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## William Faulkner's public and poetic voices: A discussion of the "human condition"

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WILLIAM FAULKNER'S PUBLIC AND  
POETIC VOICES: A DISCUSSION  
OF THE "HUMAN CONDITION"

by

Elaine Bunker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Department of English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
May 1996

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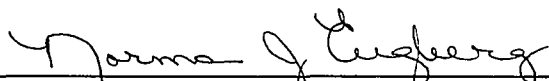
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The Thesis of Elaine Bunker for the degree of M.A. in English is approved.



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May 1992

## ABSTRACT

William Faulkner claimed that his fiction "failed" to show that "man will prevail," the standard that he set for literature in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. However, this statement and others by Faulkner can be misleading without an understanding of Faulkner's terms. A study of his speeches, essays, public letters, and interviews (Faulkner's public voice) in conjunction with his major fiction (his poetic voice) clarifies what Faulkner meant by "immortality," "evil," "fear," and "failure" and thereby demonstrates that both Faulkner's fiction and his nonfiction do in fact illustrate his belief that "man will prevail."



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When William Faulkner accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, he said that "the poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things"--that "man is immortal" not only because he has "an inexhaustible voice" but because he has "a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance" (120). He concluded his speech by asserting, "The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail" (120). Prior to 1950, Faulkner had written relatively little for publication that was not expressed through this poetic, or fictional, voice that he describes. He had written novels, short stories, poems, and even drama through his work in Hollywood, but little that explained his beliefs through straightforward nonfiction prose.<sup>1</sup> During the years that followed, however, Faulkner wrote numerous essays, sent letters to newspapers, gave additional speeches, and participated in a series of recorded interviews in addition to continuing his career as a writer of fiction. Through his nonfiction statements, Faulkner developed a public voice.

Faulkner scholars have acknowledged this public voice<sup>2</sup> and have anthologized and published Faulkner's major nonfiction in Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, Faulkner at Nagano, Faulkner in the University, Faulkner at West Point, and Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962 but have been wary of using his nonfiction as a subject for in depth study because of the apparent inconsistencies it contains. Faulkner himself admitted to scholars, reporters, and students that his interviews were unreliable. In the Preface to Faulkner in the University, Frederick Gwin and Joseph Blotner advise:

At Mr. Faulkner's suggestion and in his phrasing, we warn the reader that any resemblance to ideas and opinions Mr. Faulkner has held or expressed previously, and to the ideas and opinions which--since he intends to continue to live for some time yet--he might hold or express in the future, is purely coincidental. (ix)

Russell Alsop later reinforced this caution by quoting it in his introduction to Faulkner at West Point. Betty Beale of the Washington Star quoted Faulkner as saying, "I never tell the truth to reporters" (LIG 269), and Faulkner was quoted in Time magazine as saying "I am a fiction writer and I am not responsible for any construction made on any interview I have ever given" (qtd. in LIG 255). While chatting with Simon Claxton, a British student, Faulkner admitted, "I'm liable to say anything on these occasions, and often contradict myself" (LIG 276).

His interviews do provide occasional contradictions, but not the unusual number that Faulkner and his critics

suggest when one considers that these interviews were unrehearsed and usually un-edited (by Faulkner at least) and that they span almost forty years. As James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate state in Lion in the Garden, "Faulkner's interviews, like most others, abound in misstatements and exaggerations" [emphasis added] (xv). Faulkner's deliberate misstatements, however, appear most often when speaking to reporters and especially when discussing details. He distrusted reporters because they "'deal with facts. Facts," said the Mississippian without explaining whether he was talking in metaphysical terms, 'bear no relation to truth'" (Beale 267). In contrast, Robert Jelliffe reports that Faulkner displayed a very different attitude while in Japan:

In both respects, the talks and the answers to questions, Mr. Faulkner avoided the least trace of flippancy or superficiality. His every utterance was charged with [sic] utmost seriousness and simplicity. He paid his listeners the ultimate compliment of treating their inquiries and comments as springing from a concern for truth as genuine as his own. (FN v)

A similar "seriousness" is also exhibited in Faulkner's polished nonfiction. Meriwether praises Faulkner's essays, speeches, and public letters and writes that "although some of his writing in this field was occasional, written to order and to meet a deadline, because he needed the money, there is no hackwork here" (ESPL viii). This statement is especially true of Faulkner's speeches. Although he declared, "I am not a finished lecturer but rather a conversationalist, better at question-and-answer sessions

than as a speaker" (FWP 128), Faulkner provides powerful insight into his beliefs and his writings through this public voice. Beginning with his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1950, Faulkner spoke to a number of groups, ranging from his daughter's graduating classes to a national commission for UNESCO, on a number of topics. When studied in conjunction with his most consistent interview statements, Faulkner's speeches present a philosophy of the human condition that is reflected in his major novels, specifically The Sound and the Fury, Sanctuary, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, The Hamlet, and Go Down, Moses.

Such an approach differs from other studies because the overwhelming majority of Faulkner scholars use his public voice only as a secondary source. James G. Watson, one of the few exceptions, devotes a chapter in his book, William Faulkner, Letters & Fictions (1987), to Faulkner's public letters but only partially acknowledges the correlation between Faulkner's public and poetic writings. He writes that "the crossings between letter and literature" are "pervasive and overt" but focuses his discussion primarily on "the public letters of the 1950s" and "the later canon of Faulkner's novels and stories" (155). Furthermore, Watson sees these parallels primarily in the persona of Gavin Stevens, "a fictional spokesman for many of the same issues, albeit a fumbling and impractical one," who was "part Faulkner, part Phil Stone" (156).

Faulkner, however, denied creating a spokesperson. At the University of Virginia, Faulkner was asked about his relationship to Gavin Stevens. He replied, "I think that you're not trying to preach through the character, that you're too busy writing about people. It just happens that this man agrees with you on this particular point and so he says it" (FU 26). He reiterated this idea at West Point:

I think that any book should have on the first page, "The author declines to accept responsibility for the behavior or actions or speeches of any of these characters, because he is simply trying to tell a story." And these people that he uses, they don't necessarily have to believe as he believes. He quite often hates them, disagrees with them. (118)

Faulkner also denied the conscious use of symbolism. He told Ralph Thompson, "I write about people. Maybe all sorts of symbols and images get in--I don't know. When a good carpenter builds something, he puts the nails where they belong. Maybe they make a fancy pattern when he's through, but that's not why he put them that way" (LIG 61). He later told Cynthia Grenier, "I think people try to find more in my work than I've put there. . . . I doubt if an author knows what he puts in a story" (LIG 220). If Faulkner's statements are taken at face value, then the beliefs he affirms in his nonfiction will not be revealed through the statements of individual characters or the appearance of individual symbols, but rather in the patterns that Faulkner unintentionally creates while writing his stories.

Cleanth Brooks tries to identify Faulkner's "ultimate values" in On the Prejudices, Predilections, and Firm Beliefs of William Faulkner (1987) but discounts Faulkner's public voice completely. He claims that "the answers which Faulkner gave, during the last thirty-odd years of his life, to the various people who interviewed him are usually vague, highly subjective, and frequently contradict each other." Brooks concludes:

. . . I think that my best method of procedure is to make no further references to what Faulkner at one time or another declared to be his beliefs, but to try to discover his beliefs as they are presented, in dramatic terms, in his fiction. After all, his greatest accomplishment was his fiction. There we will find him speaking most truthfully--and least ambiguously--about the values that make meaningful the lives of men and women. (17)

While it may be true that Faulkner's "greatest accomplishment was his fiction," it does a disservice to both the man and his work to imply that the public voice that Faulkner employed in his later years was either untruthful or ambiguous in comparison to the poetic voice which brought him critical acclaim. Faulkner himself did not make such a distinction. While in Japan he said,

I'm inclined to think that [all of a man's] work has such a definite relationship that he doesn't in mid-career change his stride, or his purpose. It may have for the moment, for the sake of one particular work, have what you might say is a different attitude, a different point of view, but it is basically directed towards the same point, and this was--I think I've spoken of this before--it is the desire of the artist before he dies to say all he possibly can of what he knows of truth in the most moving way. (FN 46)<sup>3</sup>

Faulkner's public voice does provide "a different attitude,



a different point of view" than his poetic voice, but it does not demonstrate a mid-career change of stride.<sup>4</sup>

William Faulkner consistently writes about man--his role, his triumphs, his struggles, and his failures. It is essential that this integrity in Faulkner's work exist if his fiction is to be judged worthwhile **by his own standards**. The world that he creates through his fiction must be consistent with the world that he describes in his nonfiction because Faulkner believes that the artist

must strive with all the means and all the talents he possesses--his imagination, his experience, his powers of observation--to put into a more lasting form than his own frail, ephemeral instant of life . . . **what he has known at firsthand during his brief existence:** the passion and the hope, the beauty, the tragedy, the comedy of man, weak and frail but unconquerable; man who struggles and suffers and triumphs amid the conflicts of the human heart, the human condition. [emphasis added] (Andres Bello Award 164-5)

Faulkner's recurring theme, whether in the poetic voice of his major novels or the public voice of his post-Nobel Prize recognition, is consistently a discussion of "the human condition," or "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat" (Nobel Prize 119). In this respect, his public and poetic voices display perfect integrity. Faulkner repeatedly claims in his nonfiction that his goal is to write about "people," and in his fiction, the people are emphasized to the point that they seem to live and breathe.

According to Faulkner, this type of focus on the human condition is not his own innovation but is a trait of "the masters from whom we learned our craft," which is now neglected. He regrets "that the young writer of today is compelled by the present state of our culture . . . to function in a kind of vacuum of the human race." Therefore, "his characters do not function, live, breathe, struggle, in that moil and seethe of simple humanity" like those of the great writers of earlier generations whose

characters were not just weaned but even spawned into a moil and seethe of simple human beings whose very existence was an affirmation of an incurable and indomitable optimism--men and women like themselves, understandable and comprehensible even when antipathetical, even in the very moment while they were murdering or fobbing or betraying you, since theirs too were the same simple human lusts and hopes and fears uncomplicated by regimentation or group compulsion" (English Club 163).

This interrelationship of art and experience, especially as it applies to human emotion and motivation, is repeatedly emphasized in Faulkner's writings and provides the foundation for his vision of the poet's role. In 1955 Faulkner reiterated his belief that "the poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail" (Nobel Prize 120):

I think the writer or poet or the novelist should not be just a 'recorder' of man--he should give man some reason to believe that man can be better than he is. If the writer is to accomplish anything, it is to make the world a little better than he found it, to do what he can, in whatever way he can, to get rid of the evils like war, injustice--that's his job. (FN 13-4)

A compilation of even a few of Faulkner's many statements about the artist's role, however, reveals that the writer cannot approach this "job" directly. According to Faulkner, "The lesson is coincidental, even accidental" (FWP 82). The artist's motivation must be simply that "there is something so true and so moving in breathing that he has got to put it down, got to make a record of it" (FWP 53). "If he begins to preach or proselytize or pass judgement . . . the fire might go out" (FU 267), and if the artist "gets involved with right and duty, he's on the verge of becoming a propagandist, and he stops being an artist then" (FWP 57). Instead of writing being a duty, Faulkner claims that

it's [the artist's] privilege, his dedication too, to uplift man's heart by showing man the record of the experiences of the human heart, the travail of man within his environment, with his fellows, with himself, in such moving terms that the lessons of honesty and courage are evident and obvious. (FWP 48)

Therefore, in order for a poet's voice to be a "prop" and a "pillar," it must first be a faithful "record." The "trueness" of the record is not determined by the accuracy of the facts "because facts and truth don't really have much to do with each other" (FWP 84). Indeed, "the writer's prerogative . . . is to emphasize, to underline, to blow up facts, distort facts in order to state a truth" (FU 282). The "fundamental truth" is that "of man's struggle within the human dilemma," and a "first-rate writer" is one whose character's "follow the universal patterns of

man's behavior inside the human condition" (FWP 84).

These "universal patterns of man's behavior" include man's ability to "endure" and "prevail," but these terms, as used by Faulkner, are not universally understood. In his discussion of Faulkner's "Ultimate Values," Cleanth Brooks notes that "in his answers to questions, in his interviews, and most notably in his famous Nobel Prize speech, Faulkner praises man and keeps telling us that man will endure and furthermore that he will 'prevail'" (Prejudices), but Brooks places limitations upon Faulkner's faith in man. He continues,

Such statements may appear to prove that Faulkner himself believes in man's own self-sufficiency. Not so. To prove this, we do not have to rely merely on Faulkner's treatment of Sutpen and other such characters. He has told us that he believes in a Creator God, and as for man's solving all his own problems, Faulkner said to one of his interviewers: "Granted time," man will solve most of his problems "except the problems that he is doomed forever to, simply because he is flesh and blood." In short, Faulkner sees man not as a demi-god but as a mortal creature, limited by his mortal condition. (131)

Brooks's interpretation is correct only if he refers to man's "mortal condition" as a purely physically condition. Faulkner admits that man is "doomed forever" to the ungodlike problems of the flesh--sickness, old age, and death--but believes that the problems of the soul can be cured because of man's potential to become like what he means by God.<sup>5</sup> Faulkner frequently compares man to God in a way that suggests that although he does not use the term "demi-god," he does indeed see man as a "half"-god who has

not yet fully developed. When speaking at University High School, he told the graduating class, "It is not men in the mass who can and will save Man. It is Man himself, created in the image of God so that he shall have the power and the will to choose right from wrong, and so be able to save himself because he is worth saving" (123). "In addition to possessing the godlike qualities of "power and will," Faulkner's man also has rights and a destiny to accomplish that which God could not. When addressing the graduating class of Pine Manor Junior College, Faulkner stated:

Because only man can complete [the world]. Not God, but man. It is man's high destiny and proof of his immortality too, that his is the choice between ending the world, effacing it from the long annal of time and space, and completing it. (135)

Even the statement from which Brooks himself quotes shows man at a level nearly equal with God. Faulkner presents his faith in man as being comparable with a faith in God:

To believe that man will prevail is a proposition that doesn't need to be constantly proven and reproven and supported. That belief is like the belief one has in God, Buddha, or whatever his particular abettor may be. That the only factor that might alter the belief that man will prevail would be something that would cause one to doubt that he may prevail. And I think now that I am not likely to find anything in my lifetime that would cause me to doubt that man will prevail. I expect to see instances in which he has failed, yes, but they're temporary failures. I think that given time he will solve most of his problems, except the problems which he is doomed forever to, simply because he is flesh and blood. (FN 27-8)

At times, Faulkner's faith in man is not only

comparable to, but almost synonymous with, his faith in God. During a conversation with Loic Bouvard, he counseled Bouvard against "supplanting a faith in God with a faith in Man" but clarified, "I am not talking about a personified or mechanical God, but a God who is the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests both in eternity and in the now" (LIG 70). This concept of God representing man's ultimate potential is also evident in several other contexts, such as Faulkner's statement that "the story of the human being, the human heart struggling" is "to be braver than it is afraid it might be, to be more honest, more compassionate, to be nearer the figure that we mean when we say God . . . (FWP 51), and also when he claims that The Old Man and the Sea was Hemingway's best work because "he found God" (FU 149).

While in Nagano, Faulkner made several statements that reinforce that his belief in God was not a belief in traditional religion: "Well, I believe in God. Sometimes Christianity gets pretty debased, but I do believe in God, yes. I believe that man has a soul that aspires towards what we call God, what we mean by God" (FN 23-4).<sup>6</sup> This statement can assist readers in correctly interpreting the many Biblical references in Faulkner's writings and statements. Although Faulkner was heavily influenced by the Bible, he appreciated its literary value over its theology. During the colloquies in Japan, Faulkner stated that he read "the Old Testament, oh, once every ten or

fifteen years" (FN 42), but when questioned later as to why he preferred the Old Testament over the New, his answer revealed that he did not read the Bible because of religious fervor.

. . . to me the Old Testament is some of the finest, most robust and most amusing folklore I know. The New Testament is philosophy and ideas, and something of the quality of poetry. I read that too, but I read the Old Testament for the pleasure of watching what these amazing people did, and they behaved so exactly like people in the 19th century behaved. I read that for the fun of watching what people do. (FN 45-6)

Faulkner later called "these amazing people" "scoundrels and blackguards" who were "doing the best they could, just like people now" (FU 285-6).

Within his own writings, Faulkner uses Biblical references and parallels largely for their archetypal value. When asked about the resurrection motif in A Fable, Faulkner explained,

I simply used a formula, a proven formula in our western culture to tell something which I wanted to tell, but that's no new trend. I simply used an old story which had been proven in our western culture to be a good one that people could understand and believe, in order to tell something I was trying to tell. (FN 23)

Faulkner uses similar "formulas" in The Sound and the Fury when the preacher at the Easter service begins his sermon by proclaiming "I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb" (294) and recalls the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus as well as the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. The exodus motif reappears in Go Down, Moses in both the title and the final journey of Samuel Beauchamp

(358-65) and again in the journey of the Bundrens in As I Lay Dying. Other major scriptural allusions include the title of Absalom, Absalom!, Benjy's age of thirty-three in The Sound and the Fury (3), Isaac's name and the old age of his father in Go Down, Moses (4), and Joe Christmas's name, but this list does not even begin to represent the scope of the Biblical influence. Jessie McGuire Coffee identifies at least one scriptural reference in every one of Faulkner's novels, and as many as fifty-five in The Sound and the Fury (130).

These many allusions, however, should not be taken as evidence that Faulkner defines immortality in traditional Judeo-Christian terms. Nothing stated by Faulkner, in either his poetic or public voice, affirms a belief that the soul of an individual man lives on after his death.<sup>7</sup> In fact, some of the apparent contradictions in Faulkner's statements may be caused by an assumption that his terms have the traditional meanings, while many words such as **immortality, evil, fear, and failure** actually have specialized and complex definitions peculiar to Faulkner's use of them in his description of the human condition.

Faulkner's speeches help to form a framework around which his unique definition of immortality can be built, namely that man can prevail, but can do so only by applying "the verities and truths of the heart," whether it be in life or in art (Nobel 120). This ability to prevail is not the result of an absence of evil, but rather through an



opposition to evil, which man must not avoid or fear. To Faulkner, fear is more dangerous than evil because fear impedes man's immortality by limiting his individual freedom; therefore, "the basest of all things is to be afraid" (Nobel 120). Man must especially avoid a fear of failure. Failure is the proof of man's immortality because man prevails when he tries for that which he has not yet accomplished, even though he knows he may fail. It is man's knowledge that he may fail that causes him to return to the old verities of love and honor and pride and sacrifice. Immortality, as defined by Faulkner, requires the efforts of the individual, but he will receive no personal reward, in this life or the life to come. The benefits are realized only by the race when they can say "Man is improved" (FU 6).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Faulkner did participate in occasional interviews before 1950, such as those included in Lion in the Garden, but as a whole, these interviews contain little of what Faulkner actually said and a great deal about the interviewers' impressions and experiences while conducting the interview.

<sup>2</sup> James B. Meriwether briefly discusses Faulkner's development as a public figure in Lion in the Garden xiii-xiv and ESPL viii.

<sup>3</sup> Although Faulkner reaffirmed this idea repeatedly, he contradicted this important point at least once. During a conversation with Simon Caxton, Faulkner is recorded as saying, "I don't claim to be truthful. Fiction is fiction--not truth; it's make-believe. Thus I stack and lie at times, all for the purpose of the story--to entertain" (LIG 277). It is difficult to tell if this statement is meant to be flippant, if Faulkner uses the word "truth" as a synonym for factual, or if he had actually changed his opinion about writing by this time (1962), but earlier statements about the writer's purpose are so numerous and so consistent that this statement must be considered an aberration from Faulkner's life-long beliefs.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Gold came to the same conclusion. In William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism, from Metaphor to Discourse, Gold writes: "The 'shift' then in Faulkner's writing is a shift of emphasis or technique, rather than a shift of ideas, and it is perhaps illuminated by regarding it as a move from the making of myth to the construction of allegory" (14).

<sup>5</sup> As will be shown, Faulkner uses the term "God" as an archetypal symbol of ultimate goodness rather than as a name for deity.

<sup>6</sup> Faulkner immediately clarified that his problem with Christianity was not with the principles, but with the application: "The trouble with Christianity is that we've never tried it yet, but we must use it--it's a nice glib tongue but we have never really tried Christianity." (FN 24)

<sup>7</sup> Faulkner's most optimistic statement concerning an afterlife was presented in his eulogy for his Mammy, Caroline Barr: "She was born and lived and served, and died and now is mourned; if there is a heaven, she has gone there" (ESPL 118). However, this statement is a statement of doubt, not of hope. In his article, "Saying No to Death," Robert W. Hamblin provides a listing of evidence that demonstrates Faulkner's skepticism, then states, " . . . it seems safe to conclude that it was not merely death which Faulkner feared, but death as obliteration" (8).

## CHAPTER 2

### IMMORTALITY: MAN'S ABILITY TO PREVAIL

Through his work, Faulkner defines immortality on three distinct levels. He discusses immortality directly as a theme in his speeches and interviews, addresses the topic indirectly through the words, actions, and attitudes of the characters in his novels, and displays his own desire for immortality through the creation of his work as a whole. At each level, Faulkner's vision of immortality includes both the quantity and the quality of life as man both endures and prevails. This belief in man's immortality first gained widespread attention through Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech:

It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to believe this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. (120)

Man's ability to both endure and prevail demonstrates

the dual nature of his immortality--his physical presence on the earth will continue, and his nature and conditions will improve and become more "godlike." These two aspects of immortality are possible because "man" also has a dual meaning--that of the individual and that of the race.

Well, the individual--you and I know that after a certain time we will be no more. . . . That's what I mean by the mortality of the individual. The immortality is the fact that frail, fragile man, a web of bone and nerves, mostly water, in a ramshackle universe has outlasted most other forms of mammalian life. He has outlasted his own disasters, and I think that he will continue--that, for the reason I believe I said this morning, that the species which has created the fine picture, the music, the statues, the books, is too valuable for omnipotence, God whoever he is, to let perish. That is the immortality of the race, not the individual.  
(FWP 120-1)

In this vision, the death of an individual is not an obstacle to the immortality of either that individual or the race. In fact, Faulkner rarely mentions death and immortality within the same context. One of these few references is found in Absalom, Absalom!, but Rosa Coldfield's words suggest that death is a vital ingredient of immortality, rather than its antithesis: Charles "was to die . . . as pride and peace were: how else to prove love's immortality?" (120). Although Rosa's words may not match Faulkner's personal beliefs, the concept of sacrificing pride, peace, and life for love is closely aligned with many of Faulkner's statements about man's ability to prevail. Man prevails, not by escaping death, but by accepting death if necessary to maintain the humanity

and dignity of the race. He made a similar statement at West Point: "We assume that the purpose of the conflict [of the human heart with itself] is to win even if you have to die with your head still bloody but unbowed" (64).

This concept of endurance in the face of overwhelming odds is especially evident in many of the women that Faulkner writes about, providing evidence that Faulkner refers to both genders when he speaks of "immortal man." In his essay "Mississippi," Faulkner describes Southern women as "the indomitable, the undefeated, who never surrendered, . . . irreconcilable and enraged and still talking about [the war] long after the weary exhausted men who had fought and lost it gave up trying to make them hush" (ESPL 15). Rosa Coldfield of Absalom, Absalom!, one such Southern woman, tells Quentin Compson, "I waited not for light but for that doom which we call female victory which is: endure and then endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward--and then endure" (AA 116). Many of Faulkner's women do endure, such as Judith Sutpen of Absalom, Absalom!, Dilsey of The Sound and the Fury, and Ruby of Sanctuary. Even Light in August, which is typically viewed as the story of Joe Christmas's struggle with the question of his race, was prompted by Faulkner's "admiration for women, for the endurance and courage of women" (FU 74).

Endurance in the face of adversity is vital since Faulkner defines "immortality," not as the inability to die, but as man's ability, and even responsibility, to

prevail despite the hardships: "The obligation [for man to prevail] is inherent in the quality in him which for lack of any better word we call his immortality" (FN 28). Two important elements of this "quality" that allows man to prevail are his individuality and his ability to look beyond what **is** to what **should be**. When asked, "Do you think that man will prevail only if he attaches himself to a group?" Faulkner replied:

No, I think he will prevail anyway. I think that the very fact that here in 1954 a fellow wrote a piece about privacy, proved that he will prevail and endure. That someone will always say, "this is wrong. You did it, but this is bad." Just like the people who talk about a person is ignorant, a person is greedy, there is always someone that says this is bad. Now maybe he can't do too much himself, but the fact that he gets up on his hind legs and says, "I don't like this," proves to me that man prevails. (FN 8)

Although man does not gain immortality by attaching himself to a group, this is not to say that an individual can prevail in isolation. When asked, "When you say man has prevailed do you mean individual man has prevailed or group man?" Faulkner answered, "Man as a part of life" (FU 5). Man can prevail only "as a part of life" because in order to be immortal, each individual must have others to be remembered by, to feel compassion for, to treat with honor, to sacrifice for, to believe in. Faulkner names this group of people "home," and elaborates that

it means someone to offer the love and fidelity and respect to who is worthy of it, someone to be compatible with, whose dreams and hopes are your dreams and hopes, who wants and will work and sacrifice also that the thing which the two of you have together will last forever; someone

whom you not only love but like too, which is more, since it must outlast what when we are young we mean by love because without the liking and the respect, the love itself will not last.  
(ESPL 140-1)

Indeed the very essence of Faulkner's vision of immortality seems to be his belief that through individual effort and sacrifice, man will improve as a race. He encouraged the Japanese writers "to work, to believe always in man, that man will prevail, that there's no suffering, no anguish, that man is not suitable to changing, if he wants to, then to work hard" (FN 18).

Faulkner's public voice establishes, therefore, that his belief in "man" is broad and many faceted. It includes both men and women, the individual and the race, the physical and the spiritual. At Nagano, he claimed, "He [man] will do the best he can to be physically immortal as well as immortal in spirit; and to try to do more than he knows he can do, is the right aim" (FN 35). It is important to note that Faulkner does not say that man should "try to do more than he can do," but instead that he must "try to do more than **he knows** he can do." [emphasis added]. Man does not prevail by accomplishing the impossible, but rather by attempting the unknown. These attempts through which man may achieve Faulkner's vision of immortality can be grouped into three main categories: by being remembered, by creating art, and by practicing the "old verities of the human heart."



## Attaining Immortality by

### Being Remembered

The Hamlet, the first volume of Faulkner's Snopes trilogy, begins with a description of a man who was not remembered. The owner of Old Frenchman Place "had quite possibly been a foreigner, though not necessarily French," but his "name was forgotten, his pride but a legend . . . 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 . . . " (4). Structurally, this description is necessary so that Ratliff, Bookwright, and Armstid's search for the money at the end of the novel is believable, but this introduction is also important for the thematic contrast it provides. This man who once lived is gone, forgotten, immortal in neither body nor spirit. His bones are dust; he is remembered only by a nationality which is probably not his own.

Judith Sutpen of Absalom, Absalom! understands this possibility and demonstrates her own desire for immortality when she gives a letter to Quentin Compson's grandmother. In Quentin's father's interpretation of the events, she says, "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" (AA 101). This type of memorial is impermanent as well as unsure since weather can erode the scratches away, so Judith chooses to be remembered

through an action. The letter, or "scrap of paper," does "not mean anything in itself," and it doesn't matter if those who receive it "read it or keep it," "bother to throw it away or destroy it," because

at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, and it would at least be a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be is because it never can become was because it cant ever die or perish.  
 . . . (AA 101)

Judith does make "a mark on something that was," Grandmother Compson, an act which in fact is more effective in preserving her memory than an inscription on a lifeless block of stone. Grandmother Compson, like Judith, dies, but not without transferring Judith's "mark" to Mr. Compson and through him to Quentin, who then passes on the story of Judith and Charles to his roommate Shreve.

Judith chooses the final letter from Charles Bon "to give to a stranger . . . to make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed" (AA 102) because it fits Faulkner's criterion that "since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move" (LIG 252). Though the paper of the letter is inanimate, the words of the letter do "move." Charles's letter was "gentle sardonic whimsical and incurably pessimistic, without date or salutation or signature" (AA 102). Without a date, the letter was already

timeless, and through its transmission, Charles became more alive to Quentin, "his dead tongue speaking after the four years and then after almost fifty more" (AA 102), than he had been to Rosa Coldfield: "He was absent, and he was; he returned, and he was not; three women put something into the earth and covered it, and he had never been" (AA 123). Although gone, Charles was not forgotten like the "Frenchman." Because of Judith's "scratch on the wall of oblivion," both Judith and Charles are remembered, making their names, if not their physical frames, immortal.

### Attaining Immortality by Creating Art

Judith and Charles are not alone in gaining immortality through the transmission of the written word. Though they have not walked the earth for hundreds of years, artists like Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, and others have obtained immortal status through their works. This is possible because art provides two aspects of immortality. Not only is art a means by which the artist can be remembered, but the creative process itself is "godlike." Faulkner discussed both in Nagano:

If God can be any good to us, he would certainly represent harmony. . . . It seems to me that in no way can man better attain harmony than in the creation of something which whether he intends it or not will outlast him. That is to say, in effect when he has passed beyond the wall of oblivion, he will leave on that wall--you know for a few years, everywhere, you saw "Kilroy was here"--well, that's what the artist has done.  
(FN 30)

While at the University of Virginia, Faulkner elaborated on the second aspect of this statement. He said that the writer "knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall--Kilroy was here--that somebody a hundred, a thousand years later will see" (FU 61). Faulkner repeated this idea often,<sup>1</sup> and at West Point added that the motivation is "not for power, not for money, but simply to say 'I was here for a little while, I left this mark'" (FWP 119).

The artist's mark, however, is special in that it is the product of the godlike process of creation. Faulkner compared himself to God while answering one of Jean Stein vanden Heuvel's question's about the origins of Yoknapatawpha County: ". . . I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too" (LIG 255). In his statement in Nagano, Faulkner equates God with harmony, then claims that man can "attain harmony" through "the creation of something which whether he intends it or not will outlast him." Faulkner makes a similar comparison between man and God when he equates man's creation of art with God's creation of the firmament:

To me, a proof of God is in the firmament, the stars. To me, a proof of man's immortality, that his conception that there could be a God, that the idea of a God is valuable, is in the fact that he writes the books and composes the music and paints the pictures. They are the firmament of mankind. (FN 29)

Faulkner later identified literature as the best proof of man's immortality because its subject matter as well as its existence proves that man has endured and will continue to endure:

The reason that the books last longer than the bridges and the skyscrapers is that that is the best thing man has discovered yet to record the fact that he does endure, that he is capable of hope, even in darkness, that he does move, he doesn't give up, and that is not only a record of his past, where he has shown that he endures and hopes in spite of darkness, but it is a promise of the validity of that hope. (FN 158)

While at West Point, Faulkner made an even more direct connection between the creative process and immortality: "There is nothing that can match the pleasure of creation--of creating some form of art, because only that way can you affirm your immortality" (FWP 119). That Faulkner considered the affirmation made by art to be an affirmation of life is evident in his statement to Loïc Bouvard: "The most important thing is that man continues to create, just as woman continues to give birth. Man will keep on writing on pieces of paper, on scraps, on stones, as long as he lives. Man is noble" (LIG 73).

Faulkner himself tried to fit this concept of the immortal artist. In "'Saying No to Death': Toward William Faulkner's Theory of Fiction," Robert W. Hamblin convincingly discusses Faulkner's individual quest for immortality through his art.<sup>2</sup> He writes, "I suggest that the key to Faulkner's theory of fiction is to be found in his statement, repeated many times after 1951 but implicit

in even his earliest work, that writing was his way of 'saying No to death'" (4). One such statement is found in Faulkner's Foreward to The Faulkner Reader. He claims that the writer's "hope and desire to uplift man's heart is completely selfish, completely personal. He would lift up man's heart for his own benefit because in that way he can say No to death" (ESPL 181). Despite the "selfish" motive that Faulkner proposes for the writer's work, the benefits are not so limited. Faulkner continues:

He is saying No to death for himself by means of the hearts which he has hoped to uplift, or even by means of the mere base glands which he has disturbed to that extent where they can say No to death on their own account by knowing, realizing, having been told and believing it: At least we are not vegetables because the hearts and glands capable of partaking in this excitement are not those of vegetables, and will, must, endure.

So he who, from the isolation of cold impersonal print, can engender this excitement, himself partakes of the immortality which he has engendered. Some day he will be no more, which will not matter then, because isolated and itself invulnerable in the cold print remains that which is capable of engendering still the old deathless excitement in hearts and glands whose owners and custodians are generations from even the air he breathed and anguished in; if it was capable once, he knows that it will be capable and potent still long after there remains of him only a dead and fading name. (ESPL 181-2)

Through art, therefore, the writer (in this case, Faulkner) promotes both his own immortality and that of his race: his own by making "a scratch of the wall of oblivion" that allows him to be remembered, his readers' by enabling them to remember the basic human emotions which unite generations of the past with those of the present and future.

### Attaining Immortality by Practicing the Old Verities

Although being remembered, whether because of life or art, is helpful in achieving immortality, the basic human emotions that help man endure and prevail are even more important because they effect the quality of man's existence. In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Faulkner refers to these emotions as "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed" and identifies "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" as well as "courage" and "hope" (Nobel 120). Other recorded statements by Faulkner show slight variations of this list, but his choices almost always reflect the idea that "if there is one truth of the human heart, it would be to believe in itself, believe in its capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be" (FU 78). Most of Faulkner's "old verities" are those human emotions that help man achieve this goal.<sup>3</sup> The basic nature of these verities is demonstrated by one of Faulkner's answers during an interview at the University of Virginia:

Well, let's use a little better word than virtues--they're the verities of the human heart. They are courage, honor, pride, compassion, pity. That they are not virtues, or one doesn't try to practice them, in my opinion simply because they are good. One practices--tries to practice them simply because they are the edifice on which the whole history of man has [been] founded and by means of which his--as a race has endured so long. . . . Man has endured despite his frailty because he accepts and believes in those verities. (FU 133)

Faulkner's problem with the word "virtues" is not with the concept of the verities being good; he used the word "virtues" himself at times. Rather the determining factor is the truthfulness of the emotion. A virtue is not a verity of the heart if it is pretended or practiced in order to be good or for any other reason. A verity, as its name implies, is a true emotion that provides the basic human motivation for the choices which an individual makes in opposition to the external forces which try to govern his behavior. As Mr. Compson asks his son Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!,

Have you ever noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? (96)

This statement is true in Faulkner's fiction if the characters and their actions are viewed in light of Faulkner's statement that "no person is wholly good or wholly bad, that all people in my belief try to be better than they are and probably will be" (FU 9). Unappealing characters may display few moments of honor, courage, or compassion; heroes and heroines may display tragic flaws, but throughout Faulkner's fiction, are examples of men and women trying "to be better than they are and probably will be." Sometimes Faulkner's characters succeed; usually they fail, but even a small sampling of Faulkner's fiction shows that many of their attempts are indeed motivated



by "the old virtues."

One such man is Horace Benbow of Sanctuary. Although he is powerless to save Lee Goodwin, a bootlegger falsely accused of murder, he makes the attempt because of his sense of honor. While his sister Narcissa wants him to drop the case because she is concerned with appearances, Horace is motivated by justice. When Narcissa asks him why he has chosen to involve himself with Lee and his common law wife, Ruby, Horace states simply, "I cannot stand idly by and see injustice--" (123). At that time, the truth of his statement is not questioned by either Narcissa or her late husband's elderly great aunt who lives with her; Miss Jenny questions only the prudence of his reasoning. Whatever suspicions the two women do have about Horace's relationship with Ruby are dispelled in time, and Miss Jenny tells Horace, "But I reckon now she's [Narcissa] learned that you'll work harder for whatever reason you think you have, than for anything anybody could offer you or give you" (134).

Ruby, however, is harder to convince. She has had to pay for a previous lawyer's services through prostitution, and expects Horace to require the same. When he tries to explain that he does not expect payment from her, she misunderstands, thinking that Horace does not find her attractive enough to be worth his fee. He tries again to explain, "But cant you see that perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right,

necessary to the harmony of things?" (290). Ruby cannot see because she has not experienced honor before. After she finally realizes that Horace does not expect her to pay him with her body, she questions how she will be able to pay him at all. Horace answers her, "Forget it. I've been paid. You won't understand it, but my soul has served an apprenticeship that has lasted forty-three years. . . . So you see that folly, as well as poverty, cares for its own" (295).

Although Horace fails to save Lee, Horace is right that folly does care for its own. In the eyes of society, both Ruby and Horace are foolish for standing by Lee, despite the fact that they are motivated by the old verities, Ruby by love and Horace by honor. Horace's efforts for Ruby are repaid with appreciation and gratitude, emotions that he has not received from his sister, wife, or step-daughter during his forty-three year apprenticeship. Although the man Ruby loves is gone, she has gained a more positive view of mankind from her experiences. When Horace tells her, "God is foolish at times, but at least he's a gentleman," she responds, "I always thought of him as a man" (295). Horace's statement indicates that although justice has failed for Lee Goodwin, he still maintains a basic belief that life is fair, because as a gentleman, God would abide by certain rules of conduct. Ruby's past has led her to believe that God, or justice, is a "man," swayed by circumstance or emotion, but she does not directly

contradict Horace's notion. She states her attitude in the past tense, indicating that she is now at least open to believing that there might be some humanity in mankind. Because Horace has practiced the old verity of honor, Ruby is beginning to believe that the human heart has the "capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be" (FU 78).

Horace's attempts for Ruby and Lee, though prompted by honor, require little sacrifice on his part. Although he forfeits his fee, he does not seem to feel its lack, and he appears to need an activity to employ his time. In As I Lay Dying, however, the sacrifices are great--Cash's broken leg and the money he had earned and saved for a graphophone, Jewel's horse and burnt back, the wagon, the horses--but these sacrifices seem to be demanded by the situation rather than born of "a spirit capable of compassion" and appear foolish rather than noble since they ultimately accomplish little beyond effecting Addie's revenge without the sons, knowing that she "was taking revenge" (173) and allowing their Father to buy his teeth and marry a second Mrs. Bundren. Still, there is a type of glory in the fact that although these sacrifices were not volunteered by Cash or Jewel, they were accepted without expectations of reward and with little visible resentment. Jewel disappears on his horse after Anse announces that he has arranged a trade, but Jewel returns the horse and says no more on the subject. At the University of Virginia, Faulkner answered the

question "Can we attach any significance to [Jewel's] letting his Father sell the horse later on in the story?" in this way:

Only that people want to do better than they do. That this man who loved nothing but that horse would never have believed that he would have sacrificed that horse for anything, yet when the crisis came he did behave better than he thought he would behave. (FU 109)

Cash also "behaves better than he thought he would behave" because he does not complain about the loss of his tools, even though they were as important to him as the horse was to Jewel. In addition, he does not allow the pain in his leg to interfere with his family's goal of burying Addie in Jefferson as she had requested.

Through their sacrifices, Cash and Jewel show that the heart has the "capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be" (FU 78), and at times, even better than it perhaps should be. The reason for their sacrifices was a "convention in which people have to live" (FU 112) rather than a genuine human need. Addie's body did not need to be buried in Jefferson--"The simplest thing would have been to bury her where she was in any pleasant place" (FU 112). Still, both men were thrown into situations that their father had created, and within that context, their sacrifices demonstrate their ability to endure and prevail.

Judith Sutpen is also forced to live in a situation that has been created by others. Her home is ravaged by war, her family separated by the determination of both her father and brother to protect her from an improper

marriage, her fiance killed on her doorstep by her own brother. According to Rosa Coldfield, the only verities left after these events are faith and love:

. . . the stable world we had been taught to know dissolved in fire and smoke until peace and security were gone, and pride and hope, and there was left only maimed honor's veterans, and love. Yes, there should, there must be love and faith: these left with us by fathers, husbands, sweethearts, brothers, who carried the pride and the hope of peace in honor's vanguard as they did the flags; there must be these, else what do men fight for? what else worth dying for? Yes, dying not for honor's empty sake, nor pride nor even peace, but for that love and faith they left behind. . . . Love without hope perhaps, faith with little to be proud with: but love and faith at least above the murdering and the folly, to salvage at least from the humbled indicted dust something anyway of the old lost enchantment of the heart-- .  
 . . . (AA 120)

Judith does manage to "salvage" "something . . . of the lost enchantment of the heart." Mr. Compson describes Judith as "giving implicit trust where she had given love, giving implicit love where she had derived breath and pride: that . . . true pride which can say to itself without abasement I love, I will accept no substitute" (AA 96). She did accept no substitute in her love for Charles. She sends for his widow so that she can mourn and eventually provides a home for his son and then his grandson. The picture of the octoroon in the metal case that she had given Charles with her own picture, told her, "I was no good; do not grieve for me" (287), but she did not let that prevent her from caring for the physical needs of Charles's offspring, even though she could not transfer

her feeling of love for Charles to them, thus demonstrating her heart's "capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be" (FU 78).

Like Judith, Byron Bunch of Light in August, is motivated by a love that is outside the boundaries that society has set. A "slight, nondescript man" who spends his weeks working at the mill and his Sundays directing a choir for the all day service of a country church, Byron "fell in love contrary to all the traditions of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability" (LIA 49) because he fell in love with Lena Grove, a woman obviously pregnant with another man's child. This emotion is not recognized at first. Even the Reverend Hightower, Byron's only intimate friend, "does not yet think love" when he first speculates about the level of responsibility that Byron feels for Lena:

He remembers only that Byron is still young and has led a life of celibacy and hard labor, and that by Byron's telling the woman whom he has never seen possesses some disturbing quality at least, even though Byron still believes that it is only pity. (LIA 82)

Byron demonstrates his compassion as he concerns himself with the best way to tell Lena that her lover, Lucas Burch, is a part of a murder case (83), as he arranges for her lodging (85-6), as he worries about Lucas's running and leaving Lena again (101). By the time Byron helps Lena settle into the cabin where Lucas had lived with Joe Christmas, however, both Hightower and Byron have recognized that Byron is not motivated by pity or mere compassion.

"They aint man and wife yet," says Byron, to which Hightower replies, "Ah, Byron, Byron. What are a few mumbled words before God, before the steadfastness of a woman's nature? Before that child?" (307). Hightower counsels Byron to

Go away. Now. At once. . . . I can read you.  
You will tell me that you have just learned love;  
I will tell you that you have just learned hope.  
That's all; hope. The object does not matter, not  
to the hope, not even to you. There is but one  
end to this, to the road that you are taking; sin  
or marriage. And you would resist the sin. (315)

It is ironic considering Hightower's former position as a minister that his concern for Byron is not for the effect that sin would have on his soul, but rather for the cuckoldry that Byron would surely suffer by marrying a woman who bears another man's child (316).

That Hightower is at least partially correct is confirmed in a discussion between the deputy and the sheriff. When the sheriff is told that Byron is at the Burden place with a pregnant woman, he replies, "You can't tell me that about Byron Bunch." The deputy responds, "No more am I trying to. . . . I aint saying it's Byron's" (320). Later, the furniture repairer and dealer who gives Lena and Byron a ride also speculates that Byron was not the father of the baby, although he has no prior knowledge of either Lena or Byron. "I couldn't imagine anybody, any woman, knowing that they had ever slept with him, let alone having anything to show folks to prove it" (496). Byron, however, does not let the opinions of others influence his decision. After trying to leave Lena once, he returns and

tells her, "I done come too far now. . . . I be dog if I'm going to quit now" (506). Because of his love for Lena, Byron finds the "capacity to aspire," to hope that his love might be returned. Up until the time that Lena has her baby, his sacrifices for her are minor, but rather than withdrawing his attention once the symbol of her previous relationship is incontrovertible, he then makes his greater sacrifices of fighting Lucas Burch and quitting his job.

Byron's kind attention to Lena before the birth of her child is similar to the compassion that Caddy Compson shows her idiot brother, Benjy, in The Sound and the Fury. She does not make great sacrifices for Benjy but through little things shows that she is aware of his feelings. Perhaps the most touching example of Caddy's compassion for Benjy takes place when she is fourteen. Caddy recognizes that something is bothering Benjy because he is crying and because he won't stay close to her. While the other family members and the servants who are assigned to watch him are repeatedly more concerned with Benjy's noise than his feelings, Caddy not only deals with the symptoms but also searches for the source of the problem so that she can correct it. Benjy remembers:

Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn't smell trees anymore and I began to cry. . . . "What is it, Benjy." she said. "Is it this hat." She took her hat off and came again, and I went away. . . . "What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done." . . . "What is it, Benjy." Caddy said. "Tell Caddy. She'll do it. Try." (SF 40-1)



After bathing, "Caddy smelled like trees" again, and Benjy allows her to hug him and accompanies her to her room where she tries to divert him by allowing him to smell her perfume (42). The attempt is unsuccessful, but enlightening.

Benjy continues:

I went away and I didn't hush, and she held the bottle in her hand, looking at me.  
 "Oh." she said. She put the bottle down and came and put her arms around me. "So that was it. And you were trying to tell Caddy and you couldn't tell her. You wanted to, but you couldn't, could you. Of course Caddy wont. Of course Caddy wont. Just wait till I dress." (42)

After dressing, Caddy takes Benjy and the perfume down to the kitchen where she allows Benjy to hand the bottle to Dilsey and provides the explanation, "We dont like perfume ourselves" (43).

This example displays Caddy's caring on several levels: her concern for his feelings, her recognition that in spite of his mental limitations there was a logical reason for his distress, and her patience to piece together the clues, as well as her willingness to stop using the offending perfume. In addition, she let Benjy participate in the solution by putting the bottle into his hand so that he could give it to Dilsey himself.

On another occasion, Dilsey tells Benjy, "Caddy tired sleeping with you. Hush now, so you can go to sleep," but Benjy doesn't hush so Caddy comes and "Snuggle[s] her head next to [his] on the pillow" until he falls asleep (44). As a result of this kind of compassionate attention, Caddy gains immortal stature in Benjy's mind. To him, she isn't

gone; she isn't a memory. Faulkner explained, "The only thing that held him into any sort of reality, into the world at all, was the trust that he had for his sister, that he knew that she loved him and would defend him, and so she was the whole world to him" (FU 64).

At times, Faulkner combines memories and compassion in order to demonstrate man's immortality. Through their memories, various characters become more sympathetic because their thoughts show their compassion in a way that their words or actions do not, and by remembering those who are gone, they create a type of immortality for the subjects of their memories. Benjy is an idiot, but he is more appealing than his brothers in that he remembers Caddy's love more than her shame. In addition, he is the only member of the Compson family who continues to remember his father and brother by visiting their graves. In As I Lay Dying, Cash feels powerless to prevent Darl's being taken to the asylum but continues to remember him "everytime" he listens to a new record and thinks "what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too" (261).

For other characters, their memories show that the errors in the present are understandable, if not excusable, because of previous events. Faulkner stated, "And as any man works out of his past, since any man--no man is himself, he's the sum of his past, and in a way, if you can accept the term, of his future too" (FU 47-8). In these cases, the compassion that Faulkner creates is not in the character,

but in the reader for the character. Three such characters are Quentin Compson, Thomas Sutpen, and Joe Christmas.

While reading Absalom, Absalom!, the reader who is familiar with The Sound and the Fury can feel more compassion for the emotional struggle that leads Quentin to vehemently deny that he hates the South (AA 303). His memories in The Sound and the Fury show that Quentin is deeply affected by the story of Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon because it is too much his own. He has both desired his sister and felt compelled to protect her honor. Likewise, Quentin's identification with Henry and Charles in Absalom, Absalom! helps the reader to recognize the emotional turmoil that brings on his madness and to sympathize with the distorted sense of honor that causes Quentin to act out the roles of both men by killing himself because of his feelings for his sister, Caddy.

Even some of the Faulkner's most repulsive characters appear in a light that suggests they deserve our pity once we understand the memories that motivate them. After traveling the "corridor" of Joe Christmas's memories to the "big long garbled cold echoing building" of his childhood (119), the reader can see him as the victim as well as the villain of Light in August. Placed in an orphanage by his own grandfather because of the possibility that he has Negro blood, he is taunted by the other children as a "nigger" and distrusted by the dietitian because he has witnessed her affair with the hospital intern. By the

time he is adopted by McEachern, a strict, harsh, God fearing man, he knows that society considers him to be of lessor value because of the possibility that he might be part Negro. He has accepted that indictment and is unable to accept love or kindness from Mrs. McEachern or anyone else.

After thinking with the young boy Thomas Sutpen "until he got it straight" in Absalom, Absalom! (188), the reader can understand why Sutpen felt the need "to have land and niggers and a fine house" (192). He was embarrassed and confused when he was told to go to the back door of the big house, and he was determined to have whatever necessary to avoid that shame, no matter what the cost. His method was faulty, but his motivation was understandable, perhaps even honorable; he "had sacrificed pity and gentleness and love and all the soft virtues for [his dynasty]--if he had ever had them to sacrifice, felt their lack, desired them of others" (AA 124) and "violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion," but his desire was "to establish that man is immortal, that man if he is man, cannot be inferior to another man through artificial standards or circumstances" (FU 35). Unfortunately Sutpen did not understand that in order to "establish that man is immortal," he did not need to say, "I'm going to be as rich as he was, as big as he was on the outside," but rather, "I'm going to be braver or more compassionate or more honest than he" (FU 35).

Sutpen achieves a certain level of immortality because he is remembered, but the dynasty he creates dies with him. He has not prevailed. Neither Joe Christmas nor Quentin Compson is able to resolve his inner struggle, and they are remembered fondly by few people in Yoknapatawpha County. They are not immortal. Caddy, however, will never die in Benji's thoughts, Byron Bunch lives in the furniture dealer's story, and Horace Benbow has changed Ruby Lamar. These characters and others have attained partial immortality. They have made a "scratch" on "something that was" (AA 101) because they have touched the life of another human being. Through their application of the old verities, the world is not perfect, but "Man is improved" (FU 6).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See also FN 35, LIG 227, 252, 253, and ESPL 143.

<sup>2</sup> Hamblin suggests that Faulkner says "no to death" by making his characters immortal and then discusses three of Faulkner's techniques. Hamblin explains that Faulkner uses "art-surrogates" such as Judith Sutpen's letter to prevent the character's "oblivion," reworks characters to bring them back to life, and employs stream-of-consciousness to bring the past into the present.

<sup>3</sup> One exception, however, is found in one of Faulkner's statements while at West Point. He named "love," "hope" and "compassion," but also included "fear," "greed," and "lust" (FWP 59). However, this is not necessarily a contradiction of his other statements since fear, greed and lust can be seen as the opposition necessary to make courage, sacrifice, and honor possible. The concept of opposition in Faulkner's works will be more fully explored in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### EVIL: THE TEST OF MAN'S IMMORTALITY

At the University of Virginia, Faulkner was asked whether "it's harder to create a good character than an evil one." Faulkner replied, "It's possible that that's inherent in human nature . . . that it's easier to conceive of evil than of good . . . that evil is easier to make believable than good" (FU 5). This statement is reflected in Faulkner's fiction. Some of his most vibrant characters do not demonstrate the old verities, but instead an opposite, yet essential, element of the human condition, that of evil. The common conception of evil is easy enough to recognize in Faulkner's novels. His characters lie, cheat, steal, rape, and murder, causing many to question whether Faulkner truly believed that man could endure and prevail. However, quotes from Faulkner's speeches and interviews show a much broader definition of evil and demonstrate that the presence of evil in his fiction reinforces rather than refutes his belief in man's immortal nature.

Faulkner himself was often asked to explain how he

reconciled the evil in the world and in his fiction with his belief that man would prevail. His answers vary slightly but are not actually contradictory because they can be grouped into three related concepts. These three ideas are contained in a statement made by Faulkner at the University of Virginia:

. . . man will always be unjust to man, yet there must always be people, men and women who are capable of the compassion toward that injustice and the hatred of that injustice, and the will to risk public opprobrium, to stand up and say, This is rotten, this stinks, I won't have it. (FU 148)

This statement and others show that man prevails as he accepts evil as an undeniable part of the human condition, develops the old verities in opposition to evil, and through this opposition develops and strengthens his individual will.

Faulkner's belief in the inevitability and longevity of evil is concisely demonstrated when he calls "the old fallen angel" "the unregenerate immortal" (FU 2). Like God, the symbol of goodness, Lucifer, the symbol of evil, is immortal. Evil can be resisted, avoided, or accepted, but it is never destroyed. However, evil does not need to be completely eradicated in order for man to prevail. At the University of Virginia, Faulkner explained that he did not believe "in the ultimate goodness of man":

I said only that man will prevail and will--and in order to prevail he has got to . . . [try to be good]. As to whether he will stay on the earth long enough to attain ultimate goodness, nobody knows. But he does improve since the only alternative to progress is death. (FU 5)



Man, therefore, does not prevail because of an absence of evil, but because of his effort "to be good" in spite of evil. At West Point, he explained that one of his goals as an author was to illustrate this concept:

. . . the writer, the painter, the musician wants to show man not in his--not when he's dressed up for Sunday, but in all his phases, his conditions; then the very fact that to see man in his base attitudes, his base conditions, and still show that he goes on, he continues. . . . He has partaken of immortality, that the aberrations are part of his history, are part of himself, maybe. (54-5)

Faulkner even claimed "that mass manipulation by a fanatic" would not "negate [the improvements man had made]": "That to me is part of the ferment of man's immortality--that these people, the nuts, are necessary too" (FU 6).

Faulkner told the graduating class at Pine Manor Junior College why "these people, the nuts, are necessary too": "God used the dark spirit . . . not only the ambition and the ruthlessness and the arrogance to show man what to revolt against, but also the temerity to revolt and the will to change what one does not like" (137). Faulkner, playing God by creating his own cosmos, uses the dark spirit for the same reasons:

. . . there are times when man needs to be reminded of evil, to correct it, to change it; he should not be reminded always only of the good and the beautiful. . . . If the writer is to accomplish anything, it is to make the world a little better than he found it, to do what he can, in whatever way he can, to get rid of the evils like war, injustice--that's his job. And not to do this by describing merely the pleasant things--he must show man the base, the evil things that man can do and still hate himself for doing it, to still prevail and endure and last, to believe

always that he can be better than he probably will. (FN 13-4)

This, according to Faulkner, is "why [his] characters must reach an absolute pitch of degeneration or damnation":

. . . I love my country enough to want to cure its faults and the only way that I can cure its faults within my capacity, within my own vocation, is to shame it, to criticize, to show the difference between its evils, its good, its moments of baseness, and its moments of honesty, integrity and pride, to remind the people who condone the baseness that there were moments when it was glorious, when they as a people, their fathers, grandfathers, did fine, splendid, glorious things. Just to write about the good qualities in my country wouldn't do anything to change the bad ones. I've got to tell people about the bad ones, so that they'd be angry enough, or shamed enough to change it. (FN 125-6)

Faulkner's fiction is peopled with characters from both categories. Popeye (Sanctuary), Flem Snopes (The Hamlet), Jason Compson (The Sound and the Fury), and Anse Bundren (As I Lay Dying) each show "moments of baseness" because they have "the ambition and the ruthlessness and the arrogance" of the dark spirit instead of the old verities of the human heart that would qualify them as human beings. None of these men, however, is unopposed. Those who are "angry enough, or shamed enough" by their actions try to fight the baseness. Those who are angry typically choose the temerity of the dark spirit as their weapon; those who are shamed are more likely to employ the old verities, but whatever the weapon, each individual who "gets up on his hind legs and says 'I don't like this,' proves [] that man prevails" (FN 8).

### Representations of Evil

A study of Faulkner's fiction reveals that evil has many degrees and variations, at times to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish the villains from the victims. Faulkner himself asserts:

I think that you really can't say that any man is good or bad. I grant you there are some exceptions, but man is the victim of himself, or his fellows, or his own nature, or his environment, but no man is good or bad either. He tries to do the best he can within his rights.  
(FU 118)

This statement was made in defense of Joe Christmas (Light in August), but based on other answers that Faulkner gave during his interviews, it would be equally true for Thomas Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!) and Anse Bundren. Popeye, Flem Snopes, and Jason Compson, however, are among the "exceptions" and so provide an excellent base for an understanding of the characteristics of the "dark spirit" which Faulkner uses.

Popeye is the undisputed villain of Sanctuary. Faulkner himself said, "Now I don't understand Popeye. He, to me, was a monster" (FWP 83). At the University of Mississippi, he said that Popeye "was merely symbolic of evil" (LIG 53). Faulkner contradicted himself later at the University of Virginia by saying, "No, He was to me another lost human being. He became a symbol of evil in modern society only by coincidence . . . " (FU 74). This debate, however, is limited to the question of Popeye's ability to be a human being; that he is a symbol of evil is

uncontested. This symbolism is demonstrated in the novel through Popeye's consistent association with black. His suit is black; his eyes are black. According to Horace Benbow, Popeye even "smells black" (S 7) and his "presence" is remembered as a "black and nameless threat" (125).

Even without such imagery, however, Popeye would clearly be evil. He demonstrates his ruthless nature by killing the harmless idiot Tommy and raping Temple with a corn cob. He shows no compassion for Temple while traveling to Memphis afterwards but instead chides her about her appearance and asks her, "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?" (144). He keeps Temple in a Memphis brothel, but because of his impotence, he must watch her relations with another man in order to receive any sexual fulfillment. Popeye eventually kills that man, not in a fit of jealousy, which would at least be a human emotion, but in cold blood after watching Temple being driven away by two of his thugs. His variety of evil is best described by Miss Reba, the madam of the brothel where he keeps Temple: "It's against nature" (269-70).

This is in keeping with Cleanth Brooks's summation of evil in Faulkner's fiction: "Evil for Faulkner involves the violation of the natural and the denial of the human" ("Faulkner's Vision" 74). While Popeye defines "the violation of the natural," Flem Snopes demonstrates "the denial of the human." Faulkner describes Flem as "inhuman": I have known people in actual life who were hopeless, who

in terms of the humanities, in terms of the verities of man's condition, compassion and pity and courage, unselfishness, he was inhuman, but he was still a living man" (FU 132). Therefore, Flem is evil, not merely because of what he does, but because of his reasons. Flem is not motivated by the conflicts of the heart, but by the baser desires of the mind. Faulkner said of Flem, "I never did feel sorry for him anymore than one feels sorry for anyone who is ridden with an ambition or demon as base as simply vanity and rapacity and greed" (FU 120).

Flem demonstrates the predominance of his mind over his heart throughout the novel. His business dealings, which include providing high interest loans, using a middleman for the sale of the wild Texas ponies, and outmaneuvering Jody Varner and Ratcliff while bargaining, are legal, although unethical. He even legally outmaneuvers "the Prince" of darkness himself in an allegorical section of the novel because his soul is gone, leaving only "a little kind of dried-up smear under one edge" of the box where it had been kept (H 167).

Like Flem, Jason Compson also is "completely inhuman" (FU 132). Faulkner identifies Jason as his "unfavorite character" (LIG 225) and claims that he "represented complete evil" (FN 104). Jason represents both "the violation of the natural and the denial of the human" because his lack of the human verities leads him to steal from his own family. By gaining his mother's power of

attorney, he has been able to embezzle her money as well as cash the checks that his sister, Caddy, sends for her daughter, Quentin. He is especially vindictive towards Caddy because he holds her responsible for a job in a bank that was promised to him, but later denied. After their father's funeral, Jason sees Caddy at the cemetery and extorts a hundred dollars from her when she begs him to let her see her daughter. He fulfills his part of the agreement but does so with a mocking lack of compassion. He bribes the driver of the hack to wait until dark. Then when they finally drive by Caddy, Jason holds little Quentin to the window just long enough for Caddy to see them. As she comes forward, Jason instructs the driver, "Hit'em Mink!" and they "went past her like a fire engine." Jason sees Caddy running after them as he looks through the back window and tells Mink, "Hit'em again" (SF 204-5). Later that evening as he counts the money, he shows no remorse or sympathy for Caddy's feelings. He says instead, "I says I reckon that'll show you. I'll reckon you know now that you cant beat me out a job and get away with it" (205).

Anse Bundren also selfishly takes money from his own family, but according to Faulkner, Anse is not "inhuman" like Jason. Faulkner even partially defends Anse by claiming that the "villain" in As I Lay Dying is not Anse, but rather "the convention in which people have to live," namely that Anse must keep his promise to bury Addie in Jefferson (FU 112). Nevertheless, Anse still represents an

embodiment of "the ambition and the ruthlessness and the arrogance" of the "dark spirit" as he makes the journey in fulfillment of that promise. Although Anse appears passive in comparison to Jason, he also exerts a ruthless control over the members of his household. Anse takes money from both Cash (AILD 109) and Dewey Dell (257) and trades away Jewel's horse without permission and without apology (190-1). Some sacrifices are demanded by the situation rather than required by Anse, but they are not acknowledged or appreciated by him. As Cash lies on the ground, nearly drowned and with a broken leg, and his brothers and Vernon Tull brave the cold and rushing water to search for his missing tools, Anse feels sympathy only for himself. He not only calls himself "a misfortunate man," and complains that "it's a trial," but he also repeats three times in succession, "I don't begrudge her it," implying that he has made a sacrifice himself. Cash has indeed suffered a loss, but Anse belittles his suffering as he says, "A fellow might call it lucky it was the same leg he broke when he fell offen that church" (163).

In Go Down, Moses, the "villain" is also a "convention in which people have to live," namely, "obsolescence--the artificial inequality of man" (ESPL 96). As the title implies, the novel is about freeing the slaves, not legally--although that does occur--but socially and emotionally. The process is long and difficult; just as Pharaoh tries to maintain his power over the Israelites in

the Biblical story, many of the white Southerners that Faulkner describes cling to old ideas and traditions that would allow them to maintain superiority. Faulkner refers to these attitudes of the old South as "the old evils, the old forces, which were **by their own standards** right and correct, ruthless, but they lived and died by their own code--they asked nothing" [emphasis added] (FN 50).

Faulkner does not defend these traditions as being correct, but he does respect the strength and independence of the culture.

It is within this context that the bear in Go Down, Moses represents "the obsolete primitive" (FU 37), "a natural force which" was "not a deliberate evil, not a satanic evil, but the quality of evil in sample size and force which exists" (FN 58-9). Lest his distinctions between the types of evil be misunderstood, Faulkner later renamed the evil "an old obsolescence that was strong, that held to the old ways, but because it had been strong and lived within its own code of morality, it deserved to be treated with respect" (FN 92-3). This obsolescence must be treated with respect, not because it is good, but because it is powerful.

Faulkner explores two aspects of obsolescence in Go Down, Moses--the ownership of slaves and the ownership of property. Faulkner named slavery the "curse" of the South and called it "an intolerable condition," (FU 79), but property ownership is part of this curse because the slave



system could not have fully developed without the possession of large plots of land. In addition, both are facets of the same evil because they commercialize the creative process. According to Isaac McCaslin, a character who repudiates his inheritance, "God created man and He created the world for him to live in" (GDM 331). Ownership of either man or land effects a curse because man cannot own that which has been made by another.<sup>1</sup>

This curse is long-standing and widespread. Even after the political reality of slavery has been abolished, the obsolete attitudes continue to haunt mankind. Carothers Edmonds, for example, was nurtured by the Negro Mollie Beauchamp and played with her son Henry as equals until "one day the old curse of his father, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him . . . " (GDM 107). Then he would no longer sleep in the same bed with Henry and ate alone at the Beauchamp's table.

The extreme of this attitude is demonstrated by the sheriff who arrests Rider, a Negro who has killed a man and eventually is killed himself while dealing with the grief of losing his wife:

Them damn niggers. . . . I swear to godfry, it's a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why? Because they aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd

of wild buffaloes. (GDM 149-50)

This statement is tragically ironic since it reveals that it is the sheriff himself who lacks "normal human feeling" and is completely untouched by the death of another human being while Rider's conflict of the human heart is obvious and deep. The sheriff's wife refutes any idea that a woman would be more sensitive. She is more interested in having the dead man removed from her kitchen than in hearing his story.

In each case, the characters that represent evil do so because they demonstrate either a complete lack of human emotion, or their emotions are those of the "glands" rather than those of the "heart" (ESPL 120). They demonstrate lust rather than love, ruthlessness rather than honor, greed rather than sacrifice, ambition rather than compassion. However, the fact that the human race can endure despite those who are without human feeling provides partial evidence that man does prevail.

### **Reactions to Evil**

Man's immortality is further established because individual men and women have the "temerity to revolt." At the University of Virginia, Faulkner described three ways of rebelling against evil:

The first says, This is rotten, I'll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, this stinks and I'm going to do something about

it. . . . What we need are people who will say,  
this is bad and I'm going to do something about  
it, I'm going to change it. (FU 246)

Those who want "no part of evil" are those who do not understand evil. Because they believe that they can protect themselves from the consequences of evil either through position or wealth, they do not run from evil or actively fight against it. The death that they suffer is often the death of the soul rather than the death of the body as they become contaminated by evil. Those who "climb into a cave" understand evil better than the first group but lack the courage to fight it, while those who seek to change the effects of evil realize that they can do so only through evil's antithesis--the old verities of the heart.

Temple Drake of Sanctuary is an example of the first type of individual. She wants no part of the evil that she encounters at the Old Frenchman place, yet she lacks the temerity to escape the evil or to fight it. Though Ruby repeatedly warns her to leave, Temple cannot understand that she must do so without help. She asks Gowan, then Popeye, to take her away (S 52-3), and when they will not, she relies on Gowan as a gentleman, her father's position as a judge, and even the old man with the yellow eyes to protect her. All of these hopes are useless against Popeye, however. She is raped and kidnapped, but she remains incapable of understanding that she herself must act instead of waiting for others to rescue her from evil. She manages to sneak out of the brothel where she is being held, but

she telephones Red, a potential rescuer, rather than using the opportunity to escape and rescue herself (240). Even when she is returned to her father's protection, she perjures herself and condemns Lee Goodwin instead of acting to bring Popeye to justice. Because of her false belief that someone or something else will protect her from evil, she never takes the initiative against Popeye. By the time she sits in the Luxembourg Gardens with her father at the end of the novel, she is like the "dead tranquil queens in stained marble" (S 233). She has been corrupted by evil and has lost both her purity and her human emotions.

Thomas Sutpen is killed by Wash Jones in Absalom, Absalom!, but like Temple, he had given up his human emotions long before. He had wanted to fight against the artificial inequality created by obsolescence but did not understand that man cannot overcome oppression by becoming an oppressor. His desire for wealth was not base like that of Flem Snopes but instead misguided. While explaining his lack of sympathy for Flem, Faulkner stated that one "can be ridden by a demon, but let it be a good demon, let it be a splendid demon, even if it is a demon, and his was a petty demon" (FU 120). Sutpen's demon was not petty but rather was the splendid demon of wanting "to establish that man is immortal, that man if he is man, cannot be inferior to another man through artificial standards or circumstances" (FU 35).

Those who know Sutpen, however, see the demon that

he has become rather than the demon that drives him. Shreve calls Sutpen "this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub . . . who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment" (AA 145), and Rosa speaks of "Thomas Sutpen's devil's fate" (107) because Sutpen has adopted the ruthlessness of the dark spirit instead of the old verities of humanity. Rosa describes him as a man "with valor and strength but without pity or honor" (13), and the men of Jefferson "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" (32). Even when his daughters talked of Sutpen, it was with the expectation that when he returned from the war, "he would undoubtedly sweep [them] with the old ruthlessness whether [they] would or no" into his previous plan of building his dynasty (127).

Sutpen is eventually destroyed because he does not understand the true nature of man, and so denies his own humanity. Faulkner explained that Sutpen

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, the human family, is to be pitied. Sutpen didn't believe that. He was Sutpen. He was going to take what he wanted because he was big enough and strong enough, and I think that people like that are destroyed sooner or later, because one has got to belong to the human family, and to take a responsible part in the human family. . . . (FU 80-1)

Sutpen is destroyed. In trying to combat the injustice that he had experienced as a small boy, Sutpen becomes a part of the evil that he had been fighting against. Just

as young Sutpen was dismissed from the front door of the mansion, Charles Bon, his part-Negro son, is dismissed from his life. Charles does not hope for love, only acknowledgment, but Sutpen shows no compassion. He sends no word to Charles but instead reveals Charles's Negro blood to Henry. Charles would have sacrificed for his father and gone away if the request had even been implied, but with all hope of a father's attention gone, Charles chooses to marry Judith or die in the attempt (AA 285). Charles does die. He is shot by Henry, Henry becomes a fugitive, and Sutpen is left without a son to carry on his name or his dream.

Like Thomas Sutpen, Joe Christmas "does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family," but his tragedy is greater because he does not belong to any family. He is given no opportunity to acknowledge a son or father or brother, either literally or symbolically, by embracing a race. Faulkner stated, "Joe Christmas, to me, is one of the most tragic figures I can think of because he didn't know who he was--didn't know whether he was part Negro or not and would never know" (FWP 83). Christmas, like Sutpen, is faced with the evil of obsolescence. Sutpen was scorned because of his economic level; Christmas is an outcast because of the question of his race.

Unlike Sutpen, Christmas did not resist his position as an outsider. According to Faulkner, Christmas

didn't know what he was. He knew that he would never know what he was, and his only salvation

in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him. (FU 118)

Because Christmas does not know who he is, he tries to be a nonentity. His struggles subside when he is ignored, but he rebels whenever he is accepted into either the white or the black race. Indeed, it is Joanna Burden's insistence that Christmas acknowledge his race and attend a Negro college that causes the rage that drives him to brutally murder her. Christmas see both races as an evil and wants no part of them, but he is trapped by a society that feels a need to classify and so forces him to be first one, then the other, until it finally, through his death, allows him to be nothing.

While Temple, Sutpen, and Christmas are destroyed by their interaction with evil, other characters manage to remain nearly untouched. They recognize the evil, but are not corrupted by it because they distance themselves from the offending individual or situation. Faulkner cites Isaac McCaslin as an example of this second type of reaction but states that avoiding evil is inadequate (FU 246). When Cynthia Grenier named Isaac McCaslin as her favorite character because "he wanted to reject a tainted inheritance," Faulkner responded, "Well, I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people" (LIG 225).

Isaac's choice is predictable, however, considering the examples shown by his father, Buck, and his Uncle Buddy:

. . . these twin brothers had believed that there was something outrageous and wrong in slavery and they had done what they could. In fact they had given up their father's fine mansion to let the slaves live in it and they had built a two-room log cabin that they lived in. That they by instinct knew that slavery was wrong, but they didn't know quite what to do about it. (FU 39)

A generation later, Isaac still does not know how to solve the problem. Like Buck and Buddy, he tries to endure it by distancing himself both physically and emotionally. Not only does he reject the land that should have been his inheritance, but he also tries to reject the responsibility that is part of his heritage. When he discovers that Edmonds's lover is a "nigger," he thinks "Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America. . . . But not now! Not Now!" (GDM 344). Faulkner explained that Isaac was actually saying that he "had seen a condition which was intolerable, which shouldn't be but it was, and he was saying in effect that this must be changed, this cannot go on, but I'm too old to do anything about it. . . ." (FU 46). Isaac expresses a similar idea himself when speaking to Fonsiba's Negro husband-to-be:

Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can--not resist it, not combat it-- maybe just endure and out last it until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples' turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Dont you see? (GDM 266)

Although the most obvious, Isaac McCaslin is not the only character who tries to ignore evil rather than fight



it. According to Faulkner, the people of Jefferson initially avoided Thomas Sutpen for this reason. "They feared him and they hated him because of his ruthlessness. He made no pretense to be anything except what he was, and so they ostracized him. Not in revenge at all, but simply because they wanted no part of Sutpen" (FU 80). Gowan Stevens of Sanctuary also runs, although not from the real evil which threatens Temple. He is ashamed that he has not held his liquor like a gentleman, and so he leaves Temple at the Old Frenchman place rather than face her after he has regained consciousness (S 90). He then leaves Jefferson and Narcissa in hopes that she will not discover his weakness (S 135). Cash Bundren does not physically distance himself from the evil of committing his brother to an institution, but he does not participate while the others restrain Darl. Like Isaac, he rationalizes that there is nothing more he could do: "But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life" (AILD 261).

While the second group of people theorize about the nature of evil and rationalize their own behavior, the third group acts in opposition to the evil. Faulkner states "that to theorize about an evil is not enough. Someone, somewhere, must do something about it" (FN 97). It is in actually doing something that man prevails:

There's a--what quality in man that prevails, it's difficult to be specific about, but somehow man does prevail, there's always someone that will never stop trying to cope with the Snopes, that will never stop trying to get rid of the Snopes. (FU 34)

Mrs. Armstid is one of those who literally try "to cope with the Snopes." Her lawsuit against Flem Snopes is unsuccessful, but her attempt is evidence that she did not lack temerity. She recognized an evil and tried to change it. Other characters also have moments of revolt: the young girl Quentin steals Jason's money, Darl tries to burn his mother's coffin, Walsh Jones kills Sutpen, Henry kills Charles, and so on.

The most effective revolts in Faulkner's fiction, however, are neither violent nor accomplished by the obvious heroes. Faulkner's major fiction indicates that Isaac McCaslin echoes Faulkner's own sentiments when he states that the Negroes "will endure" because "they are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them," yet their virtues are "their own. Endurance . . . and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children . . . whether their own or not or black or not" (GDM 281-2). By practicing these virtues, characters such as Dilsey, Sam Fathers, and Mollie and Lucas Beauchamp demonstrate how man can prevail in opposition to evil.

Faulkner identifies Dilsey as one of his favorite characters because she is "brave, courageous, generous, gentle, and honest" (LIG 224). Despite the ruthless influence that Jason had over his mother, brother, and niece,

in that whole family there was Dilsey that held the whole thing together and would continue to hold the whole thing together for no reward, that the will of man to prevail will even take the nether channel of the black man, black race, before it will relinquish, succumb, be defeated. (FU 5)

Her ability to "hold the whole thing together" is evident the morning Jason discovers the broken window in his room. Jason sends Dilsey to wake Quentin for breakfast instead of letting her sleep in. Mrs. Compson is weak and tells Dilsey, "You'd better do as he says. . . . It's his right to require us to respect his wishes." Dilsey, however, sees injustice in the situation and replies, "Taint no sense in him getting so bad tempered he got to make Quentin get up jes to suit him" (SF 278). Although whether Question gets up or sleeps in is a minor issue, Dilsey shows her character by being willing to say, "This is wrong."

Throughout the day, Dilsey repeatedly sees the effects of evil and tries to change them. She states her intention to protect Quentin from Jason's anger (281-2), consoles Mrs. Compson (282-3), and cares for Benjy's emotional needs (288) as well as providing for the physical needs and comforts of the entire family. In this way, Dilsey clearly demonstrates that man can prevail by employing the old verities, and she does so from a disadvantaged position. When speaking to the Raven, Jefferson, and ODK Societies at the University of Virginia, Faulkner proposed that Negro could not be given freedom but needed to be taught " . . . that, in order to be free and equal, he must be worthy of it, and then

forever afterward work to hold and keep and defend it" (157). Specifically, he stated that the Negro "must learn . . . the hard things--self-restraint, honesty, dependability, purity; to act not even as well as just any white man, but to act as well as the best of white men" (158). Dilsey has learned these things and acts better than "the best of the white men" in The Sound and the Fury. She is "free and equal" because she makes no excuses about her race, her employers, or her responsibilities, but as an individual, she cares for her family and the remaining members of the Compson family. As she shows compassion, endurance, and sacrifice, she demonstrates Faulkner's concept that the completion of the world "begins at home" and that "home means not just today, but tomorrow and tomorrow, and then again tomorrow and tomorrow" (Pine Manor 140). She prevails because she combats evil through the practice of these old verities.

Sam Fathers, the son of an Indian chief and a quadroon slave, also prevails because the old verities of his heart are stronger than the evils of his situation. According to McCaslin Edmonds, Sam's mother "had bequeathed him not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which had enslaved it; himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat" (GDM 162), yet Sam does not allow the evil of slave ancestry to turn him into a slave. McCaslin Edmonds asks Isaac McCaslin, "Did you ever know anybody yet, even your

father and Uncle Buddy, that ever told him to do or not do anything that he ever paid attention to?" (162). Isaac admits that he did not, and that it was "white man's work, when Sam did work" (163). Like Dilsey, Sam was not given this freedom but is "free and equal" because he is "worthy of it":

In the boy's eyes at least it was Sam Fathers, the Negro, who bore himself with gravity and dignity and without servility or recourse to that impenetrable wall of ready and easy mirth which Negroes sustain between themselves and white men, bearing himself toward his cousin McCaslin not only as one man to another but as an older man to a younger. (GDM 164)

Lucas Beauchamp also successfully revolts against mixed blood. Descended from both Carothers McCaslin and Negro slaves, he is like the fyce that fights the bear.<sup>2</sup>

The fyce represents the creature who has coped with his environment and is still on top of it, you might say. That he has--instead of sticking to his breeding and becoming a decadent degenerate creature, he has mixed himself up with the good stock where he picked and chose. And he's quite smart, he's quite brave. (FU 37)

Like the fyce, Lucas has coped with his environment and shows himself to be smart and brave. When Zack Edmonds's wife dies in childbirth, Edmonds keeps Lucas's wife, Mollie, in his home to care for his newborn son. Lucas endures the situation for half a year then goes to Edmonds and demands that she return. "I'm a nigger . . . . But I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your grandmaw. I'm going to take her back" (GDM 46-7).

Lucas does not revolt violently until after Mollie has

returned to the Beauchamp home, bringing the Edmonds child with her. Lucas's anger causes him to forget the old verities and to rely instead on the ruthlessness of the dark spirit, which nearly destroys him. When evening comes, Lucas tells Mollie, "I went to Zack Edmonds' house and asked him for my wife. Let him come to my house and ask me for his son!" (GDM 50). Lucas waits, but Edmonds does not come, so Lucas feels compelled to reassert his manhood by entering Edmonds's home and challenging him to a fight. The struggle begins in earnest when Edmonds questions Lucas's lineage--"Or maybe you aint even a woman-made McCaslin but just a nigger that's out of hand?" (54)--and ends when the pistol misfires.

Lucas realizes afterwards that nothing was to be accomplished through the violence, and that the "dull little brass cylinder less long than a match" had saved his life as well as Edmonds's when it misfired. After this incident, Lucas does not make an issue of his ancestry.

Yet it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. He didn't even need to strive with it. He didn't even bother to defy it. He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two races which made him, and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, in which the toxic and its anti stalemated one another, seetheless, unrumored in the outside air. (GDM 101)

Lucas's wife, Mollie, also effectively combats evil. She has the temerity to ask for a divorce when Lucas's

activities with a divining machine become disruptive to her family. "I got to go clean away. Because he's crazy. Ever since he got that machine, he's done went crazy" (GDM 98). At first Mollie's choice to leave may appear to be a desire to run from Lucas's obsession for buried money. Her later statements, however, indicate that this is not the case. When Carothers Edmonds offers to take the machine and give it to George Wilkins, Lucas and Mollie's son-in-law, Mollie's purpose and sacrifice become evident.

Can't you see? Not that he would keep on using it just the same as if he had kept it, but he would fotch it onto Nat, my last one and least one, the curse of God that's gonter destroy him or her that touches whot's been done rendered back to Him? I wants him to keep it! That's why I got to go, so he can keep it and not have to even think about giving it to George! Dont you see? (GDM 118)

Another of Edmonds's suggestions is that she could cure Lucas of his money-hunting by neglecting her work and taking the machine out hunting herself any time he was asleep and couldn't watch it. "That'll cure him. But you're too old. You couldn't stand it" (98). Edmonds was right; Mollie couldn't stand it, but that didn't keep her from trying. She disappeared the next day, and when they found her the day after, she was "lying on her face in the mud, the once immaculate apron and the clean faded skirts faded and torn, one hand still grasping the handle of the divining-machine as she had fallen with it" (121).

When Lucas finally does give up the divining machine, it is a result of Mollie's revolt rather than Edmonds's

insistence. This is reinforced as the three leave the courthouse after the aborted divorce proceedings. Lucas symbolically reasserts his earlier statement, "I'm going to be man in this house" (117), as he ignores Edmonds's order to wait by the car and goes to the store to buy a bag of candy for Mollie (125). Furthermore, he refuses Edmonds's offer to keep the machine for him, and tells him instead, "Get rid of it. . . . Clean off this place, where I won't never see it again. Just don't tell me where" (126).

Dilsey, Sam, Lucas, and Mollie are only a sampling of the characters in Faulkner's fiction who show that man can prevail by revolting against evil and practicing the old verities, yet they are significant because they do so in spite of their race. By resisting obsolescence as well as injustice, greed, lust, and ambition, they demonstrate that although evil does exist, men and women, whether black or white, can revolt against the "ruthlessness and rapacity and ambition" of the dark spirit. Each time someone "gets up on his hind legs and says, 'I don't like this'" (FN 8), man reasserts his immortality because the power of evil is diminished and "Man is improved" (FU 6).



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gold also promotes this relationship between land and slavery in his discussion of "The Bear": "Ownership of the land led to ownership of people. The land and people belong only to God" (62).

<sup>2</sup> Faulkner explained that a fyce "is any small dog, usually--he was a fox or rat terrier at one time that has gotten mixed up with hound, with bird-dog, everything else, but any small dog in my country is called a fyce " (FU 37).

## CHAPTER 4

### FEAR: THE OBSTACLE TO MAN'S IMMORTALITY

In man's struggle to prevail against evil, his greatest obstacle is his fear. Evil can be overcome only by applying the old verities of the heart, but fear consumes the heart and leaves no room for love, honor, pity, or compassion. In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Faulkner said that the writer "must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart" (120). Faulkner delivered a similar message at his daughter's high school graduation and counseled the students, "Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion, against injustice and lying and greed" (ESPL 123-4).

In their struggles against evil, many of Faulkner's characters fail because they are consumed by fear and have no room for the old verities in their hearts. For some, like Mrs. Compson or Temple Drake, fear prevents action. They are crippled by their fears and unable to protect themselves or others from the very evil they fear. For

others, like Thomas Sutpen or Joe Christmas, fear causes inappropriate action. These characters become part of the evil "because they themselves are baffled and afraid, afraid of, or incapable of, believing in man's capacity for courage and endurance and sacrifice" (ESPL 123). Still others, like Horace Benbow or Isaac McCaslin, have partially mastered their fears. They recognize the injustice and have a desire to correct the evil they see, but lack sufficient courage to effectively enact a change. In each case, fear permits evil to triumph over man's immortal nature.

Fear, however, cannot be eradicated through an absence of the evil which causes it. When Faulkner spoke at Pine Manor Junior College, he said that God did not intend for man to have

freedom from fear, because man does not have the right to be free of fear. We are not so weak and timorous as to need to be free of fear; we need only use our capacity to not be afraid, freedom in which to decree and then establish security and peace. And He demanded of man only that we work to deserve and gain these things--liberty, freedom of the body and spirit both, security for the weak and helpless, and peace for all--because these were the most valuable things He could set within our capacity and reach. (136)

What man needs, therefore, is not freedom from fear, but freedom to work. Work is the antithesis of fear and companion of courage because "fear, like so many evil things, comes mainly out of idleness, that if you have something to get up to tomorrow morning, you're too busy to pay much attention to fear" (FU 67).

Mrs. Compson is an example of the debilitating effects

of idleness and fear. Speaking of her family, she tells Dilsey, "You're not the one who has to bear it. . . . It's not your responsibility. You can go away. You don't have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out. You owe nothing to them, to Mr. Compson's memory" (SF 272). Her words, however, are ironic because she does not "bear the brunt of it." In reality, she has little to do because Dilsey cares for the house, the meals, and the children, and after Mr. Compson dies, Jason takes care of the finances. Mrs. Compson recognizes her dependence and fears that asserting any degree of initiative will result in her having to care for her own needs. She will not protect or defend her granddaughter, Quentin, because she is afraid of displeasing Jason. She tells Dilsey, "It's neither your place nor mine to tell Jason what to do. Sometimes I think he is wrong, but I try to obey his wishes for you all's sake" (SF 278). In reality, it is Mrs. Compson's place to tell Jason what to do; his authority as the head of the house has been delegated to him by her, but she does not want that authority returned. When Jason complains about Dilsey and the other servants, Mrs. Compson replies, "I have to humor them. . . . I have to depend on them so completely. It's not as if I were strong. I wish I were. I wish I could do all the house work myself" (279). Her words are empty, however, because she is not even willing to fetch her own hot water bottle (275) or retrieve her Bible from where it has fallen on the floor (300).

Her words make her fear even more obvious than her actions. She tells her husband that except for Jason, her own children are "strangers nothing of mine and I am afraid of them" (104). Later, after her husband and one of her children have died, even the simple act of visiting their graves is nearly beyond her ability. A change of driver is so threatening that she tells Dilsey "I'm afraid to" three times before Dilsey can reassure her and help her into the carriage (9). Once they start, she tells T.P. twice, "I'm afraid to go and leave Quentin" and asks him to turn around but ultimately proceeds to the cemetery without Quentin because she is "afraid for [him] to turn around" (10-1). Ironically, the only detail of the trip that does not concern her is the state of the old family carriage although Dilsey tells her that it is "going to fall to pieces under you all some day" (9).

Temple Drake is another character that is crippled by fear, but unlike Mrs. Compson, she tries to deny her fear. While at the Old Frenchman place, Temple tells Ruby, "I'm not afraid," but her fear is apparent in her statements and her voice: "Things like that don't happen. Do they? They're just like other people. You're just like other people. With a little baby. And besides, my father's a ju-judge. The gu-governor comes to our house to e-eat--" (S 59). Her fear is demonstrated through her denial of "things like that," her stuttering, and her childish attempt to rely on her father's position for protection. Ruby

recognizes these signs of fear and is not deceived by Temple's bravado. She accuses Temple directly, telling her that she is fortunate that she has never been "wanted by a real man" because she is "just scared of it" (63). Ruby's own fears, however, cause her to dismiss Temple's fears as insignificant: "Nobody cares whether you are afraid or not. Afraid? You haven't the guts to be really afraid, anymore than you have to be in love" (65).<sup>1</sup>

Eventually Temple is forced to acknowledge her fears and is ultimately ruled by them. Soon after arriving at the Old Frenchman place, she coos to the baby, "If bad mans hurts Temple, us'll tell the governor's soldiers, wont us?" (59), but she does not in fact tell the "governor" or the judge at Lee Goodwin's trial the true identity of the "bad mans" who hurt her. Although the statement itself is ironic, as part of an over all pattern, it becomes easily predictable that Temple would not have the courage to correctly identify her abuser. Dianne Luce Cox explores this issue in "A Measure of Innocence: Sanctuary's Temple Drake." Cox proposes that Temple's early failures to escape Popeye are not caused by an affinity for evil, but by a preoccupation with respectability coupled with fear. She writes:

Temple hasn't the courage to walk away partly because she continues to hope that she will get away with this venture--that she will get back to Oxford in time for one of her friends to sneak her back into the dorm. She fears violation, but she also fears the consequences of breaking her social code, of being caught being indiscreet, of suffering a lapse in respectability; and all her

life, this, not violence, has been the most immediate danger. (308-9)

Cox supports this thesis with numerous examples showing that Temple's fear of discovery was greater than her fear of Popeye up until the time that Popeye murders Red. This act of violence destroys Temple's hope of escaping Popeye with her respectability intact, and in order to save her own life, Temple is then willing to make a deal to protect Popeye even though it reveals her shame (Cox 319-20).

While it is easy to recognize the type of fear that inhibits Temple Drake and Mrs. Compson, other types of fear can be identified only by their effects. Besides the desire for respectability that Temple displays, fear can also be seen in a willingness to trade independence for financial gain. When speaking at University High School, Faulkner told the graduating class:

Our danger is the forces in the world today which are trying to use man's fear to rob him of his individuality, his soul, trying to reduce him to an unthinking mass by fear and bribery--giving him free food that he has not earned, easy and valueless money which he has not worked for . . . (123)

Faulkner refers to the danger of unearned money on other occasions as well. In answer to a question about communism, Faulkner replied that "the individual must be independent of the state, he mustn't accept gratuity from the state. He mustn't let the state buy him by pensions or relief or dole or grant of any sort" (FU 100-1). He was especially insistent that writers should be economically independent. He told Jean Stein Vanden Heuval, "I've never known anything

good in writing to come from having accepted any free gift of money" (LIG 240). He reiterated this idea at the University of Virginia: "I don't think that an artist should be subsidized too much by anyone. I think he has got to be free, and even a little hardship may be good for him" (FU 169). The danger involved in accepting "easy and valueless money" in each of these cases is that the person receiving the funds must relinquish his immortal ability to stand on his hind legs and say, "I don't like this" (FN 8). As shown by the example of Mrs. Compson, dependence destroys initiative because the receiver fears the responsibility that accompanies the action.

Quentin Compson, for example, has been given money for college. Although he wants to commit suicide, he feels a sense of responsibility because he knows that Benjy's pasture had to be sold in order to raise the funds. He tells himself, "the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing" (SF 124). Because the sacrifice that enabled him to attend school is not his own, he does not feel the individual freedom to take his own life until he has finished the semester and received the full value of that money. Even so, he fears that the worth of the money can never be realized since the pasture was sold to finance an image. "Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound. A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound" (174).



Quentin's brother Jason also receives money that he has not worked for, but the fear involved is not caused by a sense of responsibility for others, but for himself. Because the pasture and furniture were sold to pay for Quentin's schooling and the family debts, Mrs. Compson has led him to believe that it is Caddy's responsibility to compensate him for his loss (262). This responsibility was to have been fulfilled through a bank job which was promised to him by Herbert, Caddy's fiancée, but after Herbert discovered that Caddy was pregnant with another man's child, he severed all ties with the Compson family. Jason's bitterness is apparent when he thinks about the promised job: "I was a kid then. I believed folks when they said they'd do things. I've learned better since. Besides like I say, I guess I dont need any man's help to get along I can stand on my own feet like I always have" (206). Jason fears (with good reason) that he will never receive another opportunity to advance his position and so continues to hold Caddy responsible for his lost inheritance by embezzling the money that she sends to care for her daughter, Quentin, who has been raised in the Compsons's home.

Jason doesn't need or even want the money itself, but rather he wants the power over his sister and niece that it represents. When he thinks of the money he has given his mistress, he states, "I say money has no value; it's just the way you spend it. It dont belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it. It just belongs to the man that can get it and

keep it" (194). Jason has been able to "get" the money that Caddy has sent, but cannot "keep it." Despite his words, he has hoarded a portion of the money in a locked box in his closet as a tangible symbol of the job in the bank. Quentin finds the money and steals it before running away with a man from a traveling show.

Because Jason's hidden stash represents the job that he lost as well as his power over his sister and niece, Quentin steals much more than cash when she takes the money from his closet and runs away. By hoarding the "easy and valueless money," Jason has given Quentin the opportunity to symbolically take his job from him a second time. He must pursue her in order to regain what he perceives to be his rightful inheritance but fears, again correctly, that his pursuit will be unsuccessful. He threatens the Sheriff that he will "report it to the governor" if a car is not ready in ten minutes, a statement that is reminiscent of Temple's show of bravado, but Jason fails to enlist the Sheriff's help because the sheriff has "some suspicions about who that money belongs to" (304). As he continues on his own, he is handicapped by his distorted sense of respectability and fears that "the whole world would know that he, Jason Compson, had been robbed by Quentin, his niece, a bitch" (309).

Fear, however, does not always accompany the acceptance of "easy and valueless money." Anse Bundren takes money from Cash and Dewey Dell as well as the horse from Jewel but

is not burdened by either responsibility or respectability. He expects and receives help from family and neighbors. As Dewey Dell explains, "Pa thinks because neighbors will always treat one another because he has always been too busy letting neighbors do for him to find out" (AILD 26).<sup>2</sup> Because he is not concerned about his reputation, Anse feels no shame about the odor of his wife's decaying body or his financial dependence on his children. With his complete lack of concern for others or what others may think, he is able to achieve his purpose. Anse makes the trip to Jefferson, buries his wife, buys his teeth, and even marries a new wife who owns a graphophone. Anse's success serves to illustrate that if a man is ruthless enough, he need not trade his independence for "free and valueless money." The acceptance of unearned money is not a cause of fear, but rather a symptom.

Thomas Sutpen showed no symptoms of fear as he worked to build his dynasty, but fell prey to its power after accomplishing his goal. As a young man, he worked as an overseer on a plantation in Haiti. When the plantation was attacked, he fought without fear against the siege. "On the eighth night the water gave out," so Sutpen single-handedly "walked out into the darkness and subdued them" (204-5). Quentin has never been told how Sutpen subdued the attackers, but from his grandfather, he knows that Sutpen "had not been afraid"; at that time, "his [Sutpen's] innocence still functioned and he not only did not know what

fear was until afterward, he did not even know that at first he was not terrified" (AA 201).

After arriving in Yoknapatawpha County, Sutpen's behavior still reveals no fear. He engages in hand-to-hand combat with his slaves, works beside them to build his mansion, and avoid debts that would limit his independence and interfere with his plan. Sutpen did not even drink with the other men because "he did not have the money with which to pay his share or return the courtesy," but for Sutpen this was not a sacrifice because his dream was all important (AA 25). Sutpen stated to Grandfather Compson, "I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family--incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of no man" (212). Sutpen achieved the money, house, plantation, and slaves by "not loafing, idling" (32).

Acquiring a wife and family, however, required a different approach. Rosa Coldfield told Quentin that Sutpen had worked naked while constructing his mansion in order to save his clothes

since decorum even if not elegance of appearance would be the only weapon (or rather ladder) with which he could conduct the last assault upon what Miss Coldfield and perhaps others believed to be respectability--that respectability which, according to General Compson, consisted in Sutpen's secret mind of a great deal more than the mere acquisition of a chatelaine for his house. (28)

The respectability that Sutpen hoped to acquire through his wife and family was not that which Miss Coldfield imagined,

however. It did not depend on the good opinion of the citizens of Yoknapatawpha, but on his own feeling of superiority over them. Faulkner once defined respectability as "an artificial standard which comes from up here. That is, respectability is not your concept or my concept. It's what we think is Jones's concept of respectability" (FU 35). The "Jones" who shaped Sutpen's concept was the liveried servant who sent him to the back door so many years before, so Sutpen cared nothing about opinions of those with less power than he. He maintained an "utter disregard of how his actions which the town could see might look and how the indicated ones which the town could not see must appear" (AA 56). "He was not liked (which he evidently did not want, anyway) but feared, which seemed to amuse, if not actually please him" (AA 57).

It is the amusement or pleasure which Sutpen felt from being feared that reveals his own fear. He wished to "reduce man" for his "own aggrandisement and power" because he himself had been "baffled and afraid, afraid of, or incapable of, believing in man's capacity for courage and endurance and sacrifice" (ESPL 123). After becoming the largest single landowner in the county, Sutpen increased his susceptibility to fear when he abandoned work and took on "a role of arrogant ease and leisure which, as the leisure and ease put flesh on him, became a little pompous" (AA 57). Finally when Charles Bon arrives, seeking not Sutpen's fortune or love or even his name, but only a private

acknowledgment, "this old man was afraid to do that" (FU 273). His fear of losing the "respectability" he had acquired would not allow him to show compassion to a son with Negro blood.

Sutpen's fear caused his destruction. He could have saved both his sons if he had been brave enough to rise above the obsolescence which said that a Negro was not as good as a white man, but he was more concerned with respectability, "an artificial standard," than with the old verities of the heart or even the emotions of the glands which had motivated him previously. Faulkner described this phenomenon at the University of Virginia:

" . . . the rapacious people--if they're not careful--they are seduced away and decide that what they've got to have is respectability, which destroys one, almost anybody. That is, nobody seems brave enough anymore to be an out and out blackguard or rascal, that sooner or later, he's got to be respectable, and that finishes it.  
(FU 32)

In Faulkner's terms, respectability is a weakness for the individual, but perhaps a useful weakness for the race because, as in the case of Sutpen, it usually prevents the continued success of those individuals who are driven by ambition or greed.

Like Thomas Sutpen, Joe Christmas is also "baffled and afraid" (ESPL 123) by obsolescence, the "artificial inequality of man," which is in itself a product of fear. Faulkner writes that the tragedy of the South is

the fear behind the fact that some of the white people in the South--people who otherwise are rational, cultured, gentle, generous and kindly--

will--must--fight against every inch which the Negro gains in social betterment. . . . Nor is the tragedy the fear so much as the tawdry quality of the fear--fear not of the Negro as an individual Negro nor even as a race, but as an economic class or stratum or factor, since what the Negro threatens is not the Southern white man's social system but the Southern white man's economic system--that economic system which the white man knows and dares not admit to himself is established on an obsolescence--the artificial inequality of man--and so is itself already obsolete and hence doomed. (ESPL 95-6)

Christmas's struggle is intensified because he does not know which part of the doomed system he fits into, but fears both possibilities. He functions economically as a white man. He works steadily at the sawmill for a time and runs a successful bootlegging operation which brings in enough money that he can buy a new car. Acknowledging his Negro blood as Joanna Burden suggests is threatening to Christmas, perhaps in part because it places him into a different economic bracket, although more likely because he fears the responsibilities that Joanna wants him to assume for his race. On the other hand, Christmas also fears the possibility that he is not part Negro because so much of his life has been based on that assumption. He tells Joanna, "If I'm not [a Negro], damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time" (LIA 254).

Isaac McCaslin also deals with the evil of man's inequality, but his conflict is different from that of Sutpen or Christmas. He is not a victim of obsolescence, but one of its heirs: " . . . his was the name in which the title to the land had first been granted from the Indian

patent and which some of the descendants of his father's slaves still bore in the land" (GDM 3). Isaac is not "baffled and afraid" to the degree that he desires "aggrandisement and power" (ESPL 123). Instead he fears the responsibility that accompanies the "aggrandisement and power" that he has inherited, and so he gives the land, power, and responsibility to another.

This fear was not part of his childhood. General Compson says that Isaac "was born knowing and fearing too maybe but without being afraid" (GDM 240). Sam Fathers taught him to "not even be afraid, not even in the moment when the fear would take him completely" because being afraid would increase his vulnerability: "Be scared. You can't help that. But don't be afraid. Aint nothing in the woods going to hurt you if you dont corner it or it dont smell that you are afraid" (GDM 198-9). Even the animals themselves taught Isaac about courage. Faulkner said that Isaac "learned not about bears from that bear, but he learned about the world, he learned about man. About courage, about pity, about responsibility, from that bear" (FN 92-3). Later, Faulkner was asked about the passage from "The Bear" in which Isaac is described as

a boy who wished to learn humility and pride in order to become skillful and worthy in the woods but found himself becoming skillful so fast that he feared he would never himself become worthy because he had not learned humility and pride though he tried until one day a old man who could not have defined either led him as though by the hand to where a old bear and a little mongrel dog showed him that, by possessing one thing other, he would possess them both. (GDM 282-3)



Faulkner was asked to identify that "one thing other" to which he replied, "Courage" (FU 76).

Learning about courage and being willing to apply it, however, are not the same thing. Isaac learns enough about courage that he is willing to face the bear, but when the fyce, Lion, attacks the bear, Isaac does interfere in the conflict. Although he has the skill and position to shoot the bear, he only watches while Boon Hoggenbeck wrestles the bear with a knife (GDM 230-1) and cannot even tell McCaslin Edmonds the reason (283). Faulkner said that the bear represents a force "which man has got to face and not be afraid of, that force must not be reduced by trickery, it must be reduced by a bravery comparably as strong as its power" (FN 58-9). It is Boon and Lion, not Isaac, that demonstrate "a bravery comparably as strong as [the bear's] power. Isaac's failure to act is not caused by a fear of the bear, but by his belief that the end result was inevitable. The narrator of "The Bear" explains that Isaac "should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it" (GDM 216).

A parallel situation occurs in Isaac's attitude towards obsolescence. He tries to avoid the evil of inequality that exists between the white landowner and Negro farmers by refusing the land of his inheritance, but he remains in Yoknapatawpha as a witness. By repudiating a tainted inheritance, Isaac does not diminish the evil of obsolescence but merely delegates it to Roth Edmonds, who

is not strong enough or brave enough or good enough to resist it. Roth's Negro lover tells Isaac, "You spoiled him [Roth]. . . . When you gave to his grandfather that land which didn't belong to him, not even half of it by will or even law" (GDM 343). Roth, by fathering a Negro son and refusing to acknowledge the child or even speak to the mother (339), is perpetuating the heritage of obsolescence that he has received.

Isaac cannot be held responsible for Roth's actions, but his own inaction qualifies him for censure. At West Point, Faulkner said that man should

never be afraid of dirt or filth, or baseness or cowardice, but try always to be better than that, to be braver, to be compassionate, but not to be afraid of it, not to avoid it. I think the worst perversion of all is to retire to the ivory tower.  
(55)

By choosing to "retire to the ivory tower" of the house in town, Isaac shows that although he is brave enough to face obsolescence when he must, he is cowardly enough to avoid the responsibility whenever he can. As Joseph Gold writes in his discussion of "The Bear," "Ike is a rather pathetic figure throughout; although he learns values and can recognize evil when he sees it, he is really unable to cope with the responsibility that ensues from such recognition" (67). Isaac meets Fonsiba's future husband, Roth's lover, and Lucas Beauchamp face to face and acknowledges the wrongs that have been done to their race and the change that is inevitable but asks that they not require him to participate.

In contrast, Horace Benbow is brave enough to accept the responsibility of Lee Goodwin's case but lacks the ability to be effective because he fears evil itself. He does not fear physical violence from Popeye although he has been previously threatened by him, and he is not concerned with the respectability that is so important to his sister Narcissa, but he is afraid of the effect that evil has on those who come in contact with it. He tells Miss Jenny, "There's a corruption about even looking upon evil, even by accident; you cannot haggle, traffic, with putrefaction" (S 134). His fear of evil increases as he talks to Temple in the brothel because her "black antagonism" (224) and "black, belligerent stare" (225) convince him that she has been corrupted by the evil that he had earlier observed in Popeye. Miss Reba suggests that he take Temple away or "find her folks" (231), but Horace does not consider these options. Instead he fatalistically believes that it would be "better for her if she were dead. . . . For me, too" (232). As he leaves the brothel, he further considers the relationship between death and evil: "Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realize, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die" (232).

In an effort to distance himself from the blackness that he has seen, Horace takes the midnight train back to Jefferson instead of returning to his hotel room in Memphis. His attempt to escape the evil fails, however. After arriving home, his fear causes him to be physically ill as

he thinks about the similarities between his stepdaughter Belle and Temple. According to Cox, "What he thinks he fears for both girls is their exposure to irresponsible young men like Gowan Stevens and through them to evil, but what he really fears is that they may be impervious to evil, that they may be able to survive it" (312). One type of fear, however, does not preclude the other. It is more likely that he felt both.

Horace shows that he has the "backbone" to stay in Jefferson through the end of the trial despite Miss Jenny's suggestion that he go home to his wife (136), but he is paralyzed after seeing Temple wearing a "black hat" in the courtroom (297). The judge even comments on his lack of objections during the district attorney's leading questions (301), and Horace makes no attempt to cross-examine Temple or discredit her testimony (303-4). After hearing Temple's description of evil, first in Memphis and then in the courtroom, he "aint got any backbone left" (136). He is powerless as he watches Lee Goodwin convicted and then lynched. His courage gone, he goes home to Belle.

Horace's fears and failure, however, should not diminish the level of courage he does achieve. Despite the disapproval of his sister, his was one voice that stood for justice. Faulkner places great importance on the individual voice:

It's that single voice that's the important thing. When you get two people, you still got two human beings; when you get three you got the beginning of a mob. And if you get a hundred all focused on

one single idea, that idea is never too good. Man has got to be, if he is got to be a collection, or a gang, a party or something, he's got to be a party of individual men. (FN 29)

Despite his failure to save Lee Goodwin, in the courtroom or from the lynch mob, Horace is a positive example of the superiority of the individual over man as a group.

Faulkner repeatedly expressed the importance of having the courage to stand as an individual. In his essay "On Privacy," he defined the American Dream as the desire for a "land where man can assume that every man--not the mass of men but individual man--has inalienable right to individual dignity and freedom within a fabric of individual courage and honorable work and mutual responsibility" (ESPL 62). At West Point, he said, "I think that if the individual takes care of himself and his own goals and his own conscience, that his nation will be in pretty good shape" (109). He told a group of students at the University of Virginia, "I doubt if people accomplish very much by banding together. People accomplish things by individual protest" (FU 80).

His vision of what could be accomplished by "individual protest" contains none of the pessimism that he feels about group man. Faulkner told the students in his daughter's high school class that mankind could be saved and the world changed by

Man, the individual, men and women, who will refuse always to be tricked or frightened or bribed into surrendering, not just the right but the duty too, to choose between justice and injustice, courage and cowardice, sacrifice and

greed, pity and self. . . . (ESPL 123)

This change can not be effected as "a class or classes, but as individuals," yet if enough individuals will "never be afraid," then

In one generation all the Napoleons and Hitlers and Caesars and Mussolinis and Stalins and all the other tyrants who want power and aggrandisement, and the simple politicians and time-servers who themselves are merely baffled or ignorant or afraid, who have used, or are using, or hope to use, man's fear and greed for man's enslavement, will have vanished from the face of the earth.  
(ESPL 124)

The fear that man must resist takes many forms in Faulkner's writings. He acknowledges "a general and universal physical fear" (ESPL 120), but contends that the atom bomb is not a real threat: " . . . all it could do would be to kill us, which is nothing, since in doing that, it will have robbed itself of its only power over us: which is fear of it, the being afraid of it" (ESPL 123). More often he writes of fear as an attitude which weakens the will of the individual and allows evil to triumph over the old verities. Although she was not defining fear at the time, Dianne Cox captures the essence of what Faulkner means by fear when she writes, "Immaturity, the confusion of social respectability with moral responsibility, lack of self-knowledge, lack of human empathy--all of the failings of flawed humanity--will suffice as evil's tools" (323). If left unchecked, these traits stifle man's individuality, limit his ability to prevail, and challenge his immortality. Man reasserts his immortality, however, because as an

individual "he wants to be better, he wants to be braver, he wants to be more honest than he thinks he will be and sometimes he's not, but then suddenly to his own astonishment he is" (FU 85).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to Dianne Luce Cox, Ruby's fears are compounded because "Temple's obvious fear of sexual violation is arousing to the men there" (307).

<sup>2</sup> Dewey Dell's "always" only refers to Anse's adult life. According to Darl, "Pa's feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet in homemade shoes when he was a boy" (AFLD 11). In addition, Darl suggests a correlation between the work that Anse did earlier in his life and his unwillingness to work anymore: "He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it" (17).



## CHAPTER 5

### FAILURE: THE PROOF OF MAN'S IMMORTALITY

Because a large number of Faulkner's characters give in to their fears and fail to revolt against evil, many of his readers have doubted that Faulkner truly believed that man could be immortal through his ability to endure and prevail. During the time that Faulkner was a Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia, he was questioned about the apparent contradiction between his stated beliefs and those implied by his fiction:

Q. Mr. Faulkner, in your speech at Stockholm you expressed great faith in mankind . . . not only to endure but prevail. . . . Do you think that's the impression the average reader would get after reading The Sound and the Fury?

A. I can't answer that because I don't know what the average reader gets from reading the book. I agree that what I tried to say I failed to say. . . . But in my opinion, yes, that is what I was talking about in all the books, and I failed to say it. I agree with you, I did fail. But that was what I was trying to say--that man will prevail, will endure because he is capable of compassion and honor and pride and endurance. (FU 4-5)

Faulkner's answer is significant because it helps to establish his intention to present his vision of man's immortality through his fiction, but it cannot be fully

understood if taken out of the context of his other nonfiction statements. Three times Faulkner claims that he "failed," but this does not mean that Faulkner regretted his effort or even disliked his accomplishment. To Faulkner, failure does not necessarily represent mediocrity, but rather a discrepancy between man's dream and his achievement.

In Faulkner's opinion, man's failures, as well as his achievements, have value if they result from his attempts to affirm his immortality. Upon receiving the National Book Award for Fiction, Faulkner said that " . . . even failure is worth while and admirable, provided that the failure is splendid enough, the dream splendid enough, unattainable enough yet valuable enough, since it was of perfection" (ESPL 145). It is in this context that Faulkner's "failures" as a writer and his characters' failures as representatives of the human race confirm rather than contradict Faulkner's vision of immortality. Although not all dreams are "splendid," each time man tries to accomplish the "unattainable," he demonstrates his capacity to endure and prevail.

It is important to note, however, that Faulkner is not consistent in his use of the word "failure." Although he frequently gives "failure" a positive connotation, the word still retains its traditional meaning in other contexts. In most cases, the distinction is between those who fail while taking an action and those who fail to act. The first

is usually a sign of courage; the second is typically a symptom of fear. Furthermore, within his fiction, failures are seldom identified as such, but they can still be recognized and classified according to a set of general principles. Through his nonfiction, Faulkner explains four specific ways that man's failure to accomplish his goals can promote his immortality: it gives man continued purpose, it teaches him humility, it motivates others, and it becomes a virtue in itself when it is the result of extraordinary effort. Through his fiction, Faulkner creates characters whose failures reflect these effects.

Man's failures give him purpose because the discrepancy between his dreams and his accomplishments makes him want to try again. Faulkner felt that this type of discontentment was especially vital for a writer:

Maybe it's just as well we are doomed to fail, since, as long as we do fail and the hand continues to hold blood, we will try again; where, if we did attain the dream, match the shape, scale that ultimate peak of perfection, nothing would remain but to jump off the other side of it into suicide. (ESPL 143)

In this sense, man is immortal, not in spite of his failures, but because of them. If man ever reaches the point of being able to say that the world "is finished. We made it, and it works" (ESPL 135), then he will no longer need or want immortality because there will be nothing left to live for.

Failure is also useful when it develops humility. Upon receiving the National Book Award for Fiction, Faulkner

suggested that one of the problems with our country is "too much success." He claimed that an individual "can gain it so quickly and easily that he has not had time to learn the humility to handle it with, or even to discover, realize, that he will need humility." He then proposed that "what we need is a dedicated handful of pioneer-martyrs who, between success and humility, are capable of choosing the second one" (ESPL 145).

Faulkner does not elaborate on the reason that humility is so important, but it is easy to draw some conclusions based on his attitude towards success. Faulkner told Cynthia Grenier, "Success is feminine. It's like a woman. You treat her with contempt and she'll come after you, all fawning and eager, but chase after her and she'll scorn you" (LIG 219). Not only the pursuit of success is undesirable, but also the attainment. Faulkner blamed success for the loss of human verities. When Faulkner was asked if "this callous attitude of Sutpen and Flem Snopes, this ability to use people without realizing they're people, sort of dehumanizing them" was a result of their moves into towns, he answered, " . . . the contempt for people came not because they moved to the city but out of success" (FU 98). He included Jason Compson in this same condemnation: "There are too many Jasons in the South who can be successful . . . " (FU 17). This attitude undoubtedly influenced his statement that the writer "must remind the people who are in command and in charge of our economy, our culture of

success, that there is more to being a member of the family of man than just success" (LIG 212).

Failures are also useful in that they can inspire new attempts for improvement and provide a foundation to build from. Faulkner told the National Commission for UNESCO that

out of every failure there arises always a new handful who decline to be convinced by failure, who believe still that the human problems can be solved. . . . We will fail again perhaps, but at least we have learned that that failure will not be important either. That failure will not even have its laurels to rest on, since out of that failure also will rise its handful, still irreconcilable and undismayed. (166)

Since Faulkner's concept of man's immortality involves the efforts of the individual in order to achieve the betterment of the race, individual failures could have a detrimental effect only if man were to become discouraged and stop trying. The fact that man sees the dreams of others and builds upon them allows him to improve the race and prevail as an individual.

Because of its benefits, Faulkner claimed, " . . . failure to me is the best. To try something you can't do, because it's too much [to hope for], but still to try it and fail, then try it again. That to me is success" (FN 3-4). This inversion of failure and success has been noted by several scholars. William E. H. Meyer, Jr., begins his article "Faulkner's Patriotic Failure: Southern Lyricism versus American Hypervision" with this observation:

One gets more than a little weary, in reading Faulkner in the University, of the writer's insistence that his productions are always failures--'it ain't good enough'--until one

realizes that the author is operating with a system of ultimate values wherein "failure" is the highest metaphysical or aesthetic truth. (105)

In addition, Meyers calls "failure" Faulkner's "Southern high-priestess" (106). Elmo Howell also ties Faulkner's attitude towards failure to his Southern roots in his article, "Southern Fiction and the Pattern of Failure: The Example of Faulkner": "The Southerner is frustrated by abundance, which leads him to attempt much, to fail much, and sometimes--like Faulkner--to make a virtue out of failure" (757).

Faulkner's application of failure as a virtue is nowhere more evident than when evaluating his own work or that of his contemporaries. When asked to identify his most "successful" book, Faulkner replied: "Well, the finest failure was The Sound and the Fury, and that's the one that to me is the [most successful] because that was the best failure" (FN 9).<sup>2</sup> He later explained further when he was asked to identify his "best story":

In my own estimation, none of them are good enough . . . . And so my personal feeling would be a tenderness for the one which caused me the most anguish, just as the mother might feel for the child, and the one that caused me the most anguish and to me is the finest failure is The Sound and the Fury. That's the one that I feel most tender toward. (FN 102-3)

Faulkner uses this same analogy of a mother with her child again at Nagano (105), at West Point (49), and at the University of Mississippi (61), suggesting that when Faulkner identifies his work as a failure, the term is an endearment rather than a criticism.

In speaking of his contemporaries, Faulkner further explained why a failure could be considered commendable: "All of us failed to match our dream of perfection. So I rate us on the basis of our splendid failure to do the impossible" (LIG 238). One of Faulkner's most discussed statements was the result of this type of rating. While visiting the University of Mississippi, he was asked to rank his "five most important contemporaries." He placed Thomas Wolfe first because "he had much courage, wrote as if he didn't have long to live," and Hemingway fourth because "he has no courage, has never climbed out on a limb. He has never used a word where the reader might check his usage in a dictionary" (LIG 58). This statement caused a great deal of controversy and was questioned repeatedly.<sup>3</sup> His best explanation was given at the University of Virginia:

Now that was an unfortunate remark I made. . . . [Wolfe] failed the best because he had tried the hardest, he had taken the longest gambles, taken the longest shots. I rated Hemingway last not on the value of the product at all but simply because of Hemingway having taught himself a pattern, a method which he could use and he stuck to that without splashing around to try to experiment. It had nothing to do with the value of the work at all. It was simply on the degree of the attempt to reach the unattainable dream, to accomplish more than any flesh and blood man could accomplish, could touch. (FU 206-7)

Many of Faulkner's most memorable characters also fail as they strive to achieve an "unattainable dream." In some cases, the dream is not admirable, but the failure can still have value because of the "degree of the attempt." One of Faulkner's last published statements, however, suggests

that these failures should not be ranked like those of his contemporaries. Perhaps he learned from that experience, for in one of his final speeches he promoted "the premise that there are no degrees of best; that one man's best is the equal of any other best, no matter how asunder in time or space or comparison, and should be honored as such" (ESPL 169). Since Faulkner claimed that failure is "the best," there could also be "no degrees" of failure. However, the failures that Faulkner's characters experience in his fiction can be categorized by their effects. Lena Grove and Byron Bunch find purpose in their respective failures; Boon Hoggenbeck and Darl Bundren learn humility. Caddy Compson and Thomas Sutpen each influence the next generation through their failures, and Horace Benbow and Ratliff's failures are virtues because they resulted from an effort to try to a effect change despite overwhelming odds.

At the end of Light in August, Lena Grove and Byron Bunch are on the road searching for Lucas Burch, the father of Lena's baby. Lena had found Lucas once before with Byron's help, but both have failed to prevent his flight. That failure, however, gives both Lena and Byron reasons to continue their journey. Lena's "reason" for finding Lucas is perhaps more of an excuse. Faulkner himself said that Lucas was not the goal Lena sought: "It didn't really matter to her in her destiny whether her man was Lucas Burch or not. It was her destiny to have a husband and children and



she knew it, and so she went out and attended to it without asking help from anyone" (LIG 253). She takes advantage of her "failure," however, to allow herself to continue her travels. The furniture dealer who give them a ride tells his wife:

I think she was just travelling. I dont think she had any idea of finding whoever it was she was following. I dont think she had ever aimed to, only she hadn't told him [Byron] yet. . . . I think she had just made her mind up to travel a little further and see as much as she could, since I reckon that she knew that when she settled down this time, it would likely be for the rest of her life. (LIA 506)

If Lena had married Lucas in Jefferson or had accepted Byron's declaration of love, she would not have had a reason to continue with her journey.

Byron's involvement with Lena is less calculated. It actually begins with a much earlier failure. When Lena comes into the sawmill looking for Lucas Burch, Byron fails to perceive that Lucas Burch is actually Joe Brown and unintentionally reveals Brown's bootlegging activities to Lena. His disclosure makes him feel responsible for her, and that feeling of responsibility eventually develops into love. It is the love he feels for Lena that then causes him to continue in attempts that are destined to fail. Although he knows "Joe Brown's" character, he arranges for Lucas to be taken to the cabin where Lena and the baby are staying with the understanding that they will be married. He starts to leave town but looks back from a hill and sees Lucas running from the cabin. He turns back and thinks:

I took care of his woman for him and I borned his child for him. And now there is one more thing I can do for him. I cant marry them, because I aint a minister. And I may not can catch him, because he's got a start on me. And I may not can whip him if I do, because he is bigger than me. But I can try it. I can try to do it. (LIA 426)

Byron finds Lucas at the railroad grade, crouching with his back turned, but Byron's sense of fair play does not allow him to use this advantage. He challenges Lucas, "Get up onto your feet" (438). He thinks, "You've done throwed away twice inside of nine months what I aint had in thirtyfive years. And now I'm going to get the hell beat out of me and I dont care about that either" (439). After only two minutes, Byron is left "lying quietly among the broken and trampled undergrowth, bleeding quietly about the face, hearing the underbrush crashing on, ceasing, fading into silence" (439). His failure to win Lena's love has caused him to fight Lucas although he could not win.

An unspecified amount of time later, Byron and Lena are travelling. Byron tries to convince Lena not to pursue Lucas any further but is unsuccessful (501). That night he climbs into the truck where Lena is sleeping in a desperate attempt to satisfy his desire but fails miserably as Lena rebuffs him: "Why, Mr Bunch. Aint you ashamed. You might have woke the baby, too" (503). After this episode, Byron leaves the camp but catches up with Lena the next day. His words demonstrate that his failures have not effected his desire to prevail: "I done come too far now. . . . I be dog if I'm going to quit now" (506).

In Go Down Moses, Boon Hoggenbeck does not give up either. Instead he gains humility from his failures as a hunter. The narrator of "The Bear" explains that the dog Lion or someone else would have to kill the bear: "It would not be Boon. He never hit anything bigger than a squirrel that anybody ever knew, except the negro woman that day when he was shooting at the negro man" (225). Boon's inability to shoot is evidenced during one of the hunts: "He shot at the bear five times with his pump gun, touching nothing, and Old Ben killed another hound and broke free once more and reached the river and was gone" (216). Boon is devastated by this failure: "I missed him five times. With Lion looking right at me. . . I aint fit to sleep with him [Lion]" (216). Because of his great embarrassment, specifically as it applied to Lion, Boon displays an equal measure of courage when the bear and Lion engage in combat:

Then Boon was running. The boy saw the gleam of the blade in his hand and watched him leap among the hounds, hurdling them, kicking them aside as he ran, and fling himself astride the bear as he had hurled himself onto the mule, his legs locked around the bear's belly, his left arm under the bear's throat where Lion clung, and the glint of the knife as it rose and fell. (230-1)

Even after the bear is dead, Boon shows no pride or feeling of success. He is successful in killing Old Ben because his motivation is not a desire for glory, but rather his concern for Lion. This concern is further evidenced by his careful attention in caring for Lion's wounds (231) and his grief when his efforts to save Lion fail (238).

In As I Lay Dying, Darl Bundren also shows an increased

level of compassion after he fails to destroy his mother's decaying body. While the Bundren family is camped for the night, Darl tries to destroy the corpse by setting fire to the barn where the coffin has been laid. During the fire, he fails to discourage Jewel from re-entering the barn to recover the body and so his plan is frustrated (221).

Darl's disappointment is obvious from Vardaman's ingenuous statement. "You needn't to cry. . . . Jewel got her out. You needn't to cry, Darl" (225).

Despite the fact that Jewel has caused his failure, Darl treats Jewel more kindly after this incident. He had repeatedly taunted Jewel in the past with statements like, "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?" (212). After the fire, however, he is kinder. When they enter town and someone makes a comment about the smell of Addie's body, Darl even defends Jewel in order to avert a fight, but he also clarifies that Jewel's courage was never in question, only the necessity of demonstrating it (230-1). He also shows the greatest concern for Cash's broken leg and tries to get Cash to a doctor. Although this change of behavior is never directly tied to his failure, the timing suggests a correlation. In addition, since Faulkner considered the loss of the human verities to be a symptom of success, it is logical to suppose that an increase of the human verities is a sign of humility.

Darl's failed attempt affects not only himself, but also his brother Cash. While Cash's earlier sections seem

cold and deal only with the details of creating and balancing the coffin, after the fire he becomes philosophical and recognizes the value of Darl's attempt:

But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so hard to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. (233)

In The Sound and the Fury, Caddy's struggles against Jason are unsuccessful, but like Darl's, her failures have a domino effect. Her daughter Quentin builds her own success from one of Caddy's failures. Caddy's conflict with Jason has been long-standing. Benjy records one of Caddy's early childhood revolts. He describes watching Caddy and Jason fighting. Even after Mr. Compson breaks up the fight, Caddy continues to struggle and kicks Jason because he has maliciously cut up the paper dolls that she had made for Benjy (64-5). As an adult, the specifics have changed, but the struggle continues. Caddy is now concerned with the welfare of her daughter, Quentin, but is left kicking helplessly because Jason now has authority as head of the home. Caddy has tried to see Quentin several times, first by paying Jason, then by asking Dilsey to help her, but Jason found out about her visits and has threatened "that if she tried Dilsey again, Mother was going to fire Dilsey and send Ben to Jackson and take Quentin and go away" (208). Therefore, Caddy fails to protect or provide for

Quentin because the only option that remains is to send money through Jason, and Jason passes none of that money on to Quentin. Caddy understands Jason and the futility of her effort but continues to fight Jason through empty threats in her letters, the only recourse she has left (190).

Quentin, however, succeeds where her mother has failed. By stealing the money that Jason has embezzled, she provides both restitution to herself and retribution to Jason. Quentin's action shows the courage that her mother could not act upon because of her concern for Dilsey, Benjy, and Quentin. Quentin has no such limitations, however. This is not to say the Quentin's decision to run away was right, or even ultimately beneficial to her. Her future is unknown. However, her choice shows the power of the individual that Faulkner very much admired.

In Absalom, Absalom!, Thomas Sutpen fails to create his dynasty, but his daughter also creates a success from his defeat. This relation between victory and defeat is foreshadowed in the building of Sutpen's mansion. General Compson told about the architect that Sutpen had hired:

The little harried foreigner had singlehanded given battle to and vanquished Sutpen's fierce and overweening vanity or desire for magnificence or for vindication or whatever it was . . . and so created of Sutpen's very defeat the victory which, in conquering, Sutpen himself would have failed to gain. (AA 29)

Just as Sutpen did not understand the principles of architecture that would create a great house, he also did not understand that a great family must be built upon the

human verities. His failure, however, still has value because although his approach was wrong, his attempt was admirable. Faulkner explained "that the men like Compson and Sutpen who had the desire to be heroic--they failed through lack of character or absence of things in their character which should not [sic] have been there but at least they tried" (FU 205).

After Sutpen dies, Judith creates a success from her father's defeat much as the architect did. She tempers his dream and does not concern herself with respectability and the questions of race. She cannot love Charles Etienne because he is the product of Charles Bon's marriage with another woman, but she brings him to his grandfather's home, the home that he would have inherited were it not for his Negro blood. She lacks the pretensions of grandeur of her father and does not build the dynasty that he had imagined, but in bringing his Negro offspring to Sutpen's Hundred, she does establish that Sutpen's blood line continues.

Mr. Coldfield provides an interesting contrast to Quentin and Judith. He does not build on a failure; instead he is destroyed by a success. Sutpen and Coldfield become business partners in a speculative venture. The particulars are not clear, but the general understanding is that Coldfield contributed his credit and Sutpen his willingness to take all the blame if they were caught. Mr. Coldfield had "seen the chance to do that very same thing all the

time, only his conscience . . . wouldn't let him" (AA 209).

Mr. Compson supposed that Mr. Coldfield agreed to the arrangement because he assumed that they would fail:

He couldn't quit thinking about it, and so when they tried it and it failed he (Mr Coldfield) would be able to get it out of his mind then; and that when it did fail and they were caught, Mr Coldfield would insist on taking his share of the blame as penance. (AA 209)

With Sutpen's help, however, the plan did not fail, and so Mr. Coldfield's conscience was not appeased. He locked himself in his room and eventually starved himself as a self-imposed punishment for his success.

Horace Benbow returns to his wife Belle as a self-imposed penance for failing to save Lee Goodwin twice--once during the trial because of Temple Drake's false testimony, and a second time when the mob has set Goodwin on fire--but both cases were noble attempts in a lost cause. Even if Horace had not been handicapped by his fear of evil, Goodwin's demise was inevitable. Goodwin refused to defend himself in the courtroom because of his own fear of Popeye, and by the time Horace discovered the lynch mob and "ran into the throng, into the circle which had formed about a blazing mass in the middle of the lot," the fire was "indistinguishable, the flames whirling in long and thunderous plumes" (311). When Horace returns home after these failures, he also demonstrates a failure to leave his wife, but a spark of his desire to endure and prevail remains. Though his wife is unconcerned and his stepdaughter is unreceptive, he telephones Little Belle to



reassure himself that she is all right and to try to protect her from the type of evil that he has witnessed. He fails again as she hangs up on him, but her reaction does not negate his effort (316).<sup>4</sup> Despite his inadequacies, Horace's attempt to reach out to his stepdaughter demonstrates that he continues to resist evil through the old verities.

In The Hamlet, V. K. Ratliff fails to outsmart Flem Snopes. This failure is not as tragic as that of Horace Benbow but is equally significant because the Snopeses embody "the ambition and the ruthlessness and the arrogance" of evil (Pine Manor 137). Ratliff's intention to try to get the better of Flem is made clear early in the novel. Soon after the Snopeses arrive in Jefferson, Ratliff speaks to Will Varner:

"I think the same as you do," Ratliff said quietly. "That there aint but two men I know can risk fooling with them folks. And just one of them is named Varner and his front name aint Jody. "And who's the other one?" Varner said. "That aint been proved yet neither," Ratliff said pleasantly. (H 30-1)

That he refers to himself is made clear after his first attempt. Ratliff receives a note for ten dollars that Mink Snopes had bought from Flem. The note, which is an I.O.U. from Flem to Isaac Snopes for his share of an inheritance, is legally payable on demand, but Ratliff discovers that he cannot profit from it without allowing Flem to profit as well because Flem is Isaac's guardian: "So if I pay him his ten dollars myself, you will take charge of it as his

guardian. And if I collect the ten dollars from you, you will have the note to sell again. And that will make three times it has been collected" (H 96). Ratliff has Flem burn the note. He gives the money for Isaac to Mrs. Littlejohn, the woman who runs the boarding house, instead and asks her to give Will Varner a message, "Just tell him Ratliff says it aint been proved yet neither" (H 97).

Later, Ratliff sees Flem digging on the Old Frenchman place and interprets his actions to mean that there is buried money there. He joins forces with Bookwright and Armstid and begins to search. After finding three bags of coins, they decide they must buy the property in order to have time to continue hunting and legal right to what they find (385-6). Flem is able to sell them the property for an exorbitant amount of money because they believe that Eustace Grimm is also interested in buying (292-3). After several days of digging in earnest and finding nothing, Ratliff remembers that Eustace's mother was a Snopes, and they realize that they have been swindled. With this transaction, Ratliff fails to beat the Snopes and proves that he is not one of the "two men" who "can risk fooling with them folks," but he still prevails because he tries. In addition, his honor is still intact because his neighbors still acknowledge " . . . couldn't nobody but Flem Snopes have fooled Ratliff" (405).

Each of these characters experiences some kind of failure, but their failures do not negate their ability to

endure and prevail. Their failures do not signal an end to their efforts, but rather a renewed beginning, and as such reinforce man's immortal nature. On several occasions while in Nagano, Faulkner reiterated his belief that failure is an essential element rather than a contradiction of man's immortality. In an interview at the Press Club he stated, "Man's immortality is that he is faced with a tragedy which he can't beat and he still tries to do something with it"

(4). Later, during the colloquies he asserted

The proof of his immortality is the fact that he has lasted this long in spite of all the anguishes and the griefs which he himself has invented and seems to continue to invent. He still lasts, and still there is always somewhere someone that says: "Yes, that's right, I will do better than this," even though he himself knows that he might fail when the crisis, the moment comes when he has got to sacrifice, that the weak shall be perfected, that man shall not be inhuman to man. (FN 28)

In addition to establishing the relationship between a willingness to fail and man's immortality, these statements also encompass the other elements that constitute Faulkner's vision of the "human condition." Man accepts failure as he faces the "tragedy which he can't beat," and he endures "in spite of all the anguishes and the griefs" which result from evil. He overcomes his fear when he says "Yes, that's right, I will do better than this," and he becomes immortal as he practices the old verities because he recognizes that "he has got to sacrifice, that the weak shall be perfected, that man shall not be inhuman to man."

Faulkner's poetic voice does promote the immortality that he so frequently affirms in his public voice because

his characters demonstrate the effects of failure, fear, and evil on man as he tries to practice the old verities and attain his immortality. Faulkner's characters often fail, but they prevail, nevertheless, because they show man trying to be better than he is likely to be. Therefore, when Faulkner claimed that he "failed" to show that man would endure and prevail in his fiction (FU 4-5), he was not displaying modesty or self-deprecation. He was paying himself the compliment of acknowledging the splendid nature of his dream. Despite the darkness that so many see in Faulkner's fiction, Faulkner himself declared, "I am still convinced that man is tougher than any darkness. That man's hope is the capacity to believe in man, his hope, his aspiration toward a better human condition" (FN 157)

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See also FU 61, 151, FN 10, LIG 238.

<sup>2</sup> See also FU 77.

<sup>3</sup> See also FU 15, 143, FN, 3-4, 7, LIG 81, 225.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Watson comments on this scene in "The Failure of the Forensic Storyteller: Horace Benbow." He proposes that Horace's failures are caused by an inability to communicate. This episode, therefore, is a type of victory/defeat because Horace finally attempts meaningful communication but is unsuccessful: "I like to think that Faulkner's ellipses here [in Horace's telephone conversation with Little Belle] disguise what are actually complete sentences, that the absent content of Horace's proposed tale is secondary to the act of telling itself" (74).

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<u>Absalom, Absalom!</u>
AILD	<u>As I Lay Dying</u>
ESPL	<u>Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters</u>
FN	<u>Faulkner at Nagano</u>
FU	<u>Faulkner at the University</u>
FWP	<u>Faulkner at West Point</u>
GDM	<u>Go Down, Moses</u>
H	<u>The Hamlet</u>
LIA	<u>Light in August</u>
LIG	<u>Lion in the Garden</u>
S	<u>Sanctuary</u>
SF	<u>The Sound and the Fury</u>

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