surrender to their growing love for Charles and to the fully physical life outside their father's shadow which their image of Bon seems to promise. With an "entire proffering of the spirit" (317) Henry urges Charles, "Hers and my lives are to exist within and upon yours" (325). Having turned his back on his birth-right for love, he tries to do what his father never can, by offering,
"What my sister and I have and are belongs to you" (332).

In their desire for union and the completion of their personalities, Henry and Judith recall Aristophanes' definition of love in Plato's "Symposium." There, Aristophanes reminds us that once there were three sexes, the male "at first born of the sun, and the female of the earth, and the common sex had something of the moon, which combines both male and female." 19 Zeus, angered by mankind's outrages against the gods, commanded that each of the three sexes be cut in half, even as Sutpen renders his children's humanity and divides them from one another. But —

when the original body was cut through, each half wanted the other, and hugged it. . . . So you see how ancient is the mutual love implanted in mankind, bringing together the parts of the original body, and trying to make one out of two, and to heal the natural structure of man." 20

The male seeks its female half just as the male-spirited Sutpens and the female-spirited Charles Bon, two halves of "flesh and bone and spirit which stemmed from the same source" (317-18), seek "to become one from two. For the reason is that this was our ancient natural shape, when we were one whole; and so the desire for the whole and the pursuit of it is named Love." 21

The fulfillment of Henry and Judith's desire is, of course, at first forestalled and then prevented by the abstract shibboleths of their culture. Wanting to justify the union of Charles and Judith,


20 Ibid., p. 87.

21 Ibid., p. 88.
wrestling "with his conscience to make it come to terms with what he wanted to do just like his father had that time more than thirty years ago" (270) when he put Eulalia Bon aside, Henry finds himself in a place where, like New Orleans, to his "puritan's provincial mind all of morality was upside down and all of honor perished" (114). For if Henry is to achieve the wholeness he seeks, he must overcome his region and family's taboos of incest and race. But Henry can never fully deny these abstractions; instead, with the incest taboo at least, he tries to rationalize, to find an escape clause:

"But kings have done it! Even dukes! There was that Lorraine duke named John something that married his sister. The Pope excommunicated him but it didn't hurt! It didn't hurt! They were still husband and wife. They were still alive. They still loved!" (342)

Ironically, it is the violation of this very incest taboo which all too briefly seems to offer Henry the being he and Judith desire, just as it holds the possibility of an identity for Bon. When, late in the War, he tells Charles to write Judith and so seal their engagement, he says,

"Thank God. Thank God," not for the incest of course but because at last they were going to do something, at last he could be something even though that something was the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity and training and the acceptance of eternal damnation. (347)

With Shreve we see the primal injustice of Henry's situation:

Jesus, think of the load he had to carry, born of two Methodists (or of one long invincible line of Methodists) and raised in provincial North Mississippi, faced with incest, incest of all things that might have been reserved for him, that all his heredity and training had to rebel against on principle, and in a situation where he knew that neither incest nor training was going to help him solve it. (340)

To fulfill his love he is unjustly forced to choose between being and identity, either his brother and sister or his heritage. His choice is
largely selfless. And because of the racial shibboleth which will force a second choice, all his agony comes to nothing. This first choice is but a dream in which he "clings . . . to the arm or leg which he knows must come off" (90), a dream he will soon "wake from and find it had been a dream, as in the injured man's fever dream the dear suffering arm or leg is strong and sound and only the well ones sick" (91).

Such are Thomas Sutpen's outrages against the human bond that Henry's dream of wholeness is never more than a dream. His father has made being and identity irreconcilable, and as part of the process of Dike his children must fail to join the being they desire with the identity they have been given. And we feel the primal injustice of this failure, that, as H. D. F. Kitto remarks of Hamlet, "the poison let loose . . . should destroy indiscriminately the good, the bad, and the indifferent." 22 The Sutpen children earn their fates only because they are Sutpen children, born of their father's compulsions which become their primary family bond, a bondage to him destroying the human bond. The narrators of the tragedy insist upon this injustice: To Aunt Rosa, Judith and Henry are "two accursed children" suffering the blows "of their devil's heritage" (135). And Shreve imagines "the old Abraham full of years and weak and incapable now of further harm, caught at last and the captains and the collectors saying, 'Old man, we don't want you!'" (325). Now that time has taken its revenge on Sutpen, "who was so old and weak now nobody would want him in the flesh on

22 "Hamlet and Greek Drama," p. 156.
any debt" (326), the remainder of the burden of Dike and the expiation falls, as is the nature of Dike, upon his children.

They begin to repay what Shreve calls their father's debts as his compulsions are reborn in them. When, at war's end, after four years' resistance to heritage and family blood, Henry meets his father, "they embrace and kiss before Henry is aware that he has moved, was going to move, moved by what of close blood which in the reflex instant abrogates and reconciles even though it does not yet (perhaps never will) forgive" (353). Henry's response to his father is instinctual, as is his response when Sutpen plays "his trump card" and tells him Charles is part black. Henry recoils from blackness as he did in the stable when his father fought his slaves and as his father fled blackness in Haiti. With the shibboleth of miscegenation there can be no rationalization, for father and son misperceive blackness as brutish, the source of identity's annihilation. Henry no longer wonders or struggles as he did with the incest taboo, but thinks only "not what he would do but what he would have to do. Because he knew what he would do; it now depended on what Bon would do, force him to do, since he knew that he would do it. So I must go to him, he thought. . . " (355). Having surrendered to his father's compulsive fear of the flesh, Henry becomes a "gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotized youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet" (174), playing a role scripted for him by his past, one he may not be prepared to play but to which he nevertheless adds his own interpretation. Like Joe and Joanna in Light in August, he may not deserve the role fate gives him, but he
becomes responsible for it insofar as he surrenders, self-hypnotized, to the chain of causality implicit in it.

Similarly, when Charles Bon at last knows his father will never recognize him, just as Pettibone would never recognize Sutpen, he surrenders to the compulsions of "the old mindless sentient undreaming meat that doesn't even know any difference between despair and victory" (349). Yielding to life's compulsion for recognition, he asks Henry, speaking of their father's failure to acknowledge him:

... What else can I do now? I gave him the choice, I have been giving him the choice for four years.
--Think of her. Not of me: of her.
--I have. For four years. Of you and her. Now I am thinking of myself.
--No, Henry says.--No. No.
--I cannot?
--You shall not.
--Who will stop me, Henry?
--No, Henry says.--No. No. No. (357)

Sutpen's children, caught in the flood of family destiny, finally look at their "companions in disaster" and think, "When will I stop trying to save them and save only myself?" (74). But as Charles' final question and Henry's denial above suggest, they resist the inevitable collisions of compulsions as long as they can, hoping that war, fate, circumstance will prevent "the ancient young delusions of pride and hope and ambition (ay, and love too)" (137) from reaching that "fateful intertwining, . . . that fatal snarly climax" (167). Charles tries to force Henry to kill him before they return to Mississippi and Henry hopes the war will claim him, because both know that in the end their compulsions will be masters of their love.

Cursed by "family fatality" (118), each Sutpen child must choose
whom or what he loves better. Henry must choose between brother and
sister; Charles must choose between love of self, the ground of love
for others, and love for his brother and sister. Choosing, they "suc-
cumb . . . to the current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa
said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to, black and white
both" (269). And they suffer, as Shreve understands, as part of the
process of Diké, "just to balance the books, write Paid on the old sheet
so that whoever keeps them can take it out of the ledger and burn it,
get rid of it" (325). In fully tragic irony, it seems that only by sur-
rendering to their compulsions and so destroying themselves can Sutpen's
children, "the dragon's outcropping of Sutpen's blood" (182), effect the
balance they are otherwise unable to achieve. Sutpen has raised his
children as instruments for the preservation of his design, but through
the compulsions they inherit they become the means of its destruction.
Sutpen manages to "corrupt, seduce and mesmerize" Henry so that "he (the
son) should do the office of the outraged father's pistol-hand when for-
nication threatened" only to return "from the war five years later and
find accomplished and complete the situation he had been working for:
son fled for good now with a noose behind him, daughter doomed to spin-
sterhood" (179). When, in other words, Sutpen annihilates Charles Bon,
literally and once and for all, he earns his own annihilation that his
design was intended to prevent. The final ironies of this tragic drive
to self-destruction are two: The son he denies in life is brought into
the house dead to lie in state while the boards for his coffin are "torn
from the carriage house" (150-51), a rending of the physical manifesta-
tions of the design Charles died to preserve. And, in the end, after
all the immediate family have died, when Sutpen's mansion has been con-
sumed by flames, "somewhere something lurked which bellowed, something
human since the bellowing was in human speech, even though the reason
for it would not have seemed to be" (375). All that remains of Sutpen's
design is Jim Bond, "the scion, the heir apparent" (370), exemplar of
the human bond, the "sentient undreaming meat," Sutpen cannot finally
deny. Bond howls in protest against the primal injustice of a retri-
bution which, to be accomplished, must descend upon the children's
children's children. Thus, as H. D. F. Kitto observes of Hamlet, the
evil loose in the world goes on "working in a concatenation . . . until
none are left and the slate is wiped clean." 23

But though it is not as affirmative as Joe Christmas' tragedy, the
Sutpen tragedy does not end in the meaningless despair and negation it
would seem to with Jim Bond's cries, for Thomas Sutpen's children not
only expiate his crimes but suffer to a recognition of the secret cause
of their family's fall. The murderer Henry, "who came and crashed a
door and cried his crime and vanished, who for the fact that he was
still alive was just that much more shadowy than the abstraction . . .
nailed into a box" (153), foresees the identity he killed Bon to pre-
serve, sacrificing everything thereby except knowledge and remorse.
Through his years of flight he becomes a kind of mute ancient mariner,
apparently recognizing the cause of his crime and suffering for that
recognition, but so far as we know never able to articulate that secret
cause. Never, that is, until he comes home to die and is questioned by
Quentin:

23 "Hamlet and the Greek Drama," p. 156.
And you are----?
Henry Sutpen.
And you have been here----?
Four years.
And you came home----?
To die. Yes.
To die?
Yes. To die.
And you have been here----?
Four years.
And you are----?
Henry Sutpen. (373)

The circularity of this exchange and the concatenation of the facts given--name, years, home, death--stands as an emblem of Henry's recognition and of the necessary cycle of cause, fall, knowledge, and expiation, a cycle which the circle of Joe Christmas' fate also describes.

Even Clytie, who endures "forty-five or fifty years of despair and waiting" (350), recognizes necessity in her family's fall, is filled with "terror, fear" (350) at the thought of further retribution, and rises to protest to Quentin the primal injustice of the apparently endless retribution fallen upon her, her brother, and sister: "'Whatever he done, me and Judith and him have paid it out'" (370). Her final ironic protest, of course, bringing an end to the retribution and restoring order through violent purification, is her torching of Sutpen's "here-to-fore inviolate and rotten mausoleum" (350).

But it is upon Judith, the one least culpable for her family's tragedy, that the burdens of expiation and recognition fall most heavily. Only thirty when her father is killed, she nevertheless has grown old before her time, "not as the weak grow old, . . . but as the demon himself had grown old: with a kind of condensation, an anguished emergence of the primary indomitable ossification" (185-86). In the palm
of her hand Miss Rosa reads "as from a printed chronicle the orphaning, the hardships, the bereave of love; the four hard barren years of scoriating loom, of axe and hoe and all the other tools decreed for men to use" (164). But throughout all the years of expiation, her "face which had long since forgotten how to be young" yet remains "absolutely impenetrable, absolutely serene: no mourning, not even grief" (126).

Hers is a serenity far different from the self-deluded serenity of Narcissa Benbow or the vegetative serenity of Lena Grove; Judith's is the serenity of one who has outlasted pain but who, by so doing, has lost the capacity to feel either joy or sorrow. Hers is the serenity of dogged endurance. She does not shrink from her fate; nor does she submit meekly. When, after Bon's death, she brings one of his letters to General Compson's wife, she protests:

"Read it if you like or don't read it if you like. Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they don't even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter." (127)

Judith may lack the tragic stature of her father and brother, but more than any other Sutpen she recognizes that the primal energies for human transcendence become tragic as they conflict with the energies of others
in an apparently random cosmic order. She resists being a puppet of this order. She protests time's flow reducing all things and negating human meaning. And as she protests negation by the loom of time, she affirms in the process the intrinsic value and meaning of fleshy human life. Her protest is a mark which has not faded—the Compson's have preserved it—and the letter of Charles Bon's she brings to make her mark is itself a celebration of this life. Of wartime privations he writes, "thank God" that man

"really does not become inured to hardship and privation: it is only the mind, the gross omnivorous carrion-heavy soul which becomes inured; the body itself, thank God, never reconciled from the old soft feel of soap and clean linen and something between the sole of the foot and the earth to distinguish it from the foot of a beast." (130)

"Even after four years," he continues, "with a sort of dismal and incorruptible fidelity which is incredibly admirable to me," his body "is still immersed and obviously bemused in recollections of old peace and contentment the very names of whose scents and sounds I do not know that I remember" (131). With this letter and her preservation of it, she makes "that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed" (129), creates the meaning her words of protest seem to deny. She thus earns for Charles Bon a kind of identity denied him while he lived. Now his suffering and struggle for recognition do "matter."

Having affirmed life in the flesh, Judith acknowledges the human bond joining men by recognizing her blood kinship with Charles Etienne Bon, repudiating thereby her father's design 24 and asserting the being

and identity of both herself and Charles. For him Judith hurls down the "iron old traditions" of her family and region, seeking to make "what moral restitution" she can: "I was wrong," she tells Charles Etienne, echoing the letter from his father, "I admit it. I believed that there were things which still mattered just because they had mattered once. But I was wrong. Nothing matters but breath, breathing, to know and to be alive" (207). Peter Swiggart faults Judith for her dealings with her nephew, suggesting she is guilty of moral compromise for urging him to leave his son with her and go North where he could pass for white. She would even tell others that Charles Etienne is Henry's son. 25 Bon, of course, rejects her offers as part of his Joe Christmas-like protest, "that indictment of heaven's ordering, that gage flung into the face of what is with a furious and indomitable desperation" (202). While he is right for the sake of his identity to reject her offers, Judith is no less right for making them, not only because she would heal the wound in her family, but also because she knows that his struggle is with a whole region, not just a particular family. She would spare him what suffering she can. Most important, she does not turn Charles Etienne from the door as her father and brother did his father. She even gives her life for him, nursing him when he is down with yellow fever or small pox. She dies for a particular man and principle of brotherhood that her father spent his life repudiating. When Miss Rosa has her buried, she has the grave moved as far as possible from the other family graves, as if to remove her as far as possible from the source of suffering, but ironi-

25 The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 166.
cally she suggests just how far from the others Judith has come in her recognition and humanity.

III

It remains for the narrators, through the "meager and fragile thread" (251) of language, to try to meaningfully articulate and dramatize the secret cause Judith and Henry understand so well. Together they do the job admirably, as I tried to suggest at the beginning of my discussion of Sutpen's primal energies. That none alone succeeds is due not so much to lack of information as to the condition of his or her wounded humanity. With the exception of Shreve, each reveals in the kind of story he or she tells the harm caused by the larger regional tragedy. The narrators, too, are part of Sutpen and the South's tragedy and part of the process of Dike. Like the narrators of *Light in August*, their knowledge is incomplete, their judgments evasive and self-serving. Rosa Coldfield and Jason Compson's accounts are neither fully meaningful nor tragic in themselves because each makes of the Sutpens' story something at once more and less than it really is. Both insist upon a mechanistic view of history which, while partially true, robs their subjects of the human will and passion necessary for tragedy. With a wealth of knowledge and a paucity of understanding, both Rosa and Compson tell stories which remain incredible to them and incomplete to us.

Rosa Coldfield is, like Miss Jenny Du Pre, another of Faulkner's strong, old women, but while Miss Jenny is strong in her family pride and in her memories of her family's past accomplishments, Miss Rosa is strong only in her hatred. Her story is largely a revenge against those
she hates: her father, aunt, and Thomas Sutpen. Born "at the price of her mother's life and . . . never . . . permitted to forget it" (59) by her father and aunt, she grows up, not a walking, breathing child and adolescent, but an abstract symbol for the pain and suffering of life, "a kind of passive symbol of inescapable reminding to rise bloodless and without dimension from the sacrificial stone of the marriage-bed" (61). Although raised by father and aunt "in that unpaced corridor which I called childhood, which was not living but rather some projection of the lightless womb itself" (144), to whom "the world came not even as living echo but as dead incomprehensible shadow" (162), still Rosa does not lose completely the capacity or the urge for life. She is like that blind subterranean fish, that insulated spark whose origin the fish no longer remembers, which pulses and beats at its crepuscular and lethargic tenement with the old unsleeping itch which has no words to speak with other than 'This was called light,' that 'smell,' that 'touch,' that other something which has bequeathed not even name for sound of bee or bird or flower's scent or sun or love-- . . . (144-45)

With little more than "root and urge" (144) of life, she grows up a "dreamer" (141), living life vicariously through Judith and Charles, rehearsing her part "as the faulty though eager amateur might steal wingward in some interim of the visible scene to hear the prompter's voice" (147). Ironically, it is Sutpen who, with a proper marriage proposal, could wake Rosa from her dream. She is prepared to give herself and her life to him:

I was that sun, who believed that he . . . was not oblivious of me but only unconscious and receptive like the swamp-freed pilgrim feeling earth and tasting sun and light again and aware of neither but only of darkness' and morass' lack—who did believe there was that magic in unkin blood which we call by the pallid name of love that would be, might be sun for him. . . . (167-68)
But his proposal to breed with her as a condition of marriage, "the initial blast of that horror and outrage" (177), annihilates her, as the imagery suggests Sutpen once was at Pettibone's door, and denies life to her: "do you see? the death of hope and love, the death of pride and principle, and then the death of everything save the old outraged and aghast unbelieving which has lasted for forty-three years" (168). All that remains to her then is a dead life of "impregnable solitude" (88) in a "dead house" (14), and "overpopulated mausoleum" (176) of hated ghosts, a life nourished only by "something fierce and implacable and dynamic" (367), "forty-five [sic] years of hate" (350), "an old woman's grim and implacable unforgiving." (14)

Deprived of life herself and believing that physical existence is only a "blind unsentient barrow of deluded clay and breath" (142), Rosa fails to see the human motives of those whose story she tells: what drove Sutpen in his design, why Henry killed Charles, why she actually agreed to marry Thomas Sutpen, and why both her family and the Sutpens suffer. All she has is "that same aghast and outraged unbelief" and the "Why? Why? and Why? that I have asked and listened to for almost fifty years" (167). Having robbed her tale of its humanity, she is hard pressed to assign individual responsibility for the suffering, so she settles quickly instead on the chief object of her hate, the "demon" on whom she was unable to take her revenge while he lived. If, according to her deluded logic, the progenitor is fate, then all descendants, relatives, and in-laws are merely victims of "a fatality and a curse" (21). Hers is a tight, coherent story, but circular, skirting life, and so, finally, an insufficient explanation of the Sutpen tragedy.
So too, is Jason Compson's account insufficient and even less meaningful, "It's just incredible," he tells Quentin. "It just does not explain" (100). It does not explain, first, because of the facile enervated cynicism and mechanistic fatalism so characteristic of Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. To him, the Sutpens, as well as all men past and present, are "victims" (89), "tools" (119) for "the illogical machinations of a fatality which had chosen that family in preference to any other in the county or the land exactly as a small boy chooses one ant-hill to pour boiling water into in preference to any other, not even himself knowing why" (102). He reminds us here of old Bayard Sartoris and Miss Jenny Du Pre at their doom-saying worst. Their jeremiads are presented largely for their ironic value and so are Compson's. Certainly a fate dogs the Sutpens, but he treats their "fateful mischance" (78) as though it were somehow outside them rather than inherent in characters, wills, and choices. He has this mistaken conception of fate largely because he, like Gail Hightower of *Light in August*, subscribes to a kind of biological determinism. Of the forebears of present Southerners he declares:

We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting. . . . (100-01)

Unlike old Bayard Sartoris protesting beside his attic trunk the death of the past, Jason Compson believes the past, however "shadowy" and inexplicable, will never die. And he is right, but he does not understand that it will never die, not because of some fateful force or the
character of one's genes, but because individuals choose in their need to enact it.

His version of the Sutpen story is inadequate, second, because of his reductive view of mankind past and present. Men like Sutpen were victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled, author and victim too of a thousand homicides and a thousand copulations and divorcements. (89)

If Miss Rosa'a character psychology is something akin to that in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, then Compson's is out of a James Fenimore Cooper novel. He tells the particular story he does because, as Joseph Reed suggests, "he wants the fiction to fit his rather tired philosophical bromides so that he can feel superior not only to the story but to the men and women who originally enacted the events which form it." 26 We can grant Sutpen's heroism and even his peculiar kind of simplicity, but to see him as simple in the way Compson sees him is to deny the complex motivations born of the conflict between Sutpen's simplicity and the world, a conflict that impells him on his tragic course. On the other hand, given Compson's vision of fragmented modern man, a view perhaps revealing his own confusion, disintegration, and incomplete humanity, it is no wonder he is unable to create a coherent and meaningful picture of the past:

--Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the

26 Faulkner's Narrative, p. 163.
name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (101)

When we finish with Compson's version of the story, we have little more than "the words, the symbols," and his simile here is a symptom of why this is so. The Sutpen's tragedy is more than a formula, more than the sum of its elements. Nothing happens when Compson combines these elements because he has neglected the catalysts: human energy, will, faith, and spirit. Without these, the Sutpen story must remain "incredible."

It takes Shreve and Quentin to make the story credible and, by so doing, dramatize it as the tragedy it is. As I suggested at the beginning of my discussion of this novel, they do not create the tragedy alone. Without Rosa and Compson's versions, theirs would be incomplete, too. As they fill the "snug monastic coign" of their Harvard room with "the violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons" (258) of the past, they draw on past readings of the story. "Yes," Quentin thinks, "we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us" (261-62). They shape and are shaped in the telling by the past and shape each other's telling as well by some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of of the other--faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived. . . . (316)

More important, they add the humanity and humane vision which the story
has thus far lacked. Theirs is not a moralizing mission of revenge or a mechanistic evasion of responsibility but an attempt to discover the life implied in Shreve's questions about the South which prompt their inquiry: "What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (174). As so many have recognized, theirs is an imaginative search for truth; they live in and through their characters. As Leslie Angell suggests, Shreve and Quentin are bound together in their humanity as by an umbilical cord and, in their telling, bind past to present.²⁷ "Thinking as one" (303) and warming to their story, "it was not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither" (351). They suffer physically with their characters: "They did not retreat from the cold. They bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation of physical misery transmogrified into the spirits' travail of the two young men during that time fifty years ago" (345). At last, they become one with the spirits of Henry and Charles, "the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins, the heart and blood of youth" (294). Together, "profoundly intent, not at all as two young men might look at each other but almost as a youth and a very young girl might out of virginity itself--a sort of hushed and naked searching" (299), Shreve and Quentin, in Hyatt Waggoner's words, "retell the facts about Sutpen and his children in order to discover the feelings that can

²⁷ "The Umbilical Cord Symbol as Unifying Theme and Pattern in Absalom, Absalom!," Massachusetts Studies in English, 1 (1968), 109-10.
make the facts credible, rehearsing the deeds to discover the motives.”

Feeling with their characters, they soon come to the catalyst of the Sutpen tragedy, what Quentin's father calls "some of the old virtues" (121), especially love, "where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false." All that comes before it is "just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always has to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire" (316). Together they discover the secret cause the other accounts lack because they seek it within man as well as outside him.

Though they succeed together, neither Shreve nor Quentin alone are qualified to tell the story. Shreve's deficiencies result largely because he is an outsider. He is qualified by the bond of humanity he shares with Quentin and his subjects, symbolized by "that River" joining Mississippi and Alberta, "which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical, not only runs through the spiritual lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature" (358). But he lacks, as Cleanth Brooks puts it, "a sense of the presence of the past, and with it, and through it, a personal access to a tragic vision." which Quentin possesses: "... it's something my people haven't got," Shreve says. "'What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred

28 From Jefferson to the World, pp. 149-50.
29 The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 314.
and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of birthright ... ?" (361). As a result, Shreve is younger than Quentin who is "older at twenty than a lot of people who have died" (377). Shreve is moved by Sutpen's tragedy, certainly, but his is not the catharsis that Quentin approaches; rather, it is "that incorrigible unsentimental sentimentality of the young" (275). His response is as much "intent detached speculation and curiosity" (256) as it is passionate involvement. Left to himself, he would probably create not a tragedy but a melodrama: "'Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it'" (217). And at the novel's close, when Quentin is wrestling with the paradox of his heritage which Sutpen's tragedy has revealed for him, Shreve can only see a vast panorama of racial and cultural evolution, as bloodless as it is fuzzily optimistic.

Quentin does become capable of the vision Shreve lacks, does suffer the tragedy of his homeland with his subjects, and is illuminated by the secret cause of the suffering, but he resists, unable to finally accept what he learns. Like Rosa and the Sutpen children, he, too, has been afflicted by the disease in their common past. At the novel's opening, when he receives Miss Rosa's "summons, out of another world almost" (10), Quentin is unaware that there are "two separate Quentins" (9). To the one Quentin preparing for Harvard, the past is as obscure and lifeless as it is to his father. As Miss Rosa talks, this Quentin imagines the Sutpens

"arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum, and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself . . ., a group which . . . had a quality strange contradictory and bizarre; not quite comprehensible, not (even to twenty) quite right." (14)
Miss Rosa's tale of the Sutpen's has for him "that logic-and reason-flouting quality of a dream" (22). Seemingly uninvolved, he wonders testily to his father why she chose him to hear her story and help her run her errand to Sutpen's Hundred. But the other Quentin is involved, chosen by heritage, genealogy, and the consequences of the regional tragedy Thomas Sutpen was a part of: "it was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen; a part of the town's--Jefferson's--eighty years' heritage. . ." (11). His father tells him, "'And so she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend Sutpen ever had in this country. . . . So maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him'"

(12-13). Quentin's very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence. (12)

It is the task of this other Quentin, the one claimed by the past, to discover the cause of the disease and fever in the story of Thomas Sutpen, to separate it from the regret if he can, to understand the cause of present impotence, and so, perhaps, reclaim himself. As John Hunt remarks, "In some way, Sutpen's story holds for [Quentin] the key to the whole Southern experience. If he could explain Sutpen, . . .
That Quentin finally resists the explanation is due more to the pain it causes than to his regret or spiritual impotence. He tells Sutpen's story in "that overtone of sullen bemusement, of smoldering outrage" (218), because he would avoid if he could the pain that comes with its terrible knowledge. As he nears the point in the story where Charles Bon dies, he thinks,

*I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do.* (277)

At the same time, it is a condition of his humanity that he must tell the story, just as he had to know the secret of Sutpen's Hundred months before. When, that night, he saw Miss Rosa's expression as she descended from Henry's room, he thought:

>'What? What is it now? It's not shock. And it never has been fear. Can it be triumph?' . . . and he stood there thinking, 'I should go with her' and then, 'But I must see too now. I will have to. Maybe I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see.' So when he came back down the stairs . . . he remembered how he thought, 'Maybe my face looks like hers did, but it's not triumph.' (370-71)

What he recognized when he saw Henry's face, that face which will be "the same forever as long as [Quentin] lived," (373) is the suffering of one like himself. "It is," Richard Sewall suggests, "as if the whole burden of the South's (and mankind's) tragic dilemma is suddenly placed on his young shoulders." He resists telling Sutpen's story

30 Art in Theological Tension, p. 106.

31 The Vision of Tragedy, p. 136.
because to do so is to confront that face again and its indictment of the heritage which is the ground of his identity, to be reminded that man outgrows his father and the past--sources of impotence as well as value--not by escape to Harvard or by outliving one's past, but through the transcending process of expiation for past outrage. It is a tribute to the fullness of Quentin's humanity that he does tell Sutpen's story and so confront once more the "Nevermore of peace" (373), the source of terror which Richard Sewall calls the "irreconcilables" in the story.32 But having first resisted and then recounted the story, Quentin cannot accept what he knows: "'I don't hate [the South],' Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; 'I dont hate it,' he said. I dont hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!" (378) He cannot accept the paradox of hating what he loves, of denying a certain identity in the past for individual humanity in an uncertain future. He stands poised at the novel's close between the past and the future, between identity and being, hearing the howls of the outraged flesh--"'But you've got him there still,'" Shreve reminds him of Jim Bond. "'You still hear him at night sometimes. Don't you?' 'Yes,' Quentin said," (378)--but unable to surrender to the demands of that protest.

Faulkner has been roundly criticized for ending his novel this way, in ambivalence and paradox. Walter J. Slatoff, for example, argues that the end of the novel is "pitiful": "Faulkner again demonstrates his unwillingness or inability to step beyond the sanctuary of the

32 The Vision of Tragedy, p. 147.
paradox, to make, himself, as do a number of his characters, the clarifying 'gesture,' the clarifying 'humanistic act of faith.'"\(^{33}\) And John Paterson suggests that with Sutpen's death, "the light goes out as if forever. Succeeded . . . by a totally demoralized Quentin Compson, Sutpen passes on not a new and better world born out of the violence and ashes of the old, but a ruined universe incapable of regeneration."\(^{34}\) It appears that what these readers want is not tragedy but a morality play. The "act of faith" Slatoff requires exists in the telling of the tragedy. To be able to tell truthfully ensures that, while regeneration may not be possible for Quentin, it may be possible for his listeners. We must remember that there is a fifth account of the Sutpen legend, the one we create as we read the other four, literally a "regeneration." The "clarifying gesture" is ours to make. Furthermore, it seems unrealistic to expect any more of Quentin than we get. For him to do any more, to resolve the paradox of his heritage, is to violate plausibility and the historical context. It is, after all, 1910 at the novel's close. Now, I am not reading several months beyond Quentin's last words in Absalom, Absalom! to his suicide in The Sound and the Fury. But I imagine that these critics do and that this cross-referencing partially explains why they find the close of Absalom, Absalom! so bleak. I am referring to conditions in the South and the nation as a whole in 1910. How many were able to resolve Quentin's paradox then, or even when the novel was published? Only now, over

\(^{33}\) Quest for Failure, p. 201.  
\(^{34}\) "The Prosaics of Tragedy," p. 36.
sixty years after Quentin's death and thirty years after the publication of the novel has the South begun to grapple with the paradox of its heritage—and only after recognizing, as Faulkner did, that it truly is a paradox, a whole series of paradoxes, in fact: that the past is the present and cannot be denied, that innocence can be the source of evil, that love can be the source of great suffering, that identity depends upon fleshy humanity as the source of its value, that in loving his heritage, the Southerner must also hate parts of it, and that in tragedy one prevails only by enduring it.

Far from being a defect, the conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!* is one more aspect of its greatness. And this may be Faulkner's greatest novel. In no other novel of his is the structure of image and event so much the equal to the intellectual and narrative demands placed upon it. In no other is his vision so broad, so sure, so clear. In no other is man's place in the cosmos so much a question. In no other does Faulkner balance so clearly man's will against the fate he creates. And in no other does he penetrate so deeply to the secret cause of the Southern tragedy which is both his primary theme and the means by which he universalizes the experience he narrates.
PART V
CHAPTER XI

"BETWEEN THE BIZARRE AND THE TERRIBLE":

THE EVOLUTION OF A VISION

I.

The principal thesis of this study of Faulkner's tragic vision has been that the great differences among Sartoris, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom! show an evolution in the images and ideas that present his tragedy. The novels differ because each time Faulkner wrote he saw his central subject, the tragedy of the South, differently. My concern until now has been more with the nature of the changes in this vision than with these changes as indications of Faulkner's artistic growth. As so many readers have recognized, Faulkner was an uneven artist even when working at the height of his powers. Irving Howe, for example, proposes that his "work proceeds not as a straight line of progress but as a complex and hesitant spiral."¹ But among the three tragedies examined here there is evidence, not only of an evolution, but of progress as well: a sharpening of Faulkner's vision, an enlargement in the understanding of his materials, a refinement of his perception of how the secret cause of the South's tragedy works on individuals, and an increase in his stylistic power and control. We can chart the growth of this vision and artistry in the imagery which develops several ideas

¹ William Faulkner, p. 79.
central to his tragedies: duality, stasis and motion, the stain on the land, and tragic necessity.

The energizing power of each of the tragedies is "the heart in conflict with itself," the riven personality, one half earth-bound and mortal, the other chained to the earth-bound half but aspiring to transcendence and immortality. It is tragic man's belief that he can separate the immortal dream from the mortal dreamer, a belief that leads him to hubris and hamartia. This self-created breach in his nature is almost always presented by images of duality. Lying in the Jefferson town marshall's bed the evening after being thrown by the wild stallion, young Bayard Sartoris' head was clear and cold; the whisky he had drunk was completely dead. Or rather, it was as though his head were one Bayard who lay on a strange bed and whose alcohol-dulled nerves radiated like threads of ice through that body which he must drag forever about a bleak and barren world with him. (160)

As Joe Christmas is whipped by Simon McEachern, Joe's body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and selfcrucifixion. (150)

Thomas Sutpen, after his return at the end of the war, ages rapidly:

The flesh came upon him suddenly, as though what the negroes and Wash Jones, too, called the fine figure of a man had reached and held its peak after the foundation had given away and something between the shape of him that people knew and the uncompromising skeleton of what he actually was had gone fluid and, earthbound, had been snubbed up and restrained, balloonlike, unstable and lifeless, by the envelope which it had betrayed. (81)

Certain similarities between the first two passages are readily apparent: duality in Sartoris and Light in August separates the mind from body; the mind rules the body; both tragic heroes would free themselves from their burdensome flesh; and the body suffers for the mind's
obsession with transcendence. There are, however, distinct differences between the two passages. In the passage from *Sartoris* we are presented with a passive Bayard, lying in bed at the marshall's because he has been arrested at Miss Jenny Du Pre's orders--a submission to matronly authority we would scarcely expect of a tragic figure. By contrast, the passage from *Light in August* presents us with a boy aloof from and resisting the discipline of his step-father. Whatever pain McEachern inflicts, Joe maintains his reserve and control. Joe is more the victim of his society than the freer Bayard is the victim of his family, yet the imagery of the earlier novel suggests that Bayard is the greater victim. Joe, however, never yields to the kind of self-pity which absorbs Bayard throughout much of *Sartoris*. The world surrounding Bayard is one of vivid growth and change, not the wasteland he envisions it. With the more tragic Joe, however, we sense not futility and despair but the implacability of his resistance to his world's threatening nature. These two passages differ in Faulkner's control of his tragic materials; they also differ in his control of the imagery. In the *Sartoris* passage, Faulkner is reduced to explaining his imagery through a direct statement of Bayard's self-pity. In the *Light in August* passage, however, he uses the image of duality not only to register the idea of duality but also the features of Joe's tragic character: his isolation from self and others, the mind's distorted view of the body, and the character of the transcendence Joe seeks. Here the image carries the burden of meaning within it.

The image of Thomas Sutpen's duality is altogether different from the imagery of the earlier novels because it is an aged and aging tragic
hero who is presented here. The imagery also differs because Faulkner's conception of duality differs: the tragic breach is no longer between mind and body. Rosa Coldfield elsewhere explains this new conception in a dense purple passage: The

prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, relicts the seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished. . . . (143)

In this novel, duality divides matter from spirit. The human spirit does not so much seek to escape the brute, material life of the body as to transubstantiate it, the tragic dream as much about transfiguration as transcendence. Duality is presented as a metaphysical element of human life rather than as a problem in psychology. The imagery of duality here also reveals another kind of artistic growth. As the image of the post or tower does for Joe Christmas in Light in August, the dead architectural metaphor—"foundation"—evokes Sutpen's rigidity of character and purpose. But Faulkner takes a more complex view of the relationship between the dreamer and his dream, between the rigid, tragic man and the image he impresses on the stubborn world he drives himself against. The dreamer—"the uncompromising skeleton"—never sacrifices the original form of his dream, a kind of Platonic ossification, but the fluid life he would transfigure demands perpetual compromise and destroys him even as he tries to shape it. The final irony is that fluid life remains between the dreamer and his image, between
the "skeleton" and the "envelope," betraying one and changing the other almost beyond the dreamer's capacity for recognition.

Attempting to transcend his humanity and avoid life's necessary curve of change, decay, and death, tragic man drives himself against the motion of life. Instead of reversing life's flow, however, the tragic hero dooms himself to a furious stasis in motion. This second image motif presents a contrast between the hero's illusion or quest for a motion generating transcendence and the actual static quality of his life. Perhaps the clearest example of young Bayard Sartoris' stasis is, artistically, the weakest. After turning his car over in a shallow creek, he is carried home by two blacks in their wagon:

it seemed to him that the three of them and the rattling wagon and the two beasts were caught in a senseless treadmill: a motion without progress, forever and to no escape. (212)

The image certainly dramatizes the quality of Bayard's motion, the seductive trap of his family's rigid dream, and the futility of his ambivalent attempts either to claim or escape from the heroic Sartoris identity existing only in the minds of family dreamers. The image achieves this meaning by echoing, however faintly, the stasis of the figures on Keat's Grecian Urn, a stasis which is attractive yet terrifying to poet and returned soldier alike. But the treadmill image is trite and Faulkner, as he does in the Sartoris image of duality, explains himself more than is necessary. An even more telling weakness is the obviously half-formed character of the tragic hero's defiance. We expect more of the tragic hero's mood of resistance; instead we are presented with a stasis which is pathetic and ironic.

By contrast, the imagery of stasis in motion in Light in August
and Absalom, Absalom! reveals Faulkner in command of both idea and imagery. We are shown Joe Christmas after he has struck Simon McEachern at the school dance, robbed Mrs. McEachern, and as he rides toward Bobbie Allen and what he believes will be escape from his past.

Though the horse was still going through the motion of galloping, it was not moving much faster than a man could walk. . . . It—the horse and the rider—had a strange, dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion as it galloped steady and flagging up the street. . . . The horse was not even trotting now, on stiff legs, its breathing deep and labored and rasping, each breath a groan. The stick still fell; as the progress of the horse slowed, the speed of the stick increased in exact ratio. . . . Yet still the rider leaned forward in the arrested saddle, in the attitude of terrific speed, beating the horse across the rump with the stick. Save for the rise and fall of the stick and the groaning respirations of the animal, they might have been an equestrian statue strayed from its pedestal and come to rest in an attitude of ultimate exhaustion in a quiet and empty street splotched and dappled by moonshadows. (196-97)

And in Absalom, Absalom! Rosa Coldfield watches Sutpen as he rides up to his plantation at war's end:

I stood there before the rotting portico and watched him ride up on that gaunt and jaded horse on which he did not seem to sit but rather seemed to project himself ahead like a mirage, in some fierce dynamic rigidity of impatience which the gaunt horse, the saddle, the boots, the leaf colored and threadbare coat with its tarnished and flapping braid containing the sentient though nerveless shell, which seemed to precede him as he dismounted. . . . (159)

In each of these passages Faulkner fully engages our intelligence, imagination, and emotions. Through the image of the film in the Light in August passage we are presented with the futility of Joe's flight: to flee McEachern for Bobbie Allen is to encounter another version of the same society's rejection. His actions carry him to what is, for us at least, a predictable conclusion. By then comparing horse and rider to a "strayed statue, Faulkner fixes in our minds the misdirected quality of Joe's motion, his rigidity, his lostness. And we cannot help but
pity that poor horse Joe beats mercilessly, even as we pity Joe watching him drive himself savagely and defiantly against an increasingly intractable social reality. So, too, does the image of Sutpen on his horse fix for us the character of his energies and motion. Despite the urgency of his attitudes—the appearance of forward motion—the rotting house in the background reveals that it is already too late for him to realize his dream. The mirage of his self-projection reveals the insubstantiality of his design, the final ephemeral quality of all his efforts to stop time. Ironically, the rigid projection of Sutpen's figure anticipates his tragedy: insofar as he precedes himself in tatters and brings ruin upon himself, his end is implicit in the image he projects. In his "dynamic rigidity," an ironic phallic image of his corrupt life-impulses, Sutpen reveals not only the futility of his motion but the impotence of his attempt to stop time.

In *Sartoris*, Faulkner attempted to use horse and rider imagery to evoke stasis in motion, but his ambivalence toward his materials greatly reduces its effectiveness. As young Bayard leaps on the wild stallion, The beast burst like bronze unfolded wings; the onlookers tumbled away from the gate and hurled themselves to safety as the gate splintered to matchwood beneath its soaring volcanic thunder... The stallion moved beneath him like a tremendous mad music, uncontrollable, splendidly uncontrollable. The rope served only to curb its direction, not its speed.... His eyes were streaming a little; beneath him the surging lift and fall; in his nostrils a sharpness of rage and energy and violated pride like smoke from the animal's body.... (133-34)

With the simile of the bronze wings Faulkner fixes Bayard's false motion as he attempts to master this symbol of pride and thus claim the family's rigid heroic identity. One problem, however, is that the reader links horses to wings, remembers Pegasus, and thinks of heroic success, not
the futility Faulkner wishes to present. By mixing his romantic meta-
phors Faulkner only increases the problem of his imagery: the thunder,
the music, and the smoke add further romantic elements to the pattern,
making it almost impossible to evaluate the quality of Bayard's gesture
with any certainty. Apparently Faulkner got carried away in his identi-
fication with his protagonist and forgot about the importance of ironic
narrative distance in a scene like this. He does not make this mistake
in the horse and rider images of Light in August and Absalom. Joe,
after all, rides a groaning, sweating plowhorse; Sutpen's horse is
gaunt, his uniform--his heroic trappings--threadbare. In the later
tragedies, Faulkner does not permit us to romanticize his protagonists'
defiance or dream of transcendence. In other words, his tragic vision
evolves not only thorough changes in ideas but also through changes of
attitude and point of view which sharpen judgment.

A third pattern of imagery revealing the growth of Faulkner's
vision is that presenting man's outrages against nature--the stain on
the land. In Sartoris the outrage is not an essential part of the
tragic pattern; rather it is presented either as characterization or
incidental social commentary and then dropped. After Bayard is thrown
by the stallion, he rides with V. K. Suratt and Hub to the farm Hub
works on shares:

... the land fell away in ragged, ill-tended fields and beyond
them, in a clump of sorry fruit trees and a stunted grove of silver
poplar shrubs pale as absinthe and twinkling ceaselessly with no
wind, a small weathered house squatted. Beyond it and much larger,
loomed a barn gray and gaunt with age. ... Beyond the bordering
weeds a fence straggled in limp dilapidation, and from the weeds
beside it the handles of a plow stood at a gaunt angle while its
share rusted peacefully in the undergrowth, and other implements
It is difficult to know where outrage lies here, in Hub's "violation" of the land or in the social system that creates despair and robs the self-respect of sharecroppers like him. And whom do we blame for this outrage: Hub, at best a lackadaisical farmer; a man like old Bayard Sartoris who maintains the sharecropping system; or the times which have doomed the great plantations while at the same time providing no fulfilling work for men like Hub? Perhaps no blame is necessary since, after all, the land regenerates itself, healing the scars of its "violation." And Hub's suffering is not acute. It begins to seem that Faulkner here is absorbed by sentiment. How can farming be seriously considered as a "violation" of the land? In this scene, at least, the stain on the land is barely a smudge; there is no moral outrage and little moral vision.

While the idea of the stain on the land in Light in August is part this novel's social commentary, Faulkner subordinates the motif to his larger tragic design, informing it with his protest against destructive and self-destructive communities. The sawmill in Doane's Mill had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away. But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan—gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stump-pocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equi-
noxes. Then the hamlet which at its best day had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals would not now even be remembered by the hookwormridden heirs-at-large who pulled the buildings down and burned them in cookstoves and winter grates. (2-3)

Here there is outrage, definite and clear. The mill completely destroys the land; it cannot be farmed, does not regenerate itself. Here we know where blame lies: with men who live because of and for an economic system based on greed, plunder, and waste, a system which destroys the circles of natural and social life and then moves on in its vicious rhythms. This image of destruction early in the novel prepares us for the later outrages other communities practice upon Joe Christmas. But the outrages are analogous, not synonymous. The stain on the land evoked here is not part of Joe's tragedy. Nor is the protagonist implicated in this outrage; like the pine forests the mill destroys, Joe is a victim of the outrages committed by those in conflict with nature.

In Absalom, however, the tragic protagonist himself puts the stain on the land; this outrage is presented with such weight and urgency that, for the moment, Faulkner's moral sense overwhelms the tragic design, obliterating his narrative distance from his materials. Quentin Compson tells us that the Caribbean island to which Sutpen flees from the Virginia tidewater is a place where high mortality was concomitant with the money and the sheen on the dollars was not from gold but from blood—a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself, Grandfather said, as a theater for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed—a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea...—a little lost island in a latitude which would require ten thousand years of equatorial heritage to bear its climate, a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation until it sprang with an incredible paradox of peaceful greenery and crimson flowers... as if nature held a
Here evil is more than mere greed, more than a flaw in a social or economic system; here evil lies at the heart, not simply of a region, but of a whole culture founded upon dominion over man and nature. In *Absalom*, evil is an outrage against the fundamental order of things and the order of man's harmony with nature. This is the secret cause of the tragedy Faulkner could only grope for in a novel like *Sartoris*. As he does not in the earlier novels, he takes an almost mystical view of this essential balance of all things, finding therein the possibility of recompense or at least vengeance for outrages committed. The cosmos demands this Dike, whether it be the sinking of treasure ships which have plundered the western hemisphere or the destruction of a social order and family dynasty guilty of these outrages. Faulkner violates point of view to register his protest and explain his imagery, but we are not put off by his intrusion as we are in *Sartoris*. Given the harmony of the outrage and the action, his protest rings like a choric lament as the tragedy unfolds. Faulkner's moral vision has grown apace with the tragic.

A final cluster of images evokes tragic necessity—the tragic arc—and suggests the final effect of each novel. There is no one image in *Sartoris* which evokes the tragic arc—the hero's movement from hubris to hamartia, peripety, and fall, but the image which comes
closet to signifying this pattern is that of Colonel John Sartoris' graveyard statue:

His head was lifted a little in that gesture of haughty pride which repeated itself generation after generation with a fateful fidelity, his back to the world and his carven eyes gazing out across the valley where his railroad ran, and the blue changeless hills beyond, and beyond that, the ramparts of infinity itself. (375)

We cannot judge the Sartoris' *hubris* too harshly because it is born of their very human fear of time's necessity, their blind dreams of transcendence and dominion, a defiance of mutability. Their tragedy repeats itself in each generation because each generation has the same fear, so dreams the same dream, and then falls victim to its illusions in time. The secret cause their tragedy, then, lies not so much in their natures or even in their dreams but in the nature of time. We are attracted by their romantic defiance of the fear we share. Faulkner further frustrates our ability to evaluate critically the Sartoris' dream and tragedy by shifting our perception to the most sympathetic Sartoris and the one most responsible for the nature of the dream, Aunt Jenny Du Pre.

Miss Jenny stood for a time, musing, a slender, erect figure in black silk and a small, uncompromising black bonnet. The wind drew among the cedars in long sighs, and steadily as pulses the sad hopeless reiteration of the doves came along the sunny air. Isom returned for the last armful of dead flowers, and looking out across the marble vistas where the shadows of noon moved, she watched a group of children playing quietly and a little stiffly in their bright Sunday finery, among the tranquil dead. Well, it was the last one, at last, gathered in solemn conclave about the dying reverberation of their arrogant lusts, their dust moldering quietly beneath the pagan symbols of their vainglory and the carven gestures of it in enduring stone; and she remembered something Narcissa had said once, about a world without men, and wondered if therein lay peaceful avenues and dwellings thatched with quiet; and she didn't know. (376)

The ironic, tragic resistance of Sartoris men is, in Miss Jenny, an
admirable quality. Any sense of tragic loss we might feel is blunted both by the description of her and by the "pulses" of life in the sentimental images of the doves, the playing children, and the "enduring" family monuments. As time's subjects, the family may be brought to dust, suffering because of their humanity, but their hamartia has injured no one, really, but themselves. Life continues--as does the dream in a new generation of dreamers. Miss Jenny is wrong; young Bayard is not the last Sartoris. With Jenny and with Faulkner's narrator we feel a romantic-ironic ambivalence toward the family and its tragedy. As she is, we are not sure the world would be better without the "arrogant lusts" and "vainglory" of the family's dream.

In contrast with the static image of necessity in Sartoris, the tragic images in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! are dynamic, containing within themselves Faulkner's recognition that the tragic arc of the hero's fate duplicates the order and rhythm of all things subject to time: rise and fall, growth and decay. In Sartoris, the family stands apart from the circle; in Light in August, Joe Christmas' tragedy takes place within it:

he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled further than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo.' he thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves. (321)

The circle of Joe's fate is an image of the relationship between past
and present and cause and effect--an image of the tragic figure hemmed in by his nature, the community circle, and time. Unlike the tragic imagery in *Sartoris*, this image presents not only the hero's ironic repetition--his stasis--but his movement as well. Christmas grows into knowledge, recognition of fate and his relationship to that fate, setting the pace. His circle leads him to the necessary end of his motion: the black identity which was the origin of his defiance and the death which is the price for that defiance. The image of the circle presents the hero's victimization more forcefully than the image of the statue in *Sartoris*; as a result, when it turns from recognition to death we feel greater necessity and greater tragic loss. The final effect of the imagery in *Light in August* is naturalistic yet tragic.

In *Absalom*, the sense of the tragic is even greater. After Sutpen's return from the Civil War, Miss Rosa watched his old man's solitary fury fighting now not with the stubborn yet slowly tractable earth as it had done before, but now against the ponderable weight of the changed new time itself as though he were trying to dam a river with his bare hands and a shingle: and this for the same spurious delusion of reward which had failed (failed? betrayed: and would this time destroy) him once; I see the analogy myself now: the accelerating circle's fatal curving course of his ruthless pride, his lust for vain magnificence, though I did not then. (162)

Here Faulkner presents Sutpen's whole tragedy in one image cluster: the order he defies, the energy of his defiance, the presumption in his defiance, his *hamartia*, peripety, and fall. The scope of his tragedy is greater than that of the Sartorises or Joe Christmas as he expends himself struggling to reverse the cosmic order, the flow in the stream of time of all living things. We are shown both the insufficiency of that gesture and the heroic character of his attempt. The harder he drives
himself against necessity, the more he becomes its subject, creating
the curving fate he would avoid and so bringing himself to the earth
from which he sprang and which, in his hubris, he outraged. In fully
tragic irony, Sutpen victimizes himself. Faulkner does not permit us
to romanticize his tragedy. We see that its secret cause lies only
partly outside him in the times or society: chiefly it lies within, in
the nature of his energies. This is fully tragic necessity.

II.

A second thesis organizing this study of Faulkner's tragedy has
been that his tragic vision is the essential informing power of his
art. One way to test this thesis is see whether this signature of his
style is present when his artistic aims are other than tragic, when,
as in The Hamlet, they are comic. To make this test is to discover
that Faulkner's tragedy is not a thing contained: it informs in var-
ious ways all his art, and its use in the presentation of comedy, there-
fore, represents another stage in its evolution. Critics have been
quick to note that The Hamlet draws on materials common to the tragedies,
Cleanth Brooks, for example, tracing the novel's use of heroic allusion,2
and Duane Edwards examining the parallels in the characterizations of
Thomas Sutpen and Flem Snopes.3 But no one that I am aware of has ex-
lored the ways Faulkner uses tragic imagery and ideas to inform his
comedy.

2 The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 168 + 173.
As so many modern writers have, Faulkner understood that at some point laughter and tears come very close to being one. At the University of Virginia he insisted that "there's not too fine a distinction between humor and tragedy, that even tragedy is in a way walking a tightrope between the ridiculous--between the bizarre and the terrible." His art certainly dramatizes this tension. "Between the bizarre and the terrible" is not only an apt statement of the kind of grotesque incongruity which is so much a part of Faulker's comedy and the comedy of other twentieth-century writers; it is also an accurate description of the positions of tragic figures like Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen facing what seem to them to be the malevolent order of the cosmos on one hand and the terrible price to be paid for defying this order on the other. In many novels, Faulkner yokes tragedy and comedy, using the tensions between the two modes to strengthen and enrich his narrative. In *Sartoris*, for example, Faulkner uses old Bayard Sartoris, Jenny Du Pre, and Horace Benbow's comic commentary on the Sartoris family doom to reveal the ironic character of the family fate. And in *Light in August*, the comic stories of Lena Grove, Byron Bunch, and Lucas Burch provide comic relief from and ironic commentary on the tragedy of Joe Christmas. Here the comedy is subordinate to and controlled by the tragic structure. In *The Hamlet*, however, tragic images, ideas, and characters comment on the comedy, heighten our sense of comic incongruity, and give a weight and seriousness of vision to the novel which it might otherwise lack. The novel yokes the two modes from the beginning, opening on a scene of old tragedy, the site of the unnamed Frenchman's once magnificent plantation:
he was gone now, the foreigner, the Frenchman with his family and his slaves and his magnificence. His dream, his broad acres were parcelled out now into small shiftless mortgaged farms for the directors of Jefferson banks to squabble over before selling finally to Will Varner, and all that remained of him was the river bed which his slaves had straightened for almost ten miles to keep his land from flooding and the skeleton of the tremendous house which his heirs-at-large had been pulling down and chopping up—walnut newel posts and stair spindles, oak floors which fifty years later would have been almost priceless, the very clapboards themselves—for thirty years now for firewood. Even his name was forgotten, his pride but a legend about the land he had wrested from the jungle and tamed as a monument to that appellation...—his dream and his pride now dust with the lost dust of his anonymous bones, his legend but the stubborn tale of the money he buried somewhere about the place when Grant overran the country on his way to Vicksburg.

In this novel what once was tragic becomes the subject of comedy: the site of tragic dominion becomes a place for the comic con game; tragic energies become comic; tragic dreams become comic; the old tragedy stands as a measure of the comedy to follow. It is not my intention to explore all of the ways in which this tragic vision informs the comedy but only to offer a brief introduction to the presence in the comedy of tragic images of duality, stasis and motion, the stain on the land, and necessity.

The imagery of duality performs two functions in *The Hamlet*. On the one hand Faulkner employs it as a device of comic characterization, an inversion of the duality dramatized in the tragedies. Eula Varner, for example,

might as well still have been a foetus. It was as if only half of her had been born, that mentality and body had somehow become either completely separated or hopelessly involved; that either only one of them had ever emerged, or that one had emerged, itself not accom-

4 Pp. 3-4. All quotations from *The Hamlet* are taken from the 1964 Vintage edition. Future references will be included parenthetically in the text.
panied by, but rather pregnant with, the other. "Maybe she's fix-ing to be a tomboy," her father said. (96)

[Eula] seemed to lead two separate and distinct lives as infants in the act of nursing do. There was one Eula Varner who supplied blood and nourishment to the buttocks and legs and breasts; there was the other Eula Varner who merely inhabited them, who went where they went because it was less trouble to do so, who was comfortable there but in their doings she intended to have no part, as you are in a house which you did not design but where the furniture is all set-tled and the rent paid up. (100)

As it is in *Sartoris* and *Light in August*, the division of personality here is between mind and body. In contrast to the tragedies, however, Eula's mind does not rule her body; with her, body is pregnant with potential sentience. She is not quite human, her mind less than and contained by the body it inhabits. Her father speculates that she might grow up a tomboy because she shows none of the intellectual or emotional refinements and pretenses associated with what must be his conception of ladyhood, refinements and pretenses depending upon a sensibility foreign to her. Hers are no energies of transcendence or the motions of a tragic dreamer. Eula Varner is the quintessence of comic fecundity. This is not to say she is uninvolved with dreamers and dreams, however. Though herself incapable of dreaming, she prompts dreams in others, becoming

the word, the dream and wish of all males under sun capable of harm--the young who only dreamed yet of the ruins they were still incapable of; the sick and the maimed sweating in sleepless beds, impotent for the harm they willed to do; the old, now-glandless earth-creeping, the very buds and blossoms, the garlands of whose yellowed triumphs had long fallen into the profileless dust, embalmed now and no more dead to the living world if they were sealed in buried vaults, behind the impregnable matronly calico of others' grandchildren's grandmothers--the word, with its implications of lost triumphs and defeats of unimaginable splendor--and which best: to have that word, that dream and hope for future, or to have had need to flee that word and dream, for past. (147-48)
Almost all of male Frenchman's Bend dreams, not of transcendence, but of ravishing the virgin Eula. Denied the consumption dreamt of, the men of the Bend lead lives of "old deathless regret" (147). The tragic language enlarges and enobles their comic dream only to deflate it by the very act of burlesque.

The school teacher Labove provides a bridge to the second use of images of duality. As Eula is not, he is presented in potentially tragic terms,

--- a man who was not thin so much as actually gaunt, with straight black hair coarse as a horse's tail and high Indian cheekbones and quiet pale hard eyes and the long nose of thought but with the slightly curved nostrils of pride and the thin lips of secret and ruthless ambition. It was a forensic face, the face of invincible conviction in the power of words as a principle worth dying for if necessary. (105)

He is "enveloped . . . in consuming fury, the gaunt body not shaped by the impact of its environment but as though shrunken and leaned by what was within it, like a furnace" (106). By contrast with the rest of the Bend, he dreams of transcendence, seems capable of tragic defiance and the fatal shibboleths of principle. What burns within him, however, are not the tragic obsessions consuming tragic figures like Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen, but "his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites" (105). He, too, is earthbound. Rather than transmute a tragic idea by comic imagery as he does in his description of Eula, Faulkner here yokes comic energy and tragic imagery in a tension producing the kind of incongruity essential to comedy.

Mink Snopes represents the second use of images of tragic duality; unlike Labove's, Mink's duality is fully tragic. Although he, too, is brought finally to his peripety by his own carnal nature and the brute
weight of the world he opposes, his obsessions are not entirely physical, but of the mind as well. He fled his childhood home at twenty-three to seek the sea:

He had never thought of it before and he could not have said why he wanted to go to it—what of repudiation of the land, the earth, where his body or intellect had faulted somehow to the cold un-deviation of his will to do—seeking what of that iodinic proffer of space and oblivion of which he had no intention of availing himself, would never avail himself, as if, by deliberately refusing to cut the wires of remembering, to punish that body and intellect which had failed him. Perhaps he was seeking only the proffer of this illimitable space and irremediable forgetting along the edge of which the contemptible teeming of his own earth-kind timidly seethed and recoiled, not to accept the proffer but merely to bury himself in this myriad anonymity beside the impregnable haven of all the drowned intact golden galleons and the unattainable deathless seamaids. (235-36)

All his energies are directed to transcending the brutish fecundity of his humbling past and his even humbler present. Driven by "unflagging furious heart-muscles" (219), he opposes an injustice that seems truly primal, "that conspiracy to frustrate and outrage his rights as a man and his feelings as a sentient creature" (218). He kills Jack Houston for just such an outrage. His tragic duality emerges during his struggle to rid himself of Houston's body, a struggle encapsulating his whole life's struggle to bend to his will the impulses of a carnal nature which have been "like drink, like dope to him" (221). Like Joe Christmas, he does not seem to need food, "as if his body were living on the incorrigible singleness of his will like so much fatty tissue" (227). He is bone-tired from his labors and trying to rest, but "his mind, his will, stood like an unresting invincible ungrazing horse while the puny body which rode it renewed its strength" (227). Though tragic in themselves, as the images of Eula Varner's and Labove's duality are
not, these images are absorbed and controlled by the comic context, Mink's grotesque efforts—battling time, his own frailty, buzzards, his greedy cousin, and Houston's hound—to dispose of Houston's corpse. And though Mink's story has the shape, mood and imagery of a tragedy—if not a hero of tragic stature—his tragedy is subordinate and contributes to the larger comedy of Flem Snopes's opportunistic rise in Yoknapatawpha County, Mink's obsession with honor and dignity measuring other characters' comic obsessions.

The tragic imagery of stasis and motion, like that of duality, is developed in The Hamlet in two ways: transmuted by comic aims and contexts or existing within but apart from the comedy, commenting on it. The motion of the novel is primarily Flem Snopes's displacement of the earthy life force symbolized by Eula Varner, the "rich mind- and will-sapping fluid softness" (101), the "moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, ... the supreme primal uterus" (114), "the queen, the matrix" (115), the "axis, the center" (126). She may herself be "static ... sitting supine and female and soft and immovable" (98), but she radiates a magnetism energizing the life and motion of the community and creating a "priapic hullabaloo" (121). So, too, is Flem Snopes an essentially static figure but in deadly contrast to Eula,

a thick squat soft man of no established age between twenty and thirty, with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth stained slightly at the corners with tobacco, and eyes the color of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk. It was as though the original nose had been left off by the original designer or craftsman and the unfinished job taken over by someone of a radically different school or perhaps by some viciously maniacal humorist or perhaps by one who had had only time to clap into the center of the face a frantic and desperate warning. (51-52)
Each stage of his progress presents him, not in images of motion, but "throned" (60) in domineering stasis. An unnamed man at Varner's store describes Flem's displacement of Will Varner from the old Frenchman's place: "'I passed them two horses and the buggy tied to the Old Frenchman fence this morning.' . . . Then he added, as if in trivial afterthought: 'It was Flem Snopes that was setting in the flour barrel [chair]'" (91). Flem does not move so much as disappear and materialize, phantom-like, somewhere else. At the spotted horses auction, "Flem Snopes was there now, appeared suddenly from nowhere, standing beside the fence with a space the width of three or four men on either side of him, standing there in his small yet definite isolation, chewing tobacco. . ." (292-93).

Though static, he generates an energy and motion which are in ironic counterpoint to the fertility madness Eula inspires, a motion which is the comic equivalent of tragic motion: random, chaotic, and in The Hamlet, destructive. I. O. Snopes drives into Frenchman's Bend in a battered and clattering buggy one of whose wheels was wired upright by two crossed slats, which looked as if its momentum alone held it intact and that the instant it stopped it would collapse into kindling. It contained another stranger—a frail man none of whose garments seemed to belong to him, with a talkative weasel's face—who halted the buggy, shouting at the horse as if they were a goodsized field apart. (63)

Playing checkers with Mink for the rights to the location of Houston's body and the money he was supposedly carrying, Lump Snopes tries to lose and thus force his kinsman's hand:

He would make the dashing, clumsy, calculated moves; he would sit back with his own pawn or king's crown in his fist now. Only now the other's thin hard hand would be gripping that wrist while the cold, flat, dead voice demonstrated how a certain pawn could not possibly have arrived at the square on which it suddenly appeared
to be, and lived, or even rapping the knuckles of that gripped hand on the table until it disgorged. Yet he would attempt it again, with that baffled and desperate optimism and hope, and be caught again and then try it again, until at the end of the next hour his movements on the board were not even childlike, they were those of an imbecile or a blind person. (247)

Even the benign, good-hearted blacksmith Eck Snopes is a man "in whom there was a definite limitation of physical coordination beyond which design and plan and pattern all vanished, disintegrated into dead components of pieces of wood and iron straps and vain tools" (66). But the most insistent images of the chaotic energies loosed on Frenchman's Bend by Flem Snopes are, of course, those of the "spotted corruption of frantic and uncatchable horses" (322), "a kaleidoscope of inextricable and incredible violence" (288):

They whipped and whirled around the lot like dizzy fish in a bowl. It had seemed like a big lot until now, but now the very idea that all that fury and motion should be transpiring inside any one fence was something to be repudiated with contempt, like a mirror trick. (275)

The effect of all this comic-destructive motion is most forcefully and poignantly registered in the frustrated stasis of the pathetic Armstids, a far cry from the vigorous, sane farm family of Light in August. After Flem refuses to return the five dollars her husband paid for his spotted horse, offering her instead a nickel's worth of "sweetening for the chaps," Mrs. Armstid descends the steps of Varner's store, though as soon as she reached the level earth and began to retreat, the gray folds of the garment once more lost all inference and intimation of locomotion, so that she seemed to progress without motion like a figure on a retreating and diminishing float; a gray and blasted tree-trunk moving, somehow intact and upright, upon an unhurried flood. (317)

Maddened by his "impotence and fury," by his greedy dream of the money
supposedly buried on the old Frenchman's place, Henry Armstid digs "waist-deep in the ground," looking as if he had been cut in two at the hips, the dead torso, not even knowing it was dead, laboring on in measured stoop and recover like a metronome as Armstid dug himself back into that earth which had produced him to be its born and fated thrall forever until he died. (359)

The Armstid's stasis, more tragic than comic, reveals and measures the moral vacuum within the swirling vortex of Snopes's comic motion.

In a comic novel like *The Hamlet* we do not expect the kind of moral outrage dramatized in the tragedies by man's crimes against man and the land. The closest we come to such outrage is the portrait of the Armstids and Ratliff's protest against the community's morbid fascination with Ike Snopes and his cow. Faulkner does, however, play comically with the image of the stain on the land. In the old tragic days, driven by different energies and dreams, the Frenchman attacked the land, bending it to his will by straightening the Yoknapatawpha River "for almost ten miles to keep his land from flooding" (3). Later the sawmills came ravaging the land, their sites now "marked only by the mounds of rotting sawdust which were not only their gravestones but the monuments of a people's heedless greed" (171-72). Driven by lesser greed and what Susanne Langer calls "a brainy opportunism" rather than tragic dreams, lesser figures like V. K. Ratliff, Odum Bookwright, and Henry Armstid--three "sets of blood here lusting for trash" (346)--outrage the land in their search for the old Frenchman's buried treasure. Faulkner here burlesques his own outrage in *Absalom, Absalom!* against the depredations wrought by the Caribbean plantation owners. Uncle Dick Bolivar, the ancient man Ratliff enlists to help find the treasure with
his divining rod, protests Henry Armstid's furious digging: "'Wait,' he said. 'There air anger in the yearth. Ye must make that ere un quit a-bruisin hit'" (343). Tone and point of view turn protest to comedy.

Faulkner, then, employs tragic motifs and images in *The Hamlet* to develop comic characters, to advance the comic plot, evaluate the comedy, and chart the ironic relationship between comic and tragic energies. To these, we can add a fifth comic use of the tragic vision: to anticipate and prepare us for comic episodes and themes. The spotted horses episode is, for the larger community of Frenchman's Bend, the climatic episode in its active involvement with Flem Snopes's rise. This episode most clearly presents the comic motif of the con game structuring the novel and the comic tension between man's desires for freedom from the marriage trap and the burden of his domestic fate. The tragic imagery of necessity presenting the stories of Ab Snopes and Jack Houston provide us with two points of view for reading this episode.

Through Ab Snopes we are introduced to the con game and the theme of the deceiver self-deceived. Ab is "foreordained and fated" (35) to tangle with Pat Stamper the horse trader, not because of greed, but because he is driven, as tragic figures are, by honor and pride. In contrast, however, to tragic heroes who defy social constraints, Ab acts for the community. According to Ratliff's account: "... Ab wasn't trying to beat Pat bad. He just wanted to recover that eight dollars' worth of the honor and pride of Yoknapatawpha County horse-trading, doing it not for profit but for honor" (36). As tragic figures are, Ab is "doomed" by his own nature, the quality of the primal energies
driving him to hubris in his powers as a con man: "'It was fate,'" Ratliff tells us. "'It was like the Lord Himself had decided to buy a horse with Miz Snopes's [cream} separator money. Though I will admit that when He chose Ab He picked out a good quick willing hand to do His trading for Him'" (32). The more Ab resists his fate, trusting to his guile as a deceiver, the more he is fated to be deceived and defeated: "'he had done walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found out it was quicksand, and . . . now he knowed he couldn't even stop long enough to turn back'" (37). In a perfect imitation of tragic reversal, the "quicksand" Ab blunders into quickly becomes "'a whirlpool and him with just one jump left'" (39). He takes that one jump and for his gambit gets back the very horse he tried to trade to Pat Stamper, tricked in part by the same fishhook ruse he practiced on Stamper. With Ab's story behind us, we are prepared for the con game of the spotted horses episode, prepared to see the community's pride and honor trampled by Buck Hipps and Flem Snopes.

Jack Houston's story, also presented through images of the game, horses, and tragic necessity, leads to a more somber end than Ab's, the tragic mood coloring our response to the spotted horses episode and deepened by the Armstid's plight. Further, Faulkner's exploration of Houston's energies and desires provides us with the insights necessary to evaluate the community's impulses which later lead to comic peripety. Houston and the rest of male Frenchman's Bend dream an obsessive dream of comic transcendence, of "bitless masculinity" (214); they are possessed by "that strong lust, not for life, not even for movement, but for that fetterless immobility called freedom," freedom from the
"immemorial trap" (205), marriage and domesticity. In contrast to tragic protagonists, Houston is denied his transcendence not by the cosmic order checking Thomas Sutpen but by little Lucy Pate, "still serene, still steadfast... waiting, tranquil, terrible" (209), "who had merely elected him out of all the teeming earth, not as one competent to her requirements, but as one possessing the possibilities on which she would be content to establish the structure of her life" (207). Between Houston and his nemesis there is a "feud, a gage, wordless, uncaptulating, between that unflagging will not for love or passion but for the married state, and that furious and as unbending one for solitariness and freedom" (207). He may defy his fate, seeking sanctuary in flight, working on a Texas railroad where he travels back and forth in frantic stasis, but he must eventually submit: "He fled, not from his past, but to escape his future. It took him twelve years to learn you cannot escape either of them" (211). "Bitted" (214) at last by Lucy Pate's 'implacable constancy... , that steadfast and undismayable will to alter and improve and remake" (206), Houston is brought to recognize his domestic fate: "the beast, prime solitary and sufficient out of the wild fields, drawn to the trap and knowing it to be a trap, not comprehending why it was doomed but knowing it was, and not afraid now--and not quite wild" (214).

Houston's story, broadly comic so far, gains pathos and a mood of tragic loss through his hamartia and peripety, an error in judgment and a reversal echoed in the comedy when the spotted horses are brought to Frenchman's Bend. The destruction of the domestic life to which he finally surrenders lies in the dream he can never entirely foresake.
After his marriage he buys a stallion whose "blood and bone and muscles represented that polygamous and bitless masculinity which he had relinquished" (214), and it kills his wife, even as the spotted horses later wreak havoc in the Bend. By his pride in the shreds of his masculinity and individuality--the same energies driving Frenchman's Bend to buy the ponies--he makes himself the instrument of his own primal injustice, "the victim of a useless and elaborate practical joke at the hands of the prime maniacal Risibility" (188) bending him to his domestic fate and then robbing him of the serene steadfastness which has tamed him. We may sympathize with Houston and wholly comic victims of this injustice like the Tulls, but we recognize that the necessity of their victimization is inherent in their comic energies, as it is in the energies of tragic figures.

Such is William Faulkner's mastery of the tragic form that it weights and enriches even a comic novel like The Hamlet. His fiction is concerned with mankind's essentially tragic struggle to be, to define himself in terms authentic to him, and make what Judith Sutpen calls "at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that . . . can't ever die or perish" (Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 127-28). We watch this struggle in the tragic protagonists and even in his comedy where it informs the imagery presenting characters like Houston and Mink Snopes. By his humane, compassionate and affirmative dramatization of this struggle, Faulkner has made his own mark on what he called "the wall of oblivion." 5 Through the energies and struggles of young

5 Faulkner in the University, p. 61.
Bayard Sartoris, Joe Christmas, and Thomas Sutpen, we watch Faulkner's vision changing from romantic and regional concerns to tragic and universal ones. We, too, are changed in mind and heart by witnessing this evolving expression of a tragic vision; and this cathartic change is, after all, the aim of tragedy.
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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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