

SUCCESS IN THE TWILIGHT TIME:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S SNOPEs TRILOGY TO HIS LITERARY
CAREER

A Senior Thesis

By

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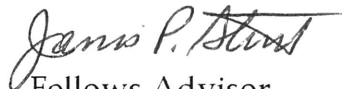
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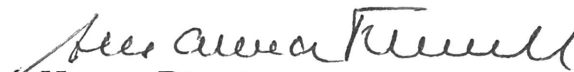
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Success in the Twilight Time: The Significance of
William Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy
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SUCCESS IN THE TWILIGHT TIME: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S SNOPEs TRILOGY TO HIS LITERARY CAREER. Joel Ray (Dr. Janis Stout), English, Texas A&M University.

This paper looks at one of the lesser known achievements of Faulkner's career, his trilogy Snopes. In approaching the criticism of Faulkner's work, his later writings are often regarded as lesser efforts after the talent of his early years had faded. Only the first novel of the trilogy was written during what has become the "great books" phase of Faulkner's career. The next two novels did not appear until sixteen years later, marking a significant change in Faulkner's formulation of his career as a writer. This paper traces the relationship of Faulkner's work on the trilogy to his writing career. In addressing the different novels of the trilogy, the sixteen year gap in his work on them also provided an area for investigation and is used to discover connections between the works and trace their development. Since this work has traditionally been considered one of Faulkner's lesser efforts, this research attempts to assert its significance as an important part of his literary career and to use analysis and research to present it as a significant artistic accomplishment in its own right.

William Faulkner is generally regarded as one of the most significant writers of modern times. He left behind an inexhaustible body of work, novels whose impact can only be appreciated through experience, since no description can encompass or do justice to their literary force. Reading Faulkner can prove to be a struggle, however, the textured verbosity of his books has become almost legendary. But while many authors might come across as overly complex or long-winded for no appreciable purpose, Faulkner does not. The fullness and complexity that characterizes his stylistic approach reflect the fullness and complexity with which he has explored a rich range of human experience. In navigating through a Faulknerian paragraph or sentence, the reader becomes involved alongside the author in wrestling with the complicated nature of human existence. Faulkner's profound moral and social concerns and his distinctive techniques for involving the reader in pondering such concerns along with him, not just his style alone, have established his reputation as one of the leading novelist of the twentieth century.

Faulkner explored universal themes such as the individual's place in the world, responsibilities to the self, and relationships to others and the surrounding community in localized terms provided by his own personal experience and awareness of Jefferson County, Mississippi. From this specific, real place he created the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, a distillation of his life in the South. Yoknapatawpha has been recognized and widely praised as a very real imagined place where Faulkner both created a uniquely Southern

identity and used that account of Southern life as a model for considering the fundamental elements of the human condition. Critics recognized the vast and compelling presentation of Southern life in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha as the creation of a fictional world that, as Daniel Joseph Singal noted, formed a basis for "Faulkner's probe into the depths of southern consciousness" (Singal 195). In the novels that Faulkner published early in his career as he was establishing himself as a writer and forging the world of Yoknapatawpha, his historical portrait of the South focused on the lives of the South's fading aristocracy. The first two Yoknapatawpha books, Sartoris and The Sound and the Fury, both published in 1929, lacked an in-depth and involving consideration of the South's poor whites. While poor whites did appear in these novels, the sections of the picture dealing with the lower class had only been sketched and not yet filled in. That part of the portrait appeared in Faulkner's next novel, As I Lay Dying (1930), but was not treated with much fullness, especially in regard to the place of the poor white in the New South, until much later, when he finally completed his long-delayed and greatly undervalued Snopes trilogy.

This trilogy, which is made up of three substantial novels -- The Hamlet, The Town, and The Mansion -- depicts the infiltration and rise in society of the various members of poor whites. Using varied techniques and forms, Faulkner guides the reader to consider the conditions that drive the unprivileged to the acts of desperation in order to claim their own place in the world. The examination of the poor and their place in society that is presented in the Snopes

trilogy complements the earlier preponderance of attention to the status of the aristocracy in Faulkner's fictional realm. To slight the novels of the trilogy in an evaluation of his Southern panorama is to neglect a particularly unique, informative, and vital portion of Faulkner's creative output.

Work on Snopes spanned much of Faulkner's career. The first novel of the trilogy, The Hamlet, appeared in 1940 and, along with the publishing of Go Down, Moses in 1942, capped off an exceptionally prodigious period of Faulkner's literary output. During these early years of his career, while he was completing the sequence of novels for which he is usually praised, he had published several short stories, often comical in tone, dealing with a poor white clan named Snopes. The members of this family were variously grotesque, bumbling, and at times sinister. Some of these stories were pulled together into the text of The Hamlet, which though it has been designated as his comic masterpiece, has not usually been given the weight of other novels from this phase of his career, possibly due to a widespread tendency to undervalue anything that is labeled comic, or possibly due to the fact that it was constructed partly by the reworking of stories that had already been published elsewhere. The next novel of the trilogy, The Town, did not appear until seventeen years later in 1957, and was quickly followed by The Mansion, the concluding novel in the trilogy. in 1959. It is an astonishing span of time for such a unified sequence of novels, especially since Faulkner conceived of the trilogy as a whole during his inception of his Yoknapatawpha work.

The two late books in the trilogy are not so much dismissed, as The Hamlet often is, as simply disregarded, since they came at a time in Faulkner's career that is traditionally considered as not indicative of his contributions to American literature. In the later period of his writing, Faulkner was considered a blunted genius whose earlier creative experiments in narrative form were peak of his literary contributions and were unmatched in significance by any of his later works. Malcolm Cowley, editor of The Portable Faulkner, evinced this view stating, "None of his later books was on a level with The Sound and the Fury or Go Down, Moses" (Cowley 172). Choosing one's favorite book by Faulkner or designating one as one of his most innovative is, of course, highly subjective, and his early books overflow with qualities to encourage such recognition. But to consider any work by an author of Faulkner's stature and awe-inspiring ability as insignificant reduces the artistic dimensions of his vision. It is somewhat analogous to the plight of Orson Wells after Citizen Kane: when judged by his earlier successes, even Faulkner has trouble measuring up to his own achievements in a medium whose expressive potential he revolutionized. After all, to match his earlier triumphs, Faulkner would have had to produce another The Sound and the Fury, which would hardly have been an extension of his talents. It is far more appropriate to evaluate his work as an ongoing process, keeping in mind the complex issues circulating in his life and in society at large and how these affected his writing. An understanding of Faulkner's relationship to his writings and what he sought to accomplish with

them is necessary to complete the picture of his artistic career and to provide a sound basis for interpreting his work and progression as a novelist.

My purpose for this paper is to trace the Snopes material as it developed from a fascination with the activities of “poor white trash” to the trilogy completed not long before his death, when he was supposedly long past his creative prime; to analyze the biographical elements that shaped the massive sequence of works; and to use this approach to emphasize Faulkner’s work as an ongoing process, thereby presenting a connection between the “early” and “late” phases of Faulkner’s career and arguing for the importance of the trilogy in Faulkner’s total body of work, as both an aesthetic achievement and a new way of viewing the artist. In doing so, I hope to establish that the novels of Snopes are much greater, artistically, than they have usually been considered.

THE “MAJOR PHASE” VIEW

Early landmarks in Faulkner’s career such as The Sound and the Fury (1929), Light in August (1932), and Absalom, Absalom! (1936) helped to establish this Southern character that has been identified with Faulkner and his writings. These great achievements also served to establish critical interpretations of Faulkner’s art and became indexes for measuring his future work. The shifting of time, space, and subjectivity by the multiple narrators of The Sound and the Fury in Faulkner’s portrayal of the decline of the aristocratic Compson family,

the racial statements and pondering of the meaning and creation of identity in Light in August, and the examination of Southern consciousness and a man's desire for immortality in Absalom, Absalom! were all great moments in American literature. The outstanding quality of these novels, however, has also colored a view of Faulkner's career based upon what Noel Polk calls, "the great books" or "the major phase" interpretation whereby books Faulkner wrote during the 1920's and 1930's (including, in addition to these three, As I Lay Dying and Go Down, Moses, two other novels whose experimental natures have been readily identified and elaborated upon) have been considered representative of his artistic accomplishment while most of his other works are given lesser emphasis and sometimes even dismissed as failures (Polk, Ideology 303). This notion has been so embedded in Faulkner criticism that it can be advanced as a point-of-fact without any need for justification. For example, Joel Williamson, in William Faulkner and Southern History flatly identifies "Faulkner's four great novels, The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses" (Williamson 312). In a similar manner, Daniel Singal confidently states Faulkner's exploration of the Southern consciousness "did not continue much beyond Absalom, Absalom!" (Singal 195). The climate of Faulkner studies has become such that statements like these can be made with little fear of opposition. Noel Polk confronts this perspective when he responds to the apparent need to justify studying so-called "lesser" works by saying that it is not necessary to "argue that these novels are 'great'

and *therefore* worth our attention[but] that they are worth our attention because they are interesting and by an author whom we admire” (Polk, Ideology 303).

The so called “great books” or “major phase” view ultimately traces back to the 1946 publication of The Portable Faulkner. In his afterward to the original introduction to that volume, Malcolm Cowley characterizes Faulkner’s later work as having “more than a touch of old-fashioned sentiment” and states that “the younger possessed an unregenerate author is the one whose works amaze us” (Cowley, Portable xv) The Portable Faulkner revived interest in Faulkner’s career and, by emphasizing the creation of Yoknapatawpha as a “living pattern” and by presenting passages in chronological order to illustrate this process, helped to point critics in a direction for interpreting Faulkner’s art. Cowley’s efforts were instrumental in the reevaluation of Faulkner that culminated in the awarding of the Nobel Prize in 1950, but they also helped to lay a foundation that set a division firmly in place between the early and later Faulkner. Faulkner’s career came to be viewed as having two separate phases, one, that of the young inspired man who produced works of feverish intensity and the other that of an aged benevolent one who assumed a responsibility to provide more consciously moral gestures to his audience. The division this scheme proposes is between the bold risk-taker seeking to satisfy his desires and the conscientious man drawing from his accomplishment to engage his audience more directly. In The Faulkner-Cowley File, Cowley later generalized his assertion regarding the decline of Faulkner’s later work: “That it is the

common fate of imaginative writers...some original force goes out of them. The books they write after the age of fifty most often lose in genius what they may possibly gain in talent" (Cowley 171). Such grossly assumptive views as those inspired by the interpretive trends set by Cowley have effectively promoted a prejudiced approach towards the phase of Faulkner's career in which he completed Snopes.

Perhaps what most distinguished the two phases of Faulkner's career in conceptual terms is that the early Faulkner was writing mainly for himself, whereas the later one had come to recognize his audience and was extending himself towards them. Nevertheless, both of these realms overlap since even in his early phase Faulkner distributed his writings to friends and publishers and craved recognition while the older one still drew his personal concerns (obsessions) to fuel his creativity. What may be overlooked by separating Faulkner's career into distinct phases is that both exercised a great deal of talent in their endeavors. It was the general application of these gifts that was different. In evaluating the successfulness of these two separate ventures, one might view them as differing in many ways in practice and final form, but as forming a continuum in which one phase is an outgrowth of the other. Having experimented with technique and discovered a mode of expression that accommodated his personal and artistic concerns and goals, Faulkner moved on in a logical progression, to a phase of more deliberate intentionality in his works and the messages he hoped to convey to his audience. After establishing his

talents and learning how to best apply them, he needed a more direct way of using them. Faulkner had of course matured by that time and was no longer as filled with shifting energy and interests to occupy his passions. He had aged and in some ways settled down. After being established as an author, his direction in life would become a little more certain (in terms of career at least), and his later works reflect this much more focused approach.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SNOPEs FAMILY

The first mention of Faulkner's writing stories about the Snopes family occurred in 1927 when Phil Stone, Faulkner's close friend and a mentor to his emerging passion for the literary world, created a news release describing two of Faulkner's projects, one about the tragic and aristocratic Sartoris family, the other a comic tale of a large family of "typical 'poor white trash'" (Minter 77). These two efforts constitute in fact, Faulkner's earliest foray into the creation and exploration of the dimensions the world of Yoknapatawpha. The project dealing with the poor whites, called "Father Abraham," contains the setting many of the characters, and basic plot points of the Snopes stories and novels. Even in this early incarnation, the Snopes clan is already a "prolific and rootless" (Minter 79) family that is infiltrating and usurping the order of the community of Frenchman's Bend. Already, Flem has become president of the Jefferson bank after marrying Will Varner's pregnant daughter Eula, and the prominent story in the narrative of "Father Abraham" is Flem's return from his Texas honeymoon with a herd of wild ponies that he uses to swindle the townspeople, the renowned "Spotted Horses" story that would eventually be incorporated into the final text of The Hamlet.

The "Spotted Horses" story was one of the Snopes yarns Faulkner had frequently told to amuse friends. This storytelling had its roots in conversations the young Faulkner and Phil Stone heard about the "revolt of the 'rednecks'"

taking place in Lafayette County. The two young men discussed what Stone learned about the uprising in his family's law office. This so called "redneck revolt" included much demagoguery and was represented by the stories of such actual political figures as Lee Russell, James Kimble Vardaman, and Theodore "The Man" Bilbo. Stone would share his stories he knew about people pulling themselves up by the bootstraps, and he and Faulkner would discuss their take on the phenomenon. In some cases, they expressed admiration for the efforts of the struggling poor, but other rednecks seemed greedy and amoral, inspiring the feeling of derision mixed with fascination that would characterize Faulkner's future treatment of the Snopes clan (Blotner 47). These conversations and reflections between the two, dating back to their high school years, would continue when Stone became a lawyer himself and observed the extremes of human behavior to which his daily legal practice exposed him. Using their familiarity with the subject as fuel, Faulkner and Stone would proceed to make up outrageous stories that may not have been drawn from actual events, but were just as real to them because they considered the tales just as plausible (Blotner 231).

Phil Stone later claimed that he had given Faulkner the idea for the Snopes novel that "the real revolution in the South was not the race situation but the rise of the redneck, who did not have any of the scruples of the aristocracy, to places of power and wealth" (Blotner 192). Exactly what kind of scruples Stone was referring to is not clear, but the idea behind his comment presents the

type of thinking about the poor that characterizes the presentation and evaluation of the Snopes family in the trilogy. The idea seems to be that they are not just a different class, but also breed of people than the rest of humanity. This view is a troubling evaluation of the situation of the impoverished, and remains a difficult part of the trilogy's voice until The Mansion, where Faulkner not only completes his sympathetic portrayal of Mink Snope's pitiful condition by equating him with all humankind, but also extends his compassion even to Flem.

In light of the doomed and chivalrous Sartoris family that was the subject of the other story Faulkner was working on at the time Stone first mentioned the two projects (which later became the novel Flags in the Dust/Sartoris), the unscrupulous Snopeses provided a contrast that helped define the extremes of his vision as well as expand its potential (Blotner 348). Faulkner set aside his work on "Father Abraham," however, when it had reached a little over fifty pages. Why he chose to focus on Flags in the Dust rather than "Father Abraham" is not clear, but it would seem that the immensity of his intent for the Snopes story and its significance to his emerging mythical world were too great for him to master and fully realize at the time. It was during this time that Faulkner's imagination caught fire. Encouraged by what he was discovering after heeding Sherwood Anderson's advice to write what he knew about, Faulkner found unlimited reservoirs for expression through the creation of families and characters drawn from his own experiences and memories and his just as significant imagined possibilities for "what should have been."

Faulkner did not leave the Snopes family behind, however, Snopes characters made appearances in Flags and Dust, as did other characters from the "Father Abraham" piece in later works. In addition, he continued working on the horse-trading story in the piece, and in November 1928 submitted to Alfred Dashiell at Scribner's magazine a short story called "As I Lay Dying," which condensed the principal events in "Father Abraham" into a twenty-one page version of the spotted horses story. It was promptly rejected (Blotner 232). In August 1930 Faulkner submitted a fuller version of the story now called "The Peasants," but it was almost 15,00 words and Scribner's rejected it again (Blotner 264). In 1931 after revising it according to Dashiell's suggestion, he submitted to the Saturday Evening Post a version under the new title "Aria Con Amore". That was also rejected. He then sold it to Dashiell for \$400; this time the length was close to 8,000 words. At Dashiell's request Faulkner changed the title to "Spotted Horses," and it appeared in that form in the June 1931 issue of Scribner's (Blotner 275).

Besides his reworking of the spotted horses story, Faulkner also worked on other Snopes stories both during these early years and throughout his career. In May 1930 a new tale drawn from the "Father Abraham" piece emerged. In this story, Suratt, Henrey Armstid, and Vernon Tull go out to the Old Frenchman place and spy on Flem Snope's digging in the garden, which inspires the men to fetch an old dowser named Uncle Dick. By the end of "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard," Flem has tricked the men with planted treasure into

buying the otherwise worthless property. This would become the final episode in The Hamlet. In November 1930 Faulkner sent Scribner's "The Hound," which described how a poor white farmer named Ernest Cotton came to kill his arrogant neighbor Houston. Houston would later become one of the characters in The Hamlet and Cotton would become the character Mink Snopes whose murder of Houston in The Town and his return to exact vengeance on Flem Snopes in The Mansion. Almost thirty years before the Snopes trilogy would be completed, then, Faulkner had already developed what would grow into one of the most significant events in the trilogy and had also begun to explore the resentful psychology of the disadvantaged that drove men to actions as desperate and seemingly immoral as those conducted by the Snopeses.

Through Faulkner's submissions to Scribner's, Flem Snopes was becoming established as a distinct character, and associate editor Kyle Crichton expressed an interest in more stories about his exploits. In August 1931 Faulkner sent them "Centaur in Brass," which follows Flem to the town of Jefferson (the fictional counterpart of Oxford, Mississippi), where he extends his influence from the base provided by his half-ownership of the restaurant Suratt had traded for his interest in the Old Frenchman place. Flem has used his wife's involvement with the mayor to gain an appointment as the superintendent of the municipal power plant. In that position, he manipulates the two Negro firemen to help him steal brass parts from the plant. It is interesting to note that this story was rejected because Flem did not emerge triumphant from his scheming,

a critique Faulkner did not appreciate at all (Blotner 280). In the story of the Snopes family, as Faulkner conceived it, Flem was not merely some comical anti-hero, but a man degenerated by greed. The "Centaur in Brass" story (which later appeared in The Town) presented another side of Flem Snopes, his fallibility, and showed that there was a rational human mind behind his extraordinary schemes, a fact that makes his actions all the more terrifying. Around late 1934 Faulkner returned to one of his favorite characters, V.K. Suratt, in "Fool About a Horse," which tells of Suratt's father's failed attempt to get the upper-hand with legendary horse-trader Pat Stamper. This comical tall tale would be reworked into The Hamlet with Suratt (whose name would change to Ratliff in the novel) telling the story to Will Varner, and the character of Pap Suratt would be changed to Ab Snopes as an example of happier times for the new soured man.

After beginning work on Requiem for a Nun in December 1933, Faulkner set it aside to write a comic story about another member of the Snopes Family. "Mule in the Yard" deals with I.O. Snopes's practice of allowing livestock to wander onto the railroad tracks so that he could sue for damages and how he is beaten by a railroad widow named Mannie Hait. It was also around this time that Faulkner began planning to write his first Snopes novel. He mentioned the project in a letter to his publisher Hal Smith. "About the novel. I still think that Snopes will take about two years of work study. I could finish the other one in good time, if only the Snopes stuff would lie quite, which it won't do" (Blotner,

Letters 78). Clearly, the Snopes project remained a great concern of Faulkner's and was a work whose baseness was inherent in both what he wanted to say and do with the trilogy. The characters and stories that the Snopes family had been inspiring in Faulkner since the creation of Yoknapatawpha had maintained an active position in his imagination and seem to have been central to his own foundation of what he wanted to accomplish as a writer. In a couple of months, however, his attention was diverted from the project again as he began reworking and writing what would become Absalom, Absalom!. He would not return to the project until November 1938 when he wrote the short story "Barn Burning" as an intended prologue to his next novel, The Peasants. "Barn Burning" tells of a bitter Ab Snopes, who burns a barn to avenge what he feels is arrogant and unfair treatment, and the rebellion of his son Colonel Sartoris Snopes against this action. After finishing this section of the intended novel Faulkner decided it would make a good short story and mailed it to publisher Bob Haas's neighbor, literary agent Harold Ober. On December 15 Faulkner wrote to Haas discussing his progress on a book that was the first three volumes and described his plans for the rest of the trilogy.

THE HAMLET

In a letter to Robert Haas dated December 15, 1938 Faulkner announced a plan whereby his on going work on the Snopes family would materialize into an

organized form. It would be a trilogy, with the three volumes to be titled The Peasants, Rus in Urbe, and Ilium Falling. The first book would detail Flem Snopes's rise in social position "as he gradually consumes a small village" until gaining a foothold in Jefferson, which would lead into the second book as Flem fills each position he leaves behind "with another Snopes from the country, until he is secure in the presidency of a bank." In the final volume, Jefferson would be consumed by Snopeses as they corrupt the government and buy up land (Blotner, Letters 107-108). Faulkner said that he was already half way through the first book of the trilogy, which at this point mostly consisted of the short stories he had previously written that he knew were part of the story. It would take a year, however, before he would finish this novel, and by that time, its title would be The Hamlet. The intended title, "The Peasants," would appear as the name of a section.

This process of return and revision would characterize Faulkner's work on the Snopes saga, the history of which would span his entire career as chronicler of Yoknapatawpha County. When he wrote "Father Abraham" in late 1926 or early 1927, Faulkner was struggling to establish his career. The years between this initial attempt at a work about an upwardly mobile family of rednecks and his concentrated effort to write a novel dealing with the same material in 1939 provided time for Faulkner's vision to mature and for him to gain confidence in his abilities. The string of Snopes-related stories and the appearance of members of the family in novels that Faulkner wrote during this

time demonstrated his continuing interest in their significance to his literary world. By 1938 his career progressed significantly and thus it was with an awareness of his own stylistic capabilities that he began to complete the work he had conceived when he was still measuring his potential. As Michael Millgate observed, "The long history of The Hamlet reveals it clearly as a novel conceived as a single whole but written over a period of many years, with many interruptions, much revision and reworking, and a continually enriching book, far from being a series of loosely connected incidents, demands consideration as a carefully organized and wholly organic structure" (Millgate 33).

Although Faulkner had written the "Barn Burning" story as a prologue to the novel, he apparently decided that the tone of the story did not fit the tone he felt himself developing as he worked on the novel. Instead, he opened with a scene-setting description of Frenchman's Bend that is followed by a description of Uncle Billy Varner, who owns a controlling interest in the business and lands of the community, and his son Jody. The means for Flem Snopes's rise is soon introduced as his father Ab approaches Jody for the rental of one of the Varner's farms. Details from "Barn Burning" would be presented in the words of the sewing machine agent V.K. Ratliff as he informs the Varners about Ab's past. It is also Ratliff's voice that is used to relate the episode of the "Fool About a Horse" story as he tells Will Varner how Ab Snopes became soured.

The method of inclusion for these two stories demonstrates how Faulkner was both reformulating his vision of the trilogy and reworking the previously

written material he incorporated into it. Standing on its own as an introductory episode, "Barn Burning" would have introduced thematic considerations that would have colored the reader's perception of the Snopes family and the events of the novel in a way contrary to Faulkner's apparent intention. In the condensed form in which its events are summarized, however, the story helps to form the backdrop the opening section of the book creates for the rest of the novel. It establishes a background for Ab that would also provide Flem with his first opportunity for manipulation and self-promotion. Its anecdotal form also maintains the dubious nature of the origins of the Snopes family, whereas the complete story would have already established Flem's character before he begins his social climbing. Thus, this decision to limit the significance of the "Barn Burning" story serves to strengthen the unity between the narrative and thematic natures of The Hamlet. The "Fool About a Horse" story works in concert with "Barn Burning" both to provide information about Ab Snopes's past and to assert Ratliff as a source of observation and commentary, a feature that remains intact throughout the entire trilogy. Much of the reworking of "Fool About a Horse" derives from the context as the story is told about a now bitter Ab as an example of more carefree times when he was a vigorous horse trader and not a resentful tenant farmer he has become. The comic tone of the tall tale is also given a different cast as the chapter ends with Ab's rejection of Ratliff's offer of renewed friendship.

This shading of the “Fool About a Horse” story illustrates an important aspect of the novel as a whole, which is its use of the combination of comical excess with somber tones to comment on the nature of an event’s appearances and its deeper substance, involving the reader in a shifting perspective whereby easy judgments prove inadequate in evaluating an individual’s situation. In establishing this more careful and concerned approach to understand the meaning of events and the lives of the people involved, the novel established a narrative technique that is one of the trilogy’s greatest accomplishments: the encouragement of a profound extension of compassion when judging the lives of others and the human condition as a whole.

Another tall tale inserted into the novel that gains from its working into the larger context of the novel is the “Spotted Horses” episode, which along with “Fool About a Horse” provides humorous situations about the trickery involved in horse trading. On their own, these stories may seem to have no wilder implications for the lives of their characters, but in the broader context of the novel, these seemingly conventional characters are revealed to the reader as individuals capable of suffering (Millgate 33). For every triumph won through deception, there is a victim suffering the consequences. Thus, the comic elements of the tall tale have an ironic resonance and the story’s restrictive portrayal presents an implied contrast to the more fully realized characters and the actions of the novel and at the same time offers an alternate way of viewing the same events. This variability demonstrates how many different ways a story

can be told and interpreted, highlighting the multiplicity of human understanding, one of the primary features of Faulkner's narrative approach, and showing how the tragic and comic can feed each other. The impact the horse trading has on the Armstid family, particularly the loss of Mrs. Armstid's savings for her children, enhances the function of the "Spotted Horses" episode as an illustration of the suffering that visits the losers of the scheming in tall tales, consequences which are not focused on in the story itself, but lurk beneath the surface.

The two tall tales also serve as stages gauging the rise of Snopesism. "Fool About a Horse" shows the older generation is defeated in the traditional matching of wits in open contest. Ab operates under the same conditions as his opponent and tries to beat him at his own game, but loses. "Spotted Horses" demonstrates the very modern act using an intermediary to displace the blame on any identifiable perpetrator of the swindle. The swindle goes on, but in a disguised way that leaves the victim no clear target for complaint. Flem triumphs not just through trickery, but also by removing himself from direct involvement in the competition and making his own rules.

Another important character who emerges from Faulkner's early Snopes tales to play a role in his highly visionary conception of the saga of the Snopes family is Eula Varner Snopes. In the text of "Fathers Abraham," Will Varner's daughter Eula had been one of Flem Snopes's acquisitions in his rise to prominence. In The Hamlet Faulkner describes her inexplicably sensual form as

“a kaleidoscopic convolution of concentric mammalian ellipses” (The Hamlet 111). In the section of the novel named for her, Eula is not only highly eroticized but also described as a very passive and unaffected person, as if her true self were not connected to her physical form. In some passages her body is objectified as “meat,” and many animalistic, particularly bovine, comparisons are made to elaborate on her primal femaleness. At the same time, mythic metaphors are used to present her as an idealized and otherworldly presence in the community of Frenchman’s Bend, but like a deity she is unaffected by her own stature, existing on a level that places her above and apart from the rest. Eula’s maturation concludes with her pregnant and abandoned by her lover, the rakish gentleman Hoake McCarron, in fear of the violence of her family’s reaction. For the sake of social propriety, Will Varner arranges a marriage of convenience to the impotent and “froglike” Flem Snopes. This ironic union underlined by tragedy as Eula is used by Flem as another stepping stone in his social climbing.

The next large section in the novel features another union that provides a kind of parallel to Flem and Eula’s marriage, but also a contrast to it. In extravagantly poetic language, chapter one of “The Long Summer” describes the feeble-minded Ike Snope’s love affair with a cow. In a quest to be with his hearts desire, Ike undergoes trials analogous to those of a knight serving his lady. Featuring some of the richest passages in the novel, this description of bestiality functions to contrast with and comment upon the previously

mentioned marriage of Flem and Eula (who has been described in cow-like terms). It also demonstrates how Faulkner repeatedly leads us to question easy judgments by coming to see pathos or even value in events and people we initially find morally repugnant. Although unnatural, Ike's devotion to his beloved is sincere, and by suggesting that such a union could be more decent and caring than the one Flem has with Eula serves as an ironic comment on Flem's debased nature.

Following the description of Ike Snopes's affair with the cow is another of Faulkner's previously published stories that was worked into The Hamlet, "The Hound." This part of the novel relates the struggle between Mink Snopes, who owned the cow, and Houston, the obstinate man on whose land Mink tries to winter the cow on covertly for free. Faulkner traces Houston's life back to when he was a child and follows his impulse for flight from the girl who loves him and the angry years he spends resisting his fate. He finally returns and marries the woman who has remained devoted to him and settles down into a brief life of contentment. This reverie is shattered, however, when his horse kills his wife, and Houston returns to his bitter defiant ways. It is with this attitude that Houston takes Mink to court to sue for the cow's pasturage. In order to pay off his debt Mink works nights digging post holes for Houston and neglects his own land. To spite Houston's asserted superiority, Mink kills him with a shotgun.

Faulkner expanded on the original story by describing the base poverty of Mink's life and his desperate attempts to dispose of the body. This presents yet

another story of striking juxtapositions as the bitter Houston's story is a sympathies, having just been brought to understand the stubborn Houston, are then redirected to comprehend the pitiful existence of Mink, perhaps the lowest member of the Snopes hierarchy. Mink's desperate situation becomes even more sympathetic when he is accosted by his despicable cousin Lump Snopes, who tries to exploit Mink into retrieving Houston's money from the decaying body and sharing it with him. This section concludes with Mink's being jailed and Ratliff's assuming responsibility to set up Mink's abandoned family with stable living conditions.

After the "Spotted Horse" episode, which appears in the final section of the novel, "The Peasants," Faulkner includes his final piece of previously published material. The "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard" story details an error in judgment of Ratliff, the moral center of the novel. Having entered into contending with Flem's ruthless advancements, Ratliff has been spying on Flem, along with Tull and Armstid, two of the many exploited by the wild pony swindle, as he digs late at night on the grounds of the Old Frenchman Place, which he received as part of Eula's dowry. According to town legend, the original landowner hid his fortune on the land. When the threesome go on their own dig, after spying on Flem, they uncover coins and believe they have found the buried treasure he was looking for. This promise of wealth and, for Ratliff, the opportunity to beat Flem Snopes compels the men to make a deal with Flem for the land. It turns out that Flem has tricked them by salting the land with

coins too recent to have been buried during the Frenchman's time. Having been blinded by his greed and desire to outwit Flem, Ratliff has inadvertently given him his first foothold in Jefferson by trading Flem his half-interest in the ownership of a restaurant in town. This demonstration that even Ratliff, one of Faulkner's favorite characters, is fallible and susceptible to misjudgment emphasizes the difficulty of making accurate assessments and steering a moral course through a treacherous world. It also emphasizes, by Ratliff's continued prominence throughout the trilogy, the need to endure.

THE GAP

In the sixteen years after the publication of The Hamlet on April 1, 1940, Faulkner's commitment to his vision of the Snopes material would sporadically disappear and reappear. Mainly, it was the pressure of other work and his pursuit of funds that delayed Snopes. Much of Faulkner's impulse for writing during this period seems to have arisen from immediate personal interests that occupied him around the time of his work on a particular project. Such interests may have also often served as an antidote to the despair he felt from subordinating his interests so he could earn money and the nagging fears he felt about his ability to continue writing well. Despite Faulkner's various distractions, whatever the reason, we can also see his conception of the trilogy

developing and certain elements falling into place during this gap in the writing of it.

Faulkner was faced with mounting financial burdens. By late April he had written Robert Haas, his publisher, that he needed \$1,000 to pay debts and bills and wanted \$9,000 more, possibly in monthly payments of \$400. Almost immediately, Haas responded by offering a three-book contract which could provide a \$1,000 advance and \$8,000 over the next three years. In a letter thanking Haas for his support, Faulkner explained his situation a little further: "I, an artist, ... began to become the sole, principal and partial support ... of my mother, ... brother and his wife and two sons, another brother's widow and child, a wife of my own and two stepchildren, my own child; I inherited my father's debts and his dependents, white and black without inheriting yet from anyone one inch of land or one stick of furniture or one cent of money" (Blotner, Letters 122-23). Any review of Faulkner's writing career reveals the struggle he faced in trying to support himself and his writing financially. From 1940 on, however, money became such a driving factor in his life that the artistic concerns that drove him to write would take a back seat to a desperate and taxing search for financial security. Although he always hoped to maintain a balance between writing for financial reasons and doing work that was close to his heart, too often money would win out and lead him to question whether he could ever manage to create something worthwhile again. Faulkner had always been a driven writer who needed the constancy of his work to keep him assured of his

abilities. Apparently, as his priorities were increasingly forced toward financial matters, he began to feel that he had sold out his art. It seems clear that this feeling, which he would often express in the form of doubts that he would ever return to his former glory, had a major role in the shaping of the last two books of the trilogy, as he both judged money-grubbers such as Flem Snopes very harshly and demonstrated some degree of sympathetic understanding of the motivations behind their plight.

Writing and money were not all that occupied Faulkner's thoughts, for the war in Europe made him think about serving and worried him that "what will be left after this one will certainly not be worth living for." He elaborated on the relationship between this subject and a perceived shift in his creativity. "Maybe the watching of all this coming to a head for the last year is why I can't write, don't seem to want to write, that is. But I can still write. That is, I haven't said at 42 all that is in the cards for me to say" (Blotner, Letters 125). With friends and relatives being commissioned and called to duty, the crisis of the war concerned him a great deal, and he would repeatedly seek to find a way to do his part, but, being unfit for combat, he was turned down. These years were setting the stage for a change in his formulation of himself as a writer. A new sense of commitment to the works he wanted to do was being nurtured by the urgency he felt in the need to "scratch the face of the supreme Obliteration and leave a decipherable scar of some sort" (Blotner, Letters 125). His stabs at a military career seemed to express a desire to join in the common struggle, and

when this failed, he turned to his writing to accomplish this goal. In a letter to his stepson Malcolm, dated December 5, 1942, Faulkner said of fighting that “it will take the young men to do that. Then perhaps the time of the older men will come, the ones like me who are articulate in the national voice” (Blotner, Letters 166).

In pondering such universal issues as war and racism, which he would soon explore in depth in Go Down, Moses, Faulkner was moving towards a significant change in his approach to writing. His previous works had largely arisen out of inspirations generated by images and concerns that were fueled by his experience and awareness of his localized Southern setting. This process produced unique achievements whose material appeared largely spontaneously and would then be reworked and formulated more deliberately. During the 1940s and '50s, Faulkner's work would shift to a more direct approach to what he wanted accomplish in his writings. As his emerging sense that he was “articulate in the national voice” demonstrates, Faulkner saw a function for his talents that extended beyond his own need to express his concerns in his writing. Increasingly, he sought to engage his audience in the moral effort of pondering the implications of the issues he was writing about. With this heightened awareness of his position as an artist, Faulkner was becoming more deliberate in conceiving his works, and this shift would contribute to the more direct moral comment in The Town and The Mansion.

Despite the impact these ideas would eventually have on his future work, Faulkner's immediate circumstances drove him to spend more and more of his time trying to make money. His financial problems drove him to try to raise funds through short story sales. This process would be complicated by the frequent need to revise his submissions so that they would be more "suitable" for publication in the journals his agent Harold Ober approached. Many of the stories produced during this time would be incorporated into a book Faulkner had proposed to Haas on racial relationships in the South. Having stabilized himself a little through advances from Haas and the sale of stories, Faulkner set to working on Go Down, Moses around May 1941. As he began this novel, Faulkner continued to hope for admittance into the Air Corps, but the most he managed was an appointment as the aircraft warning chief for the area, a duty which put him behind with Go Down, Moses (Blotner 428). The book also came slowly because of the amount of work involved in revising the stories and writing extensive additional sections. It was around this time, having spent most of his advance, that Faulkner also began contemplating a stint in Hollywood to generate income.

In December 1941 Faulkner was finishing his novel and ending his Civil Defense work. In early 1942 he wrote a short story called "Knight's Gambit" which featured Gavin Stevens, the district attorney in Jefferson and a character who would figure prominently in the final two novels of the trilogy. The story was rejected by Harper's on the grounds of "obscurity and complexity," an

evaluation that has been made of much of Faulkner's work in the trilogy (Blotner 436). Throughout 1942 Faulkner had three concerns of shifting priority: to sell enough stories to ease his financial crisis, to try for a screenwriting job, or to seek a military commission. In March he was turned down by the Air Corps and after sending a revised version of "Knight's Gambit" to Ober in June, he realized that not even a commission would solve his problems. He decided to try to find work in Hollywood.

With the help of admirers such as William Herndon, an agent who had previously shopped around some storylines for Faulkner, and friends such as James J. Geller, the head of Warner brothers' story department, Faulkner returned to Hollywood in 1942. The contract Herndon had secured for Faulkner, however, was hardly reasonable. On July 27, he went on the Warner Brothers payroll at \$300 a week. Faulkner had worked in Hollywood before, and just five years earlier, he had been earning \$1250 a week. Among the belongings he packed as he left for California was a small book listing the names of all his creditors and the amounts he owed them (Blotner 440). It is clear that the pressure of debt was driving him back to a life that had already proved incompatible with and even destructive to his writing.

The move to Hollywood gave Warner Brothers options on Faulkner totaling seven years. Its demands would extract a heavy price on his creative output. He would not finish another novel for six years, and it would be seven before he published another story in a major magazine (Minter 191-192). He

worked on a series of scripts, most of them dealing with the war. As his first thirteen-week option drew to a close, he hoped for a new contract at a fair salary. Instead, Jack Warner, who had bragged about getting America's best writer for \$300 a week, only granted the minimum increase of \$50 a week (Blotner 447-448). Faulkner reacted by drinking himself into unconsciousness; with such an income, he could keep his creditors at bay, but it would be years before he could pay them off.

In December Faulkner took a month's leave to return to his home at Rowan Oak for Christmas. He was resentful but accepting of his situation, realizing that he could not count on his writing alone to support him without a steady income. When his option came up again in July, the studio renewed it for fifty-two weeks at \$400 a week. A new project with Howard Hawks briefly gave him hope for a way out. Hawks had discussed plans to set himself up as an independent producer and to hire Faulkner to write for him. The film they were working on, Battle Cry, became a chance for Faulkner to find freedom from his contract, which Warner Brothers agreed to destroy if he wrote a successful picture, and to establish himself with Hawks, giving him further independence from his financial concerns. In August Faulkner's hopes were dashed as Hawks abandoned the increasingly difficult project. He requested a leave without pay and in mid-August was granted three months.

Faulkner had tried to work on his own material in California but could not make any significant progress amidst the burdens of film scripts, financial

worries , and his active interest in the war. He may have been talking to himself as well as his friends when he told fellow writers Bud Bezzerides, “you have talent, you ought to write more” and Jo Pagano, “Get out of this town” (Blotner 447). Clearly Faulkner saw Hollywood as the wrong place to write fiction, and his lack of literary output reflects the stranglehold these years had on his creativity.

Ironically, Faulkner did discover one project during this time that would rekindle his passion and help assert a change in his formulation of himself as an artist. Around the time Battle Cry fell through, he began talking with Henry Hathaway, a director, and William Bacher, a producer, about a project dealing with the legend of the Unknown Soldier, tying it to the Passion Story of Christ. In addition, Faulkner could write not only the script, but a novel or play based on the material with the rights solely his. The possibilities for the project appear to have steadily taken hold of his imagination. On October 30, 1943 he described this new work in a letter to Harold Ober: “I am working on a thing now...It is a fable, an indictment of war perhaps” (Blotner, Letters 178). This work seemed to be a creative out from the unrewarding script work of Hollywood and the desperate churning out and revision of short stories to make them attractive to magazine editors. The commitment Faulkner felt for this new project reflected his ongoing desire, always on his mind, to be involved in the war effort. Writing to his stepson Malcolm, Faulkner again envisioned a day beyond the war when “there will be a part for me, who cant do anything but use words, in the re-

arranging of the house so that all mankind can live in peace in it" (Blotner 1143-44). Unable to fight, Faulkner increasingly saw his writing as his means to serve humanity, and his new work reflected this change in formulation. His use of the phrase "indictment of war" illustrates his increasing interest in making direct moral statements.

Faulkner's work on The Hamlet had been a step towards fulfilling a personal literary commitment characterized by a deliberate reworking of material to produce specific effects of moral sympathy in the reader. Go Down, Moses and its racial concerns revealed his active engagement in social issues, an extension of the attention to class in The Hamlet, and his movement toward a more deliberate interest in the ideas behind his work's concerns. After the discouraging emptiness of working in Hollywood, Faulkner had finally found a project worthy of his talents. Now his new project continued this process as Faulkner became more deliberate and didactic in using his ideas and creating goals for his writing. It would be ten years before he actually finished this work and named it A Fable, a drawn out process which was characterized by the major rewriting of almost every part of the book and the heavy considerations involved in producing a final product. During this time, he came to see the book as his masterpiece. The sense of renewed commitment Faulkner felt with A Fable, then, both contributed to the production of the second and third novels of the trilogy, with their direct moral concern, and delayed his production of them.

As the three-month leave that began in August 1943 came to an end, Faulkner extended it in October 1943 so he could continue working on a synopsis of A Fable. By January he was coming to see the work as more of an argument than an indictment and in the form of a book rather than a movie (Minter 200). In February Faulkner returned to Hollywood, his outlook improved by a return to work of his own and an enjoyable collaboration with Howard Hawks on To Have and Have Not. He also spent time meeting with other writers at a favorite restaurant, where he would entertain the group with stories about Mississippi and its animals. There he returned to spinning tales about the Snopeses. By the time his work on To Have and Have Not ended in May 1944, Faulkner still had not made any progress on his manuscript. Once again, Hollywood was proving incompatible with his creativity. However, one fortuitous event came in the form of a letter from Malcolm Cowley expressing interest in writing an essay on Faulkner to “redress the balance between his worth and his reputation” (Cowley 6). This began a correspondence that would eventually lead to a renewal of interest in Faulkner’s work. At this time, only one of his seventeen novels, Sanctuary, was in print, and a letter from Cowley in July was hardly reassuring, with its statement that although Faulkner was widely admired by writers, publishers felt his material would never sell. Severely depressed, Faulkner began drinking heavily, which caused a period of crisis that ended in another leave without pay. By January 1945 he was back home at Rowan Oak and working on his fable.

As he worked on A Fable, Faulkner came to realize that it would take much longer than he had thought to finish the project. He found himself “writing and rewriting, weighing every word,” an observation that reflected the new deliberateness he brought to his fiction (Blotner, Letters 188). After exhausting his funds again, Faulkner found himself compelled to return to Hollywood in June. Although this stint in Hollywood featured the usual joyless hack work, Faulkner also worked on two projects related to his Snopes writings. The first was a job on a non-Warner Brothers project, Jean Renoir’s The Southerner, a film about a young family of tenant farmers, for which Faulkner wrote some scenes into the problematic script. He also worked with his friend Buzz Bezzerides on a 50-page treatment of “Barn Burning” in hopes of selling it to a studio (Blotner 465-66). Although nothing came of this treatment and the work on the Renoir film was brief, both efforts demonstrate that Faulkner maintained his interest in the Snopeses during this time. His need for money, however, and his dedication to A Fable would continue to delay a resumption of work on the trilogy.

In August 1945 Malcolm Cowley informed Faulkner that the Viking Press had approved a collection of Faulkner’s works for its Portable Library series. Faulkner responded with enthusiasm for the project, which Cowley would edit, but his situation in Hollywood was again becoming unbearable. That same month, he had written to Harold Ober saying, “I think have had about all of Hollywood I can stand. I feel bad, depressed, dreadful sense of wasting time, I

imagine most of the symptoms of some kind of blow-up or collapse” (Blotner, Letters 199). For several weeks he tried to reach an agreement with Warner Brothers to get out of his contract or at least be able to do his work at home. After the studio proved uncooperative, a distraught Faulkner finally decided just to leave. Back home, he worked on a sort of appendix to The Sound and the Fury that he had promised to write for the Portable Faulkner. The writing came quickly and easily, and he did not worry about inconsistencies. Moved by what he was doing, Faulkner apparently felt that the substance of his writing was more important than its consistency with other works. This disregard for consistency would also be pointed out between the novels of Snapes as Faulkner continued to write with a focus on the most current project taking primacy over previous works.

In March 1946 Bennett Cerf of Random House managed to persuade Jack Warner to grant Faulkner an indefinite leave and to renounce any claims on his future work. With the publication of The Portable Faulkner in April of that year, his fortunes were finally changing for the better. Cowley’s project helped to instigate a major reappraisal of Faulkner’s achievement and to bring other novels back into print. Faulkner also sold the rights to his short stories “Death Drag” and “Honor” to RKO Pictures and another story called “Two Soldiers” to Cagney Productions for a total of more than \$10,000 (Minter 210). Relieved of financial worries, he now began to fret over his writing, which alternated between an intensity that convinced him that he was creating a masterpiece and

a slower progress that proved how difficult his new mode of fiction was for him. When progress came to a halt, he feared that Hollywood had ruined him or that his talent was burning out (Minter 210-11). Despite his frustrations, he would repeatedly express his commitment to the project, as in this letter to Robert Haas: “Yet I wont stop it; when I stand off a moment and bring to mind the whole pattern, I have no trouble believing in it” (Blotner, Letters 256). His belief in the “whole pattern” of what he saw ties this phase of Faulkner’s writing career to the very beginnings of his exploring Yoknapatawpha and envisioning the story of the Snopes family, for which he also envisioned a complete pattern. It seems clear that although Faulkner’s writing was shifting in its formulation towards moral directness, it also maintained some constant characteristics throughout its development.

After continuing to revise and add new episodes to his fable project, Faulkner set it aside in January 1948 to write a story on the theme of racism. Like A Fable, this work would also be morally didactic, but unlike the war novel it was finished rather quickly, perhaps since it was set in Yoknapatawpha and had more modest goals. Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner’s first completed work since Go Down, Moses, reflects the more direct approach Faulkner was taking towards his fiction and also features Gavin Stevens of the Snopes trilogy. When Bennett Cerf sold MGM the movie rights for \$50,000, the book also gave Faulkner the financial security he had sought so desperately. He would never again have to worry about his ability to make money.

Having finally become independent of monetary concerns, Faulkner could return to his own work. Earlier he had proposed collecting his short stories in one volume as another method of profiting from his writing. He still liked the idea and worked briefly on the stories and his fable, but by early 1949 he had begun a new project, a book of six related detective stories involving Gavin Stevens called Knight's Gambit. Once again, Faulkner was reworking previously conceived material, but what is also striking about the book is Faulkner's return to the character of Gavin Stevens. After finishing Knight's Gambit, Faulkner had completed two projects in a row featuring the lawyer and his nephew Charles Mallison.

Faulkner seems to have expressed many of his own concerns about himself in Stevens, a persistent and deeply committed man who constantly questions and reassesses himself, doubting while simultaneously proving his own worth as a moral figure. The uncertainty Faulkner felt about his own abilities and the choices he had made strongly echoes this character, which may explain his predilection for Stevens during this time in his career. Perhaps the writings involving Gavin and his nephew were useful to Faulkner as a return to familiar ground where he could exorcise the worries he felt about the challenge to his confidence that accompanied his work on A Fable. In any event, the books Intruder in the Dust and Knight's Gambit are certainly significant to our understanding of the development of the Snopes trilogy, since they are the point where Faulkner developed and expressed an ongoing interest in the characters

who, along with V. K. Ratliff, would be the alternating narrators in The Town. That fact alone further advances the likelihood that Stevens and his nephew were, like Ratliff, characters whose qualities were very close to Faulkner's heart.

After completing work on Knigh't's Gambit in June 1949 Faulkner returned to work on the vast A Fable manuscript, but by early 1950 his work on it had slowed down again. In January Random House had expressed an interest in publishing the collection of his short stories, and he sent the company the divisions he had devised for organizing the forty-two stories. Faulkner had also begun working on a new project, Requiem for a Nun, a complicated sequel to Sanctuary that is part prose and part three act play. Once again, he had created a work didactic in tone, which also included Gavin Stevens, who serves as attorney in the trial that occurs in the narrative (Minter 216). Work on Requiem for a Nun was still in progress when Faulkner received a phone call on November 10, 1950 informing him that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for 1949. After being persuaded by his daughter Jill to attend the ceremony in Stockholm, Faulkner came to recognize the occasion as an opportunity to articulate the concerns and convictions he felt so deeply and was now consciously incorporating into his fiction. In some ways the now famous acceptance speech would be a pinnacle for Faulkner's didactic evolution. In the speech he asserted many of his simple but most vital and profound convictions: his hope to reach the young, his belief that only "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself . . . can make good writing because only that is worth

writing about," his feeling that any story lacking "the old universal truths" of "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" was ephemeral and doomed," and of course his prophetic assertion that the human race will prevail (Cowley, Portable 723-24). After a restless period of traveling and heavy drinking following the trip to Stockholm, Faulkner managed to finish his work on Requiem for a Nun and it was published in September 1951.

The next two years were a fitful time for Faulkner's creativity. He oscillated between such diversions and undertakings as attempts to oversee stagings of his play, travels to Europe, New York, and Boston, electro-shock treatments for his depression and drinking, and of course, sporadic work on A Fable. He also reflected on his impressive achievements as a writer and worried about his new status as a man whose commitment was intense but who was unsure of his ability to fulfill his new definition of himself as an accomplished writer seeking a more direct and preconceived application of his talents.

After finally completing A Fable in November 1953, Faulkner busied himself traveling across Europe and working on another movie with Howard Hawks. During this time he was again drinking heavily, which repeatedly ended in hospitalizations, and also dealing with personal issues such as his daughter's marriage. August 1954 signaled a new development in Faulkner's career: he began serving as a sort of cultural ambassador for improving relations between the United States and the countries of South America. This role suited

his need to make statements on the moral issues facing humanity, as during his travels he would discuss his views on peace and racism.

Toward the end of the month, after Faulkner was back in the States, his interest in recording Snopes stories began to reappear in the form of a story called "By the People" which takes place roughly fifty years after the events of The Hamlet. Narrated by Charles Mallison, the story featured Gavin Stevens's and V. K. Ratliff's attempts to combat the corrupt Clarence Eggleston Snopes's congressional race against a decent opponent who is handicapped by the distinction of having commanded Negro troops in the Korean War (Blotner 592). This new Snopes story mixed Faulkner's concerns for moral awareness in social institutions with racial issues, and its direct engagement of questioning the evil behind such publicly condoned abuses as greedy self-promotion seem to serve as a precursor for Faulkner's formulation of the trilogy. "By the People" is also significant for extending the story of the Snopeses to modern concerns and using this connection to comment on basic elements of human nature as well as tie those observations to humanity's present state. Sometime later Faulkner also composed another Snopes-related story called "Hog Pawn." Both of these efforts would be reworked into the text of The Mansion.

In early 1955 Faulkner returned to the process of reworking old material when he and Saxe Commins designed Big Woods, a volume of four hunting stories linked together by five short prose pieces. The new writings cover Yoknapatawpha from its beginnings as a rich virgin land to its modern condition

of being exploited to make money (Minter 234-235). In both respects, then, its form and its moral content, the project is pertinent to his return to the trilogy. Clearly the greed of modern times was becoming an important moral concern for Faulkner, perhaps even seeming to him to be more fundamental than racism, as the next two novels of the Snopes trilogy would demonstrate through their deep involvement in considering this problem. In July 1955 Faulkner set out on another State Department assignment that would take him to Japan and throughout Europe. By the time he returned in October, he felt he had finally worked out his restlessness and decided he was ready to work again (Minter 236). In a letter written the same month he described his feeling that he needed to write about his “imaginary country and county” (Blotner, Letters 387). He filled that need by starting to work on the long-delayed sequel to The Hamlet. By December he had returned to the project he had envisioned some thirty years before.

THE TOWN AND THE MANSION

Faulkner would finish his work on The Town within the year, and this period would feature, in addition to the busier schedule brought on by his success, an expression of the fear that his talents were fading. In a letter dated January 28, 1956 to Jean Stein, a friend whom he had asked to read some of the work-in-progress, he wrote, “The book is going too good. I am afraid; my

judgment may be dead and it is no good" (Blotner, Letters 393). The ease with which the Snopes material was coming to him might have been challenging his confidence since laborious efforts had seemed to mark much of his work and he was still questioning his skill as a more direct writer. However, in another letter to Jean Stein on August 22, Faulkner was realizing he had achieved something more complex and moving than he expected: "Just finishing the book. It breaks my heart, I wrote one scene and almost cried. I thought it was just a funny book but I was wrong" (Blotner, Letters 402). Apparently this project was proving to be more profound and significant than its synopsis, the rise of a redneck in society, suggested. The emotional power of the story's connection to life as people are living it took shape across the work in increasingly real terms as the trilogy developed.

The Town begins with a chapter narrated by Charles Mallison that briefly retraces Flem Snopes's progress toward Jefferson and then recounts the "Centaur in Brass" story that first appeared in 1931. Flem has already used his wife's affair with Manfred de Spain to gain an appointment as the superintendent of Jefferson's power plant and sets about stealing the brass safety valves. To aid in his plan, Flem pits the plant's two Negro firemen against each other by telling each that the other wants him fired. Flem's efforts fail, however, because he only understands social and economic factors, not emotional ones. When Tomey's Turl's pursuit of Tom Tom's young wife is added to the situation, a sexual dimension is added to the firemen's competition, and this variable causes Flem

to fail. After realizing that Flem had set them against each other, the two firemen cooperate and dump the brass into the town water tank. This story serves as the rare occurrence of defeat for Flem and from it he learns a lesson about being too bold in his schemes, as he was by overlooking the emotional factors in his purely economic plan. He also learns, through Manfred de Spain's request of Flem to pay for the damage without being prosecuted by Gavin Stevens, that corruption, as long as it is discreet, is tolerated and not openly challenged.

The only other previously published story that Faulkner works into the novel is "Mule in the Yard" (1934) which deals with I. O. Snopes's manipulation of leading mules onto railroad tracks so he can collect an insurance payment from the railroad company. This largely comical story relates how his scheme fails when his partner and five of the mules are accidentally killed during one of these attempts and the widow Hait foils I. O.'s stubborn demand for money from her. In a scene reminiscent of the "Spotted Horses" episode in The Hamlet, one of the mules runs wild and the ensuing chaos leads to Mrs. Hait's house burning down. Mrs. Hait buys the mule for ten dollars, a price I. O. does not agree on, and in a pseudo-trial conducted amongst the ruins of her yard the two bicker over I. O.'s claim for more money. Flem steps in to resolve this situation by presenting Mrs. Hait with the mortgage to her house, which he bought, so that she can rebuild it and by paying off I. O. for the sixty dollar mules at the \$150 price he claims they are worth on the condition that he leave town. By this action Flem, now vice president of the bank, demonstrates that his goal of social

climbing is not a purely financial one. He is interested in conforming to the social norms of Jefferson by cultivating respectability, and the lengths he goes to in order to drive his embarrassing kinsmen out of town demonstrates how Flem is thoroughly committed to this cause.

The beginnings of this shift in Flem's outward behavior first appeared in an earlier section of the book. Flem's cousin Montgomery Ward Snopes had been caught exhibiting French postcards (i.e., obscene materials) after dark to various members of the community. In order to avoid the scandal that would be caused if this information went public, Flem manages to confiscate the photographs and frame Monty for the lesser offense of bootlegging. Flem's desire to maintain appearances also manifests itself in his becoming active in the Baptist church, eventually becoming a deacon. Throughout the novel, Flem's ability to gain a socially respected position in the Jefferson community and his service as defender of public decency, even though he is clearly motivated by selfish and essentially amoral ambitions, functions to reveal the hypocrisy inherent in the organization of society.

All of these incidents are related in the chapters of The Town narrated by Charles Mallison, called chick by his Uncle Gavin. Through his perspective, the reader learns about the events in a tone of innocent speculation as young Charles spends the novel forming his own take on the Snopes phenomenon and preparing to take his place in the next generation of opponents to its corrupting influence. The other two narrators, Gavin Stevens and V. K. Ratliff, are members

of the old guard who actively participate in the events that Charles reflects upon. Ratliff has learned from his experiences in The Hamlet, especially after witnessing the wild pony auction and experiencing his own defeat in purchasing the Old Frenchman place. Being such an integral part of the community, Ratliff has become a more detached observer of the advance of Flem Snopes and all the other forms of rapacity that Faulkner designates as Snopesism, realizing that a more radical approach to combating Flem is necessary. Ratliff takes a more direct role only when immediate action is necessary, such as when he loans money to prevent Flem from buying out his honest kinsman Wall's retail store. Ratliff spends most of the novel gathering information and discussing his views with Gavin and Charles. Thus, Ratliff uses his formidable knowledge to combat Snopesism as he guides and counsels Gavin and prepares Charles to continue the crusade. Through Gavin's chapters, we become aware of a route to combating the social ills revealed through Snopesism's rise that Ratliff was unable to take, that of championing the dignity of Eula Varner Snopes, whose uniqueness and flouting of social conventions identify her with the cause of the individual, in the face of Flem's ruthless manipulations and the impudence of her lover Manfred de Spain.

While it is Gavin's idealism that commits him to his cause, that same idealism also ironically leads to the ineffectiveness of much of his struggle as he tries to apply his romantic vision to reality. One of Gavin's earliest attempts involves his persuading his sister to invite Eula to the Cotillion Club's Christmas

ball. When Manfred makes a public display of their relationship by dancing with her, he and Gavin end up in fist fight. Gavin is beaten publicly by de Spain, yet despite his defeat, still struggles on until he is held back so de Spain can leave without having to beat Gavin senseless. It is by such displays of his commitment as this that another irony about Gavin's idealism emerges. While the results of his dedication and lofty goals may cause him to seem to be ineffectual and misled, his unfaltering belief in their value and relentless struggle to assert them in the face of conventional wisdom make him an admirable member of the community. Although Gavin never manages to triumph in his endeavors to directly oppose Snopesism and its related social abuses, his attempts serve to educate him about his undertaking and make him into a worthy opponent of Snopesism.

As the narrative progresses, Gavin replaces his devotion to Eula with his concern for her daughter Linda. His inability to defend a public honor which Eula does not comprehend or acknowledge renders his cause obsolete. Gavin continues his resistance to Snopesism through his mentoring of the young Linda. As this relationship develops, he finds a suitable way to incorporate his ideals into his efforts. Seeking to save Linda from exploitation by Flem and from being trapped by Jefferson's social structure, Gavin encourages her to go away to college. His attempts, still tainted by his romantic vision, mix success with failure, according to the practicality of his efforts, which range from buying her sodas and giving her poetry to discussing possible colleges. Despite the

shortcomings of some of his efforts, Gavin exhibits good intentions and, most importantly, forms a bond with Linda that will deepen in The Mansion.

The pivotal event of the trilogy occurs in The Town when Eula commits suicide. Her death serves many immediate purposes within the novel itself. Ostensibly, Eula's death is a form of self-sacrifice to protect her daughter Linda from shame. Flem had drawn Manfred de Spain and Will Varner, Eula's father, out into open confrontation about Eula and Manfred's affair. Having played the role of loving father, Flem convinced his daughter to will him her claim to the Varner estate. Flem uses this contract and the affair as leverage to gain the position of president of the Jefferson bank. Since neither the proud Manfred nor the stubborn Uncle Billy will yield to each other's position, the conflict creates a situation with one of two possible outcomes: either Eula and Manfred elope and leave town or they remain and Linda learns that Flem is not really her father. In order to save her daughter from living with such a scandal, Eula takes her own life. This event compels Manfred to leave town, abandoning both his bank presidency and his stately family mansion. Flem emerges in possession of both bank and house -- his final step in gaining social power and his greatest triumph, putting him in position for the final developments of the final novel in the trilogy. Eula's death also serves to reveal to Gavin the human limitations of his romantic vision, since Eula's suicide was the only noble solution to her predicament, but not the most humane. In the aftermath of her loss, Gavin gains a more realistic view in his struggle to balance his idealistic aspirations. Within

the community, Eula's death represents the plight of the individual and the direction society drives those who do not conform to its rules. While Eula is hardly alone in her individualistic pursuits and flouting of convention, she is singled out by refusing to hypocritically uphold its values. Ironically, her suicide, a great loss to the community, is the only instance when she does seek to maintain social appearances.

Although Flem appears to have triumphed at the end of The Town, the novel closes with a story that suggests the limitations of his success. Byron Snopes, who had fled Jefferson after embezzling money from the bank, has sent Flem his four half-Indian children. In a series of comical incidents, the children prove to be dangerous and uncontrollable: they wield a switchblade, break into the Coca-Cola bottling plant, and eat a wealthy townswoman's dog, before they are sent by Flem to Frenchman's Bend. Already, Flem had paid \$500 for the dog and was paying additional money to Dewitt Binford, who had married one of Flem's relatives, to board them. The mischievous children sneak around the house without making a sound, and when Dewitt tries to monitor their nightly activities, he gets slashed on the cheeks by a knife blade, causing him to abandon his own house. The next day Doris Snopes sets about trying to train the savage children to hunt like a pack of dogs, but before the day is out, ends up tied to a tree and almost burned up in a bonfire. The book ends with the children being mailed back to Byron in El Paso, Texas. Although the events of this story are largely comical, they are underscored by a tone of menace. Even Flem's

economic and social resources fail to contain the children. He might be able to manipulate the community of Jefferson and drive out his greedy imitative relatives, but when confronted by a form of Snopes that he is not familiar with, his stability is genuinely threatened by the presence of forces equally malevolent to him as he is to Jefferson. These Snopes offspring represent the next generation and the threat that Snopesism will continue to perpetuate itself. Flem's failure to control this incursion into his territory foreshadows his downfall when the unbridled menace another Snopes, Mink, comes to town.

Two years after completing The Town Faulkner remained committed to his need "to keep on writing about these people until [he] got it all told" (Gwynn 193). The Mansion (1959) would be the summation of the themes and events set up in the earlier two novels of the trilogy. In terms of structure, The Mansion reflects its position as the culminating volume of the trilogy by combining the forms of the first two novels into its own unique style. Like the first two books in The Hamlet, the final volume in the trilogy is divided into sections named after its three most symbolically resonant characters. Mink, Linda, and Flem each play the major roles in shaping the outcome of The Mansion. Reminiscent of The Town, there are chapters within each section named after the character who narrates its events. Some chapters are not named, and these are related in Faulkner's roving third person omniscient voice. Throughout the novel, past events in the trilogy's narrative are retold and reflected upon and characters from other Yoknapatawpha novels, such as the Compsons and Sartoris, are

tied to the Snopes epic. The direct social relevance of Snopes is further enhanced by the extension of the story into modern times (which in the time of its writing would be into the 1940s and '50s). Thus, the scope of the trilogy has become a vast and inclusive one in order to encompass its profound moral concerns and to emphasize their relevance to both Faulkner and his audience.

The Mansion is a complex work that not only deserves high critical regard on its own merits, but also crowns the trilogy and has substantial relevance to Faulkner's literary career as a whole. Even if one concedes, as many critics have, that some of Faulkner's later works -- Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, even The Town and A Fable -- are considerably less impressive than the "great books," The Mansion demonstrates that he was still, in this late period, a major artist. As an individual novel, it fully sustains his standing as one of the major writers of the century, and even beyond that it successfully pulls the Snopes material together. I will not attempt to give a full treatment of every aspect of it, such as Gavin Stevens's moral nature, but only those aspects that I have already emphasized in discussing the trilogy: the nature of the Snopes clan, the work's direct moral involvement, and its engagement in promoting a compassionate understanding of the human condition.

The novel begins by retelling the events leading up to Mink's murder of Houston. This version of the story is told sympathetically to Mink's perspective as we learn of his philosophy of a greater justice that balances out the righteousness of one action against another. This premise is his substitute for

religion and is combined in his belief system with the upholding of the dignity of the individual to justify his actions. Mink has been shown as a pitiful person whose life has been that of the impoverished and dispossessed, trapped by the deprivation of his social position and ignorance. As Faulkner elaborates Mink's belief system, however, his motivations become clearer than the simple meanness (ameliorated, for the reader, by the misery of his poverty) that has largely characterized him previously.

What drove Mink to kill Houston was not the days and nights of labor to pay for the cow, but Houston's stubborn demand for an extra dollar to close the deal. Both Mink and Houston know that Houston does not need the dollar, and this insult to his dignity determines in Mink's mind that the only recourse he has is violence. Through this portrayal, Faulkner elaborates on the plight of the disadvantaged and the limited options they have in asserting themselves in society. Deprived of respect, Mink's moral fiber is perverted by the few values he can assert for himself, which mostly relate to his own belief in personal dignity. From this perspective, Mink devises his own belief system where he sees himself forced by Houston's arrogance and flaunting of privilege to kill him. After he is arrested, Mink expects Flem, his kinsman, to intervene on his behalf. When Flem fails to respect this bond, Mink's dignity is again assaulted. In jail Mink finds himself confronted by the social consequences of his actions and has no choice but to commit to the personal justifications for his actions that he has created. Unable to betray himself and admit he has crossed a moral

boundary, Mink sees his disembodied version of justice as an antagonistic force that is testing his resolve. Upholding his personal dignity by adhering to his own value system, Mink concludes that he has to kill Flem.

The third chapter in the novel is narrated by Ratliff and recounts Flem's scheme to dislocate his relative Montgomery Ward Snopes from the shady business of exhibiting French postcards. Ratliff acknowledges the ruthless Flem's ability to triumph in his economic schemes not only because of his lack of moral restraint, but also because what he tries to accomplish is clear only to Flem himself. No venture is a simple matching of wits for Flem, and only when the circumstances are ripe for his master plan of achieving and maintaining respectability does he seize an opportunity. Aware of Mink's intention to kill him, Flem maneuvers to have Montgomery Ward, who was convicted of bootlegging thanks to Flem's tampering with evidence, sent to the same jail as Mink. Montgomery manages to set Mink up so that he is caught trying to escape, adding twenty years to his sentence, but this setback serves to enhance Mink's resolve to wait for the time when he can have his revenge. This opposition between Flem and Mink, set in motion in The Hamlet, becomes the focal point of the novel and also the summation of the trilogy's meditation on Snopesism.

The other principal figure in this conflict is Linda Snopes. She has moved to New York, married a sculptor, and then gone to Spain to fight with her husband for the loyalists. After losing both her husband and her hearing to the war, she returns to Jefferson. Eula's independent spirit lives on in her daughter

as Linda defines herself beyond the influence of social convention. She drinks bootlegged whiskey, carries a communist party card, hosts communist meetings at Flem's mansion, and attempts to improve the education of the town's Negroes. Gavin and Linda's relationship also extends itself beyond the realm of social norms. Their devotion to one another increases throughout the narrative, becoming so intense that it causes speculation that they are lovers. Both Ratliff and Charles think Gavin needs to marry someone in order to ease his feelings for Linda, not just for his sake, but for the sake of the rest of the community which desires an outward measure of the nature of Gavin's and Linda's relationship. Even after Gavin marries his childhood sweetheart, he and Linda continue to express their devotion to each other, but their love is not based on sexuality. They have found in each other qualities they both need, such as Gavin's need for a non-judgmental subject that he can stabilize himself upon during his struggle with Snopesism and Linda's need to have a moral connection to the community that she lives in as an outsider. Gavin's role manifests itself in his using Linda's purchasing of whiskey to compel Flem to accompany her for the sake of appearances, and Linda's role appears when she repeatedly relies on Gavin to lie to her about Flem's paternity of her. While the unique bond the two share serves as an example of the trilogy's call to define one's own morality based on accepting all the complexities of a specific situation instead of relying on the imposition of judgments applied for the sake of conformity, its strength and validity will be severely tested in the novel's conclusion.

In the town of Jefferson, Flem has finally solidified his position of social supremacy by possessing the community's symbols of success and power, the bank presidency and the mansion. The quest Flem began in The Hamlet has been completed. Responding to the poverty of his conditions, Flem initially sets out to improve himself through the acquisition of money. In The Town it becomes clear that Flem was not merely interested in wealth, but also desired a position in society. His attempts to maintain respectability, such as becoming a deacon in the Baptist church and driving out his greedy kinsmen, reveal that Flem's motivations and goals are not as simple as his observers may have guessed. What seems like a single-minded pursuit, however, actually serves as a manifestation of the struggle to achieve the American Dream of success through wealth and power, thereby gaining a prominent position in the organization of conventional society. After all, the story of Flem's rise across the trilogy is a rags-to-riches tale. Flem originates from the lowest form of poverty as his class is manipulated by landowners such as the Varner family for financial gain while the poor are trapped in the only conditions available for their existence. Somewhere amidst this process, Flem has learned a lesson from his exploiters and applies it to the fullest. In this sense, Flem reveals himself as not just greedy, but also ambitious, for he stops at nothing to reach his goal. In his struggle to rise to the uppermost ranks of society, Flem becomes a part of the structure he seeks to manipulate for his personal gain. Thus, when he reaches his ultimate goal, his life no longer has purpose. He has exhausted his potential by

dedicating himself to a pre-existing structure and sacrificing anything available to serve it. Instead of creating his own possibilities by defining himself from the internal value system of his conscience, Flem dooms himself to a life devoid of meaning by denying his own humanity. Flem only acts in accordance with social values that maintain appearances that indicate his prominence in the community, and his ruthless nature is justified by society's emphasis on results and appearances over substance and truth. Thus, Flem's position, while outwardly successful, is actually a pitiful one. The loss inherent in Flem's chosen mode of existence is summed up by Montgomery Ward's observation about Flem's habit of chewing, "When he had nothing, he could afford to chew tobacco; when he had a little, he could afford to chew gum; when he found out he could be rich provided he just didn't die beforehand, he couldn't afford to chew anything" (The Mansion 66).

In addition to summation of the trilogy's moral message, The Mansion also combines other concerns relevant to Faulkner's career. As Noel Polk points out in his essay "Idealism in The Mansion, "Faulkner addresses himself specifically to the crucial events of the twentieth century and suggests intimate connections between those events and Yoknapatawpha's history" (Polk 112). By bringing the chronicle of his fictional county firmly into modern times, Faulkner makes its message all the more relevant and immediate to the reader, fulfilling his commitment to his newer didactic approach to writing. By returning to familiar territory and employing his proven skills as both an excellent story

teller and radical experimenter with narrative form, he infused his reformulation of his writing with the kind of greatness evident in his earlier work (which he had feared was now his former greatness), so that the novel proves instead to be a continuance of this greatness. In her interpretation of the trilogy, Olga Vickery observes, "From Flem's first appearance in The Hamlet to his death in The Mansion, Faulkner's canvas, paralleling the growth of America itself, gets larger and more crowded" (Vickery 193). The richly populated world of the trilogy makes it a full and complex reading filled not only with the characters involved in the narrative's progression, but also by appearances of characters from Faulkner's other works. In The Mansion we learn of the fate of Benjy Compson from The Sound and the Fury: after Jason succeeded in sending him to an asylum, Benjy burns down the Compson house, destroying himself in the process. Flem even manages to swindle Jason out of ownership of the Compson place. Also appearing in The Mansion are characters from the novel Faulkner conceived of along with his Snopes project, Sartoris, as Bayard Sartoris's reckless flirting with death results in his and his father's death in a car crash, causing the first vacant position in the Jefferson bank which Manfred de Spain fills. Both of these sets of characters are drawn from the first two books Faulkner published after he first began writing for his Snopes project, and their presence brings the trilogy full circle with Faulkner's career as the creator of Yoknapatawpha.

Faulkner's ongoing interest in the war effort during the sixteen year gap between the novels of the trilogy is also incorporated into the final novel of the

trilogy. Charles Mallison and many of Jefferson's youth leave to serve in the war, and Gavin and Ratliff discuss the crisis it represents as an example of moral weakness on a global scale. As it emerges into modern times, Yoknapatawpha becomes connected not just to the rest of the country, but also to the international scene, and not just by the war, but also by the addition of two Finnish men and a Chinese man to the community of Jefferson. Once again, by expanding the space as well as the time that the trilogy encompasses, Faulkner has made his work's impact on its audience all the more relevant by involving his narrative with conditions that are increasingly recognizable in terms of the reader's own awareness beyond metaphorical and microcosmic connections.

The trilogy's meditation on Snopesism and its moral call on the reader reach their climax and summation in the closing section of The Mansion. Released from jail, Mink arrives at Flem's mansion and confronts his cousin. When Mink points his second-hand pistol at his kinsman, Flem merely faces Mink and watches as the first shot fails to go off. Offering no resistance, Flem waits as Mink recocks the pistol and fires the shot that kills him. Flem's passive acceptance of death reveals the worthlessness of his ambitious social climbing. After achieving his goal of the highest social position in the community, Flem's life ceased to have any meaning. Mink's murder of Flem exhibits the self-destructive nature of Snopesism, for Flem is destroyed both by the hands of his relative and by his own ambition. The two men are the antithesis of each other in that Flem's life is defined by his dedication to social values at the cost of his

individuality and Mink's life is characterized by his role of social victim whose only recourse is the creation of his own individual code. Both are ruthless in the pursuit of their goals, but while Mink struggles to maintain his dignity in the face of a world that has no respect for his plight, Flem seeks to create dignity from the values of the very same world. Thus, Mink and Flem form the dichotomy of the nonconformist and the conformist, two polar opposites whose collision destroys each other.

In the aftermath of this event, Gavin's and Linda's relationship faces its ultimate test, as Gavin learns that Linda aided Mink in his revenge and basically caused Flem's death. Gavin had tried to prevent Flem's demise and is shocked by Linda's complicity. Linda had convinced Gavin to help her get Mink released from prison. Gavin agreed on the condition that Mink would be paid \$250 to stay out of Mississippi. Mink, of course, refuses any such deal and sets out on his mission. As an open admission of her guilt, Linda had already ordered a brand new car for her departure from town after Flem's death. Gavin can not believe that she would be capable of an act so morally repugnant to him. He must accept this fact, however, because she enlists him and Ratliff to deliver the money that was promised to Mink upon his release from jail. Gavin tries to ignore Linda's guilt, however, and maintains their personally defined relationship to the very end. As he and Ratliff search for Mink, Gavin denies that Linda was responsible, simultaneously proving what he does not want to believe, and is moved to tears by this challenge to his rigid morality. He accepts this modification to his value

system by reasserting his dedication to Linda as he personally conducts the transaction with Mink.

After Gavin and Ratliff leave Mink, the novel closes with one of Faulkner's most poetic passages. Mink moves on, and the ground seems to call to him to lie down and yield to it. As he lies on the earth looking at the stars, Mink feels his tortured self seeping into the land, merging with those who have gone before him:

himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave, right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recording--Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim (The Mansion 435-436).

Through this connection, Mink is made equal to all the rest of humanity gone before him. In this final passage of the novel, Faulkner has extended his moral message to include all humanity, from the lowest of the low to very stuff of legend.

CONCLUSION

In discussing some of the qualities of the trilogy's events and characters, I have used the term Snopesism, a phrase used throughout the trilogy, to describe

the amoral ideology of certain members of the Snopes family and the self-interested activities this ideology supports. Despite the moral sensitivity of the trilogy and its demonstration of Faulkner's technique of leading his readers to feel compassion for individuals even after guiding readers to judge these people negatively, one might see a problem in the work's treatment of the Southern poor as a group. Certainly Faulkner draws a detailed and convincing picture of the plight of poor whites and conveys a great sympathy for their condition. Nevertheless, the practice of labeling a collection of repugnant moral qualities by the name of this extended poor-white family not only dehumanizes them (by turning their name, Snopes, into an abstract term, Snopesism) but comes close to stigmatizing an entire social class. The use of this phrase and the notions behind it, however, also plays a significant role in the moral message of the trilogy by identifying the abusive qualities that one must resist in order to prevail in the face of humanity's darker nature. Expanding upon this term's meaning will explain its significance as a device used to argue the importance of a social conscience and not to reduce an entire section of society to a prejudged group.

While the rapacious qualities of the Snopeses represent an important part of Yoknapatawpha's mythology, the trilogy's narrative reveals that the term Snopesism is a category of social behavior just as the Snopes family is presented as a category of human nature. In formulating a definition for the meaning behind the term, I do not mean that qualities associated with a specific social class, such as poverty or privilege, are indicative of this type of behavior. If there

is any implicit connection to class in the term's use it is that the impulses behind Snopesism come to embody the bourgeoisie notion of emulating the upper class without attaching any meaning to these values. The behavior described as Snopesism is a modern one that involves the infiltration of society through selfish exploitation. That the original family that this term is attached to came from lower class origins is significant, but in my view this fact enhances the trilogy's moral appeal instead of making it questionable. Since it is from the ranks of the poor that this behavior arises, the ease with which this neglected and mistreated segment of society practices "Snopesism" suggests that the behavior is not an inherent quality of the poor, but a reaction to abuses heaped upon them by the existing social structure. With all other options for advancement cut off by exploitation and a denial of even acknowledging their common human dignity, such vulgar behavior is one of the few options left for improving their situation. After all, one of the major themes of the trilogy is the inability to make easy judgments based upon outward appearances, and it is only fitting that this level of involvement is required in understanding the work itself as well as its narrative elements.

The specific facet of human behavior, the acting out of desperation and the devouring acquisitiveness that results from long standing deprivation, that Snopesism refers to proves to be richer than its most apparent qualities suggest. There are many exploitive Snopeses, who are imitations of Flem. Be it I. O. Snopes's exploitation of insurance companies to procure ill-gotten pay offs,

Montgomery Ward's exploitation of sexual desire through his exhibition of nude postcard, or Lump's exploitation of Mink's desperate situation in order to get his hands on Houston's money, the modern practice of exploitation for economic gain abounds in various forms of Snopesism. But there are also honest Snopeses such as Eck and his son Wall. Even though both Ratliff and Monty Snopes believe that Eck and Wall were not actually spawned from Snopes blood, Wall's success in opening a retail store chain presents him as a self-made man that parallels him to Flem Snopes, and both are versions of this myth of the American dream of success. Mink Snopes's insistence on a personal nobility that causes his downfall, in the form of both his imprisonment and his weary death, makes him analogous to the some of the aristocrats of Faulkner's other books. Flem's "Snopesism" manifests a duality in The Mansion by having been the epitome what a Snopes can accomplish while also revealing the failure and emptiness of this achievement. His fate makes Snopesism not just something to be feared, but also perhaps pitied. The respectability he gains from the community and his subsequent death shows how society is unequipped to combat Snopesism and even abets its existence until it self-destructs. Thus, society is called upon to take an active role in resisting both the tragedy Snopesism inflicts upon others and ultimately brings upon its own practitioners.

Through the advancement of Snopesism as human nature under the influence of modern conditions that promote greed and separation from one's fellow humanity, Flem and Mink serve as alternate responses to this condition.

Flem's unscrupulous behavior created by this situation manifests itself through his covetous rise to emulate the upper class that deems his kind as beyond improvement. Flem is created by this social system and uses tactics that lack any connection to human decency to beat the system that has put him in an undesirable position. The huge gap between his origins and the upper class of Jefferson has opened a void large enough to swallow any possible moral considerations that could impede the progress to bridge that gap.

Mink's irrational behavior is a reaction to the frustration at this gap for being trapped by the economic and social operations he lives under. With no opportunity to advance himself (especially since he is also saddled with the responsibility to support a family, whereas Flem is not), Mink can only express his resentment for his suffering through extreme action such as the violence of Houston's murder. Enmeshed in a situation that offers no method to redress his grievances, Mink also acts outside of decent human conduct to ease his frustration.

It is worth noting that although Flem only manages to improve himself from a public point of view, Mink may also have improved his situation by going to jail since he no longer bears the burdens that drove him to strike back at society (with Houston functioning as a representative of a system that uses its privilege to keep Mink in his lowly social position). This consideration serves to emphasize an awareness of the need to incorporate an active moral conscience into social behavior and not a conventional one. The examples of both of these

men's motivations demonstrates the desperation that deprivation can drive a person to and points to the vengeful nature the gap between privileged and deficient conditions can breed in the poor.

Throughout the trilogy, Faulkner has emphasized the need to apply compassion to one's fellow humanity when making moral judgments. Faulkner's deeply sympathetic portrayal of Mink Snopes is the prime example of his call to readers to form their own moral perspective by going beyond the surface of an issue and comprehending its deeper complexities. The detached and limited portrayal of Flem also causes the readers to make their own judgments about him, which on the surface is colored by Ratliff's and Gavin's opposition to his presence in the community. Through Flem's ruthless and selfish actions, we are led to see him as a despicable person whose amorality renders him unworthy of compassion, but this judgment is a direct product of our limited information about Flem as a person. One dimension of Flem's character is his reliance on the American dream of success to fulfill his life, a quest that most people in our society undertake in some form or another and in which they often find themselves wavering from decent behavior. When sympathy is extended to Flem, his actions are not always so hard to relate to or to find a real-life correlation that enhances our understanding of him. In his analysis of the trilogy, Warren Beck admits that while Flem is "the plainest of villains . . . at some few moments [he is] almost pitiable" (Beck 82). In a work that repeatedly engages its audience to explore and apply sympathy in unexpected ways, Flem sticks out

because he seems to be suggested as an absolute evil. Faulkner has spent much of his efforts in the trilogy directing the reader to reevaluate easy judgments. Condemning Flem has become the easiest judgment of all, an act that does not fit with the complicated nature of gaining a fuller understanding of the plight of humanity, and when Faulkner presents some sympathy for Flem's pathetically empty life, it begs the reader to become aware of applying compassion. As Flem's life is reflected upon from the new perspective of compassionate understanding, this act provides not only a way of stepping beyond our previous judgments, but also those judgments suggested in the text, empowering us to exercise our judgment to make our own sense of the material. In the final scene of The Mansion where Faulkner levels all of humanity down to one equal plane, the similarities that tie Flem's and Mink's plights together can allow us to create our own reading of the trilogy where not only Mink lies down with kings and bishops, but so does Flem.

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