

DELIBERATELY WITHHELD MEANING:
ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE
IN FOUR NOVELS
BY
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A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

The titles of the four novels with which this study is principally concerned have been abbreviated in the footnotes as follows :

<u>As I Lay Dying</u>	<u>AIID</u>
<u>The Sound and the Fury</u>	<u>S&F</u>
<u>Light in August</u>	<u>LIA</u>
<u>Absalom, Absalom!</u>	<u>AA</u>

The following titles have also been abbreviated because of frequent citation, or for the sake of economy :

<u>William Faulkner : Three Decades of Criticism</u>	<u>TDC</u>
<u>Faulkner in the University</u>	<u>FIU</u>
<u>A Handbook to Literature</u> (Thrall, Hibbard, Holman). . .	<u>HBL</u>

Other abbreviations in text and Bibliography follow those in the Annual Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The conventions of layout, punctuation, and citation are those suggested by Kate L. Turabian in her A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Phoenix Books (3rd. ed; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967). One convention, on which Miss Turabian is silent, affects partial quotations in the body of the text. Where such a quotation is placed last in a sentence of text, and itself ends with a full stop, the second full stop has been omitted in the interests of neatness and economy.

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INTRODUCTION

A. FAULKNER CRITICISM : GLIMPSES OF THE FOURTH DECADE

A study which aspires, however humbly, to contribute something to the critical appreciation of Faulkner's novels cannot but begin with a deep sense of debt to the authors of those earlier articles and studies, who, in their sympathetic efforts to understand Faulkner's work on its own terms, add so much to a tyro's understanding and enjoyment of the novels. From the beginning of such criticism in the summer of 1939 with George Marion O'Donnell's essay,¹ and Conrad Aiken's study of Faulkner's style which appeared later the same year,² through Warren Beck's longer, less apologetic analysis of the same topic,³ to Malcolm Cowley's Introduction to his Portable Faulkner,⁴ and Robert Penn Warren's review of Cowley's edition,⁵ one can trace a line of interpretation at once steadily critical, and at the same time concerned to see Faulkner's work (whether individual work or canon) whole. Few of these critics functioned in isolation, and were consequently able to refine on their predecessors' work. In the context of this cloud of witnesses, it is perhaps no exaggeration to hold Warren's essay - primus inter pares - as the best single article-length introduction to Faulkner's art.

¹ "Faulkner's Mythology," KR, I (Summer, 1939), 285-299.

² "William Faulkner : The Novel as Form," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXIV (November, 1939), 650-654.

³ "William Faulkner's Style," American Prefaces, VI (Spring, 1941), 195-211.

⁴ The Portable Faulkner (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 1 - 24. Cowley had not arrived at this point of view without a struggle. See Robert Penn Warren, Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Spectrum Books, (Englewood Cliffs. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 7, n. 1.

⁵ "Cowley's Faulkner," The New Republic, CVV (August 12, 1946), 176-180; continued (August 26, 1946), 234-237. Repr. as "William Faulkner," Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Harbinger Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World), pp. 109-124.

The principles established by such critics have proved invaluable for later exegetes, whether they were tackling a single work, or aspects of related works; whether in an article or a book-length study.¹ The best introduction to the main trends of Faulkner criticism from its early rather raucous beginnings through the mellifluous tide which the Nobel Prize helped to set in motion is provided by Frederick J. Hoffman's massive and impeccably documented "Introduction" to William Faulkner : Three Decades of Criticism.² For a survey of Faulkner criticism up to 1960, it is perhaps best simply to refer the reader to this work: summary or paraphrase would only distort its measured fullness.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of Warren's article for subsequent Faulkner criticism.³ Most of the work published since 1960 has been - like the work of the previous decade - either attempts to find grounds for the affirmations of the Nobel Speech in the early novels, or developments of hints which Warren threw out. One has studies of the Nature and Wilderness theme; of the Poor White; of the Negro; of the Sartoris-Snopce myth; of Primitivism; of the Woman theme. Following Warren's insistence on Faulkner's universality, one has a tracing of Christian and Freudian patterns; the Initiation-into-a-fallen-world theme; studies of Faulkner's use of symbol and imagery, and some glances in the direction of technique. The prevailing emphasis - which is, after all, very much

¹ Several excellent book-length studies are to be found, e.g.: Irving Howe, William Faulkner : A Critical Study (New York: Random House, 1952); Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962); Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner : The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Melvin Backman, Faulkner : The Major Years (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Richard P. Adams, Faulkner : Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

² Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds., Harbinger Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960), pp. 1-50. Hereafter TDC.

³ "Cowley's Faulkner," TDC, pp. 10-124.

in the tradition of British and American literary scholarship - remains on the elucidation of major themes and the determining of Faulkner's ethical and philosophical stance on pressing problems of the age.¹ Where critics have recognised a need for approaching Faulkner's works from the point of view of their structure, attention has nevertheless been largely focused on motivic organisation, on theme clusters,² or on quasi-musical structures.³ On the other hand, an article with the obviously technique-oriented title of "Narrative Management in As I Lay Dying"⁴ proves, on inspection, to be rigidly schematic in bias, more or less condemning the novel because it does not fit a particular critical procrustean bed. Even Adams's study⁵ - in many respects an invaluable work - approaches Faulkner's novels in terms of the myths which inform their structure. Specialization has also set in, as areas which such men as Cowley and Warren first uncovered become familiar through repetition. Perhaps the apogee of specialization in Faulkner studies is the recent linguistic study of The Functioning of Sentence Structure in the Stream-of-Consciousness Technique of William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury".⁶

¹ Some honourable exceptions are:

Fr. Malachy Michael Shanaghan, O.S.3., "A Critical Analysis of the Fictional Techniques of William Faulkner" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1960).

Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels;

Lynn G. Levins, "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!" PMLA, LXXXV (January, 1970), 35-47.

² See Frank Baldanza, "The Structure of Light in August," MFS, XIII (Spring, 1967), 67-78.

³ Probably inspired by Aiken's remark on the "massive four-part symphonic structure" of The Sound and the Fury (TDC, p. 141).

⁴ R.W. Franklin, MFS (Spring, 1967), 57-65. See discussion of this article in Ch. IV, p.155, n.1 below.

⁵ Faulkner: Myth and Motion (1968).

⁶ Irena Kaluza, : A Study in Linguistic Stylistics (Krakow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1967).

While one would hesitate to question the value of most of the work published on Faulkner to date, and while one welcomes the awareness of the novel as a structure which the best studies of motivic, thematic, and mythic patterns show, there are, nevertheless, very few critics who attempt to apply either the orientation or the emphasis of an Aiken to those major structural elements - those questions which the novelist as novelist must answer - which do not fall under the heading of "language" or (that compendious and too often insufficiently defined term) "style". The "study" of Faulkner's three basic methods of handling a narrative which Warren recommended in 1946 has still to be written. Although the present work does not attempt to meet Warren's demands, the writer derived something of his initial inspiration and much encouragement from so authoritative an identification of the need for a study of Faulkner's work in which the emphasis should be primarily on technique.

B. TOWARDS ESTABLISHING THE CASE FOR FICTION:

SOME CONTEXTS FOR "TECHNIQUE"

In her essay on "Modern Fiction",¹ Virginia Woolf made a point of admitting "the vagueness which afflicts all criticism of novels," while, two years later, Percy Lubbock, in sketching the difficulties which face the critic of the novel, asked if it were not somehow true that fiction, among the arts, "is a peculiar case, unusually exempt from the rules that bind the rest."² Heartened by this aspect of Mr. Lubbock's pioneering work, E.M. Forster in the Clark lectures for 1927,³ eschewed any "elaborate apparatus" in his attack on the novel,

¹ Written April 1919, publ. in The Common Reader, New York: Harcourt, Bruce and World, 1925. Repr. in Mark Schorer (ed.), Modern British Fiction, Galaxy Books (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 3 - 9.

² The Craft of Fiction, [London: Jonathan Cape, 1926 (1st. publ. 1921)], p. 10.

³ Publ. as Aspects of the Novel, [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962 (1st. publ. by Edward Arnold, 1927)], p. 30.

declaring that "principles and systems may suit other forms of art, but they cannot be applicable here." Though Virginia Woolf's admission may well be tinged with regret, no such misgiving lurks in the attitudes of Lubbock and Forster; they seem as proudly free of any taint of professionalism as any educated gentlemen of their time could wish to be in chatting about books. This is unfair, of course, for both E.M. Forster and Percy Lubbock have contributed a great deal to the development of our present awareness of fiction as a craft; but their nervous avoidance of even the appearance of a professional approach to the novel would seem to indicate their awareness of a deep-seated resistance in the English mind to a discussion of the technique of the novel.

So entrenched was this tacit assumption, that Mark Schorer, writing in 1948, could maintain that the case for a technique-oriented approach to the novel had not yet been established.¹ Schorer bases his argument for the validity of such an approach to the novel on the reunion of the often separated terms "form" and "content" :

Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the achieved content, the form ... that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique. When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything.²

Some theoreticians such as René Wellek and Austin Warren,³ to avoid the warring connotations which "form" and "content" seem to retain, prefer to use the words "materials" (to cover all the aesthetically indifferent elements) and "structure" (which includes both "content"

¹ "Technique as Discovery," Hudson Review, I (Spring, 1948). Repr. in William Van O'Connor, ed., Forms of Modern Fiction, Midland Books [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959 (1st. publ. by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1948)], pp. 9-29.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Theory of Literature, Peregrine Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 140-141.

and "form" - in their pre-Schorer senses - so far as they are organised for aesthetic purposes).

Towards the end of the first section of his essay, Schorer expands on his original identification of technique with "nearly everything" :

Technique is really what T.S. Eliot means by "convention" : any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action; by means of which ... our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed. In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself, and one cannot properly say that a writer has no technique, or that he eschews technique, for, being a writer, he cannot do so. ¹

So inclusive a notion of technique protects the intending critic of fiction from the charge (once fashionable, and, to judge by the attitudes of Lubbock and Forster, formidable) of wishing to reduce the multifarious variety of the novel to a recipe, a set of mechanical instructions for producing the "well made novel".² Nothing could be further from the present writer's intention. Such concepts as "characterization", "point of view", "space", "time", and "tone" have been selected³ because they would seem to be tools of investigation which are relatively free from built-in value-judgments, while nevertheless being aspects of the novel as form, which are common to all fiction which falls within the genre. Moreover, such concepts would seem to be adaptable enough to enable one to approach any novel "on its own terms", in so far as one would be examining the way in which the particular work manifested its writer's individual use of these technical means (among all the others possible) as well as their relative weight each to each.

¹ Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," op.cit., p. 11.

² Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), p. 121 and passim.

³ The list is not intended to be exhaustive.

So clearly did Schorer put the case for an enlightened approach to the concept of "technique" in the criticism of prose fiction, that one would simply like to assert, as he did about poetry, that "we are no longer able to regard as seriously intended criticism ... which does not assume these generalizations ..."¹ But, despite Schorer's work, one finds Warren Beck (who has amply demonstrated in other articles² his full appreciation of technique in Faulkner's novels) referring in 1950 to "meretricious technicians or formula-mongers."³ Later in the same article, Beck asserts that no textbook can tell a writer when or how to use any technique, "nor can fiction be evaluated primarily on the basis of its techniques," because a reader's judgment of literary narrative "centers upon its expression of concept and its total imaginative effect." In this context, Beck appears to be treating "technique" in the same way as Percy Lubbock and E.M. Forster - that is, equating it to a series of mechanically applied formulae or rules. This implied use of the word aids him in subtly persuading his readers of the primacy of "conception", while at the same time obscuring that sense of "technique" which is virtually the equivalent of his own phrase "expression of concept". Our understanding of the word is precisely that : how else is "concept" expressed but through technique? And if we speak of anything but expressed concept (or achieved content) have we not moved from our proper study as critics of fiction? If the reader addresses himself to anything but the concept-as-expressed, or to the "total imaginative effect", as it is derived from anything but the units of meaning in the novel, he is not addressing himself to the novel itself, but to

¹ "Technique as Discovery," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 10.

² See especially "Faulkner's Point of View," College English, II (May, 1941), 736-749, and "William Faulkner's Style," American Prefaces, VI (Spring, 1941), 195-211.

³ "Conception and Technique," CE, IX (March, 1950), 308-317.

some secondary (or imaginary) source whose very existence it may be impossible to demonstrate.

And still the case for fiction seems to resist establishment. As recently as 1961, in the Preface to his invaluable study of several aspects of narrative technique, Professor Wayne C. Booth found it necessary to apologise in these terms :

In treating technique as rhetoric, I may seem to have reduced the free and inexplicable processes of the creative imagination to the crafty calculations of commercial entertainers.¹

Even a man of Professor Booth's eminence and strong sense of the fundamental importance of technique to the interpretation of fiction, found it necessary to nod in the direction of the standard dichotomy by opposing "free ... inexplicable ... creative imagination" to "crafty calculations ... of commercial entertainers." However, he only raises this objection in order to answer it, and his answer may well serve to conclude this part of the discussion :

The success of an author's rhetoric does not depend on whether he thought about his readers as he wrote; if "mere calculation" cannot insure success, it is equally true that even the most unconscious and Dionysian of writers succeeds only if he makes us join in the dance.

If one were to concede that a discussion of a writer's narrative technique - of the conventions which govern, for him, the disposition of his selected materials in a significant structure - were not unworthy of the serious critic of fiction, one would still find problems posed by Faulkner's public remarks on the subject. It would appear that Faulkner,

¹ The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. ii. I am not quite satisfied with Professor Booth's characterization of Mark Schorer's approach as treating a novel "as a record of the author's spiritual or aesthetic biography ..." in "Teaching the Novel," English Teaching in South Africa, Papers of the Conference of Teachers of English, 23rd to 28th September, 1963, (Grahamstown: Grahamstown Publications, 1964), p. 217. This may well be the orientation of Schorer's study of individual novels, but it tends to obscure the importance of the preliminary discussion of technique.

like H.G. Wells, felt himself to be "outside the hierarchy of conscious and deliberate writers altogether."¹ In interviews and seminars at the University of Virginia, he answered (or parried) questions about technique with replies similar to what follows :

... anyone who is busy writing about people hasn't got time enough to bother with style ... there are people to whom style is important.... But there are other people that are too busy writing about men and women, human beings, the human heart in conflict with its self, with its fellows, or with its environment, to have time to bother with style.²

It should be realised, however, that Faulkner's objections to "style", his tendency to dismiss or avoid questions relating to technique, are autobiographical rather than artistic statements. Between those two kinds of statement there is an obvious difference of kind, and, as a literary critic, one cannot afford to give equal weight to both. From the point of view of a student of the novels, a trust in those novels as structures possessing a certain autonomy is essential. Whether one likes it or not, Faulkner's novels present the reader with structures of varying technical complexity, and it is as such that one must approach them, if one would speak of them as novels. In order to approach a novel in such a way - as, indeed, one would approach a poem or a play - one needs a thought-model which will include all those aspects with which the writer, if he would produce a novel rather than any other prose work, must - whether consciously or unconsciously - deal. This is not a blue-print or a prescriptive manual for fiction, but, ideally, an easily transferable, readily adaptable group of concepts which, in allowing a maximum of descriptive structural criticism, make it possible - as far as is humanly feasible - for the work to be grasped and appreciated on its own terms, and not,

¹ Quoted in Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 15.

² Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 88. Suspension points mine. Cf. pp. 48, 56. Hereafter FIU.

primarily, as a contribution to the sociology, psychology, history, economics, or geography of (in Faulkner's case) the Deep South.

Schorer demonstrates how Wells, by deliberately not attending to such aspects of technique as point of view and tone, produced in Tono Bungay a theoretic vision of the future quite opposite from everything that he meant to represent, and disappeared "from literature into the annals of an era."¹ Faulkner's later avowals to the contrary, it has frequently been maintained by critics that Faulkner, rather than devoting too little attention to technique, has devoted too much. Combined with attacks on his material as typical of the "cult of cruelty"² school, were expressions of critical irritation at the perversities of Faulkner's style and method. Granville Hicks³ maintained that Faulkner was playing an ingenious game with his readers, and suggested that it was possible that the order of some of Faulkner's novels was decided upon perversely, that he was fond of "inventing his stories in the regular form and then recasting them in some distorted form."⁴ This notion was later ridiculed by Conrad Aiken in his Atlantic Monthly essay on Faulkner's style and method.⁵ Nevertheless, largely thanks to Hicks and Thompson⁶ (who had maintained

¹ Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Forms of Modern Fiction, p.15.

² Alan Reynolds Thompson, "The Cult of Cruelty," The Bookman, LXXIV (Jan. - Feb., 1932), 471-481, quoted in TDC, p. 2.

³ "The Past and the Future of William Faulkner," The Bookman, LXXIV (September, 1931), 17-24, quoted in TDC, p. 3.

⁴ Cf. Clifton Fadiman's review of Absalom! Absalom! in the New Yorker (October 31, 1936), quoted in TDC, p. 20, in which he discusses the method of "Anti-Narrative, a set of complex devices used to keep the story from being told ... as if a witch were to go to work on it with a pair of shears...."

⁵ "The Novel as Form," TDC, pp. 135-142.

⁶ "The Cult of Cruelty," loc.cit.

that the style and method were linked at best with moral uncertainty, at worst with a wicked preoccupation with irrational and subnormal forms of behaviour), reviews of Faulkner's work throughout the Thirties emphasized the "unusual" complication of plot and the needless involution and redundancy of style.¹

Perhaps of all the early critics of Faulkner, none packed as much hostility into the word "technique" as Dr. F.R. Leavis in his review of Light in August:²

It is his 'technique,' of course, that, together with his dealings in abnormal or subnormal mentality and his disregard of the polite taboos, has gained for him, in France as well as in America and England, his reputation as one of the most significant and peculiarly modern of writers. The technique that matters is the means of expressing a firmly realized purpose, growing out of a personal sensibility. Early in Light in August it should have become plain to the reader that Faulkner's 'technique' is an expression of - or a disguise for - an uncertainty about what he is trying to do.

By putting technique in inverted commas, Leavis obviously intends his readers to deduce that Faulkner's technique is not one that "matters". Despite the good sense of his words about the technique that does matter, Leavis would appear to be invoking all the negative connotations of the word where Faulkner is concerned. Perhaps from a point nearly forty years distant in time from Dr. Leavis's review, it is now possible to approach the concept more dispassionately, to remember that every writer of fiction has his own way of approaching such unavoidable aspects of fictional presentation as time, space, point of view, characterization, division of narrative phases, and tone, and that it is these approaches which one speaks of collectively as his "technique", rather than such apparently modern devices as the stream-of-consciousness "technique". Indeed, as Robert Humphrey has shown, "there is no stream-of-consciousness technique; instead, there

¹ TDC, p. 3.

² "Dostoevsky or Dickens?" Scrutiny, II, (June 1933), 91-92.

are several quite different techniques which are used to present stream of consciousness."¹ And the use of these different techniques will depend on how the author chooses to answer the other basic questions which fictional narrative, by its very nature, raises. One is no longer required to adopt "hurray-boo" attitudes to what Leavis calls "modern techniques";² rather, bringing an awareness of the possibilities of fictional art (derived from practitioners of it within and without the Great Tradition) to bear on specific works, one may examine how and to what effect, in the context of the book as a whole, any given novelist has dealt with the structural essentials of his work, and so, perhaps, arrive at a descriptive evaluation of his "technique".

C. SELECTING CHAPTERS FROM THE YOKNAPATAWPHA DOOMSDAY BOOK :

AIMS AND METHODS

The principal aim of this study is to examine aspects of the structure of four of Faulkner's novels in order to test with some thoroughness Schorer's contention that "technique is the only means [the writer] has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it."³ The major articles which established the tradition of favourable Faulkner criticism - the work of O'Donnell, Cowley, and Warren -⁴ were predominantly thematic in emphasis. O'Donnell was explicitly concerned with Faulkner's "Mythology", while Cowley regarded Faulkner as primarily

¹ Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 4. Hereafter SOC.

² "Dostoevsky or Dickens?" Scrutiny, p. 91.

³ Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 9.

⁴ See notes 1, 4, 5, on p.1 above.

a writer of novelle,¹ and had, perforce, to disregard the separate integrities of the works which he excerpted for his Portable edition. Warren followed firmly in the footsteps of these two, although he did include a brief, important section on "technique". Close study of the best available bibliographies, and a sampling of articles, reveals that the thematic trend is still strong, although, in the last two decades, there have been several examples of a thorough-going structural approach.

The aspect of Faulkner's narrative technique which has received the most detailed critical attention to date is his language. Apart from the five writers whose articles are reprinted in Three Decades of Criticism,² a critic such as Robert Zoellner³ uses an analysis of Faulkner's style as a way into the larger structural elements of the novels. So thorough is the work that has been done by this body of critics, that it was decided to omit a detailed examination of Faulkner's language from the present study. At the same time, the writer endeavours to apply something of the same rigorous approach to

¹ A sentiment echoed by Edmund L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 29. Such writers seem to ignore the fact that, by examining each or any aspect of the structure of a prose fiction, one may determine whether it exhibits the brief density of the short story, or the epic complexity of the novel. For the purposes of this study, Faulkner is treated primarily as a novelist.

² Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," TDC, pp. 135-142.

Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style," TDC, pp. 142-156.

Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "The Creation of the Real in Faulkner," TDC, pp. 156-173.

Walter J. Slatoff, "The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric," TDC, pp. 173-198.

Florence Leaver, "Faulkner: The Word as Principle and Power," TDC, pp. 199-209.

³ "Faulkner's Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom!," American Literature, XXX (Jan., 1959), 486-502. See also Arthur L. Scott, "The Faulknerian Sentence," Prairie Schooner, XXVII (Spring, 1953), 91-98; Karl E. Zink, "William Faulkner: Form as Experience," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (July, 1954), 384-403; F.C. Riedel, "Faulkner as Stylist," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LVI, (Autumn, 1957), 462-479.

such larger structural elements as characterization, point of view, space, and time. Because, in the final analysis, Lubbock is right, and "we cannot retain the image of the book",¹ the present writer has attempted to retain as coherent a partial image as possible by tracing the permutation of only one aspect of Faulkner's narrative technique in each of the novels selected, before attempting the greater breadth which such an aspect as tone demands. Each chapter from Two to Five inclusive, then, is essentially a separate study of an individual novel; but, lest the aspect studied appear either too readily or too arbitrarily chosen, each chapter also includes brief applications of the same emphasis to the other three novels. Although from an interpretative point of view these brief discussions are no more than "notes towards", they nevertheless offer additional insights into the selected novels, while demonstrating something of the versatility of conceptual tools of this kind. Furthermore, no rigid model is adhered to in the organisation of the chapters; the techniques themselves were allowed to dictate the individual arrangement of each chapter.

Having decided on one's aim and the methods whereby one might attempt to implement it, one had next to decide how broadly to range within the Faulkner canon. In the first instance, the works to be studied had to exhibit a certain epic scope in their structure which would qualify them without reserve for generic classification as novels. This ruled out such collections of short stories as These Thirteen,² Doctor Martino and Other Stories,³ as well as works less easy to classify such as The Unvanquished,⁴ The Wild Palms,⁵ Go Down, Moses

¹ Craft of Fiction, p. 3.

² New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931.

³ New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1934.

⁴ New York: Random House, 1938.

⁵ New York: Random House, 1939.

and Other Stories,¹ and Requiem for a Nun.² Six of the stories in The Unvanquished were originally devised and published as short stories,³ and despite revision, they betray the structural characteristics of the short story. The Wild Palms, interesting as it is in its contrapuntal thematic organisation, in the vivid evocations (nowhere else so ample or so eloquent) of the Mississippi in "Old Man", and in the depiction of the relationship between Harry and Charlotte (a kind of adult relationship which Faulkner generally avoided portraying in detail, and one which is possibly his best creation outside the Yoknapatawpha world) remains two novelle, rather than one novel, just as L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, for all their linked harmonies, are two poems, not one. Both Go Down, Moses and Requiem for a Nun contribute a great deal to one's knowledge of Yoknapatawpha, but hardly possess either the density or the unity to be considered as novels.

Secondly, it was important that the works chosen should possess sufficient resonance, sufficient achieved profundity to challenge the most rigorous structural investigation. Several critics favour the division of Faulkner's work into a period of apprenticeship, a "time of genius", and a period of consolidation. Warren⁴ cites the years 1929

¹ New York: Random House, 1942. "and Other Stories" omitted from title in subsequent printings and other editions to emphasize unity.

² New York: Random House, 1951.

³ in The Saturday Evening Post and Scribner's Magazine between 1934 and 1936:

"Ambuscade," The Saturday Evening Post, CCVII (Sept. 29, 1934), 12-13, 80-81.

"Retreat," S.E.P., CCVII (Oct. 13, 1934), 16-17, 82, 84-85, 87, 89

"Raid," S.E.P., CCVII (Nov. 3, 1934), 18-19, 72-73, 75, 77-78.

"Riposte in Tertia," a revised version of "The Unvanquished," S.E.P., CCIX (Nov. 14, 1936), 12-13, 121-122, 124, 126, 128, 130.

"Vendee," S.E.P., CCIX (Dec. 5, 1936), 16-17, 86-87, 90, 92-94.

"Skirmish at Sartoris," Scribner's Magazine, XCVII (Apr. 1935), 193-200.

"An Odor of Verbena," was written specifically for inclusion in The Unvanquished (1938). Cf. Volpe, A Reader's Guide, p. 405, n. 1 on The Unvanquished for the critical controversy as to whether it is a novel or not.

⁴ Robert Penn Warren, ed., "Introduction," to Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 5

to 1940; Melvin Backman¹ expands this period to 1942; Hoffman and Vickery² include only essays on The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom! in their section on "The Time of Genius", while Adams³ maintains that "the fiction that Faulkner published after 1940 is, in general, less well organised and artistically less successful than the great works of his middle period." Perhaps Faulkner himself put it most fully, when he said at the Nagano Seminar :⁴

I think there's a period in a writer's life when he is, well, simply for lack of any other word, fertile and he just produces. Later on, his blood slows, his bones get a little more brittle, his muscles get a little stiff, he gets perhaps other interests, but I think there's one time in his life when he writes at the top of his talent plus his speed, too. Later the speed slows; the talent doesn't necessarily have to fade at the same time. But there's a time in his life, one matchless time, when they are matched completely.

On such grounds, then, one could accordingly narrow the area of choice to the novels written between 1929 and 1940. The predominantly humorous tenor of The Hamlet⁵ renders it more suitable material for a study of Faulkner's comic structures - a study which lies outside the scope of the present work. This brings the upper limit down to 1936. Within this period, however, there yet remain two works which do not measure up after preliminary analyses. Interesting and important as

¹ Faulkner: The Major Years, Midland Books (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), ix.

² TDC, (1960), x, and cf. Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, Part Two.

³ Faulkner: Myth and Motion (1968), p. 130.

⁴ Robert A. Jelliffe, ed., Faulkner at Nagano (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1956), p. 109.

⁵ New York: Random House, 1940.

Sanctuary¹ may be in the Yoknapatawpha chronicle as a whole - and it is certainly better as a novel than either Soldier's Pay² or Mosquitoes,³ and, possibly, Sartoris⁴ as well - its tendency towards the allegorical and its more conventional mode of narration render it rather slight in comparison with the resonant fullness of The Sound and the Fury⁵ and Light in August,⁶ or the daring structural organisation of As I Lay Dying,⁷ The Sound and the Fury, or Absalom, Absalom!.⁸

Pylon,⁹ on the other hand, is almost a text-book of those "grave defects" in Faulkner's work which Warren identified: "the tragic intensity becomes mere sensationalism, the technical virtuosity mere complication, the philosophical weight mere confusion of mind."¹⁰ If Sanctuary is better than a work originally and somewhat perversely

¹ New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931. James B. Meriwether points out in his book, The Literary Career of William Faulkner: A Bibliographical Study (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1961), on pp. 65-66, that most of Sanctuary was written before As I Lay Dying. Adams (Faulkner: Myth and Motion, p. 57) comments: "... Sanctuary, and not The Sound and the Fury, is the sequel to Sartoris." This would appear to be a fairly good reason for grouping Sanctuary with the "apprenticeship" novels.

² New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.

³ New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927.

⁴ New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929.

⁵ New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929. Hereafter S&F. All page references to the Modern Library edition, New York: Random House, 1966.

⁶ New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1932. Hereafter LIA. All page references to the Modern Library edition, New York: Random House, 1959.

⁷ New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930. Hereafter AIID. All page references to Modern Library edition, New York: Ransom House,⁸ 1967, with textual emendation by James B. Meriwether. New York: Random House, 1936. Hereafter AA. All page references to the Modern Library edition, New York: Random House, 1951.

⁹ New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1935.

¹⁰ Robert Penn Warren, Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1958), pp. 59-60.

conceived as a potboiler ought to be - and it is only thanks to Faulkner's extensive revisions that it is -¹ Pylon is worse than one could believe a Faulkner novel could be only three years after Light in August. Pylon does, however, serve to illustrate Warren's contention (a contention, indeed, which is incidentally borne out by the present study) that Faulkner did not develop in a straight line.² It is, moreover, only a study of Faulkner's narrative technique, rather than the traditional thematically-oriented approach, which is capable of revealing most clearly the extent to which Faulkner was a restless (and successful) experimenter with the novel as a form.

To The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom!, then, this study will proceed to address itself.

¹ See FIU, pp. 90 - 91.

² "William Faulkner," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 125.

CHAPTER ONE

YOKNAPATAWPHA :

FAULKNER'S FICTIONAL WORLD AND ITS PRESENTATION

Beginning with Sartoris I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to understand it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own.¹

In one sense, every work of literary art presents a world rather than a case history of a character or an event. A poem, a play, or a novel each presents a structure, a pattern or organism for the reader's contemplation. By means of such elements as plot, characters, setting, point of view, tone,² the artist creates a microcosm which recognisably overlaps the empirical world but is nevertheless distinct - possessing an acknowledged total difference -³ in its self-coherent intelligibility. In this way, one may speak of the "world" of Moby Dick, or The Scarlet Letter, or Bleak House. What will matter most about these worlds will not be an immediate, obvious overlapping of the empirical world, but their self-coherence and consistency. If they are not consistent within themselves - if, for instance, their makers aim at "relevance" at the cost of integrity - the result will be a lack of ultimate relevance at the deepest, least immediate levels of significance. It is to this world, this artificial structure, whose generative power and sustaining principle is technique, that the reader must first turn his attention if he would attempt to compare a novel with life, or to judge, either

¹ Jean Stein van den Heuvel, "William Faulkner," Writers at Work, The Paris Review interviews, ed. by Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p. 141.

² Cf., e.g., Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 214.

³ Cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art," in Biographia Literaria, ed. by J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 253 - 263.

ethically or socially, a novelist's work.¹

But there is a further sense, too, in which one may speak of a novelist's "world". In this context, when one speaks of Jane Austen's world, for example, one is referring to a fictitious world, existing independently of the individual works, but peopled with the characters, and located in a sort of composite setting drawn from the individual works; a world, indeed, from which an author's characteristic plots, themes, characters and settings seem to be drawn. In some novelists this is more evident, and more highly developed, than in others; it is an aspect of Balzac's work which Faulkner apparently admired :

I like the fact that in Balzac there is an intact world of his own. His people don't just move from page one to page 320 of one book. There is continuity between them all like a bloodstream which flows from page one through to page 20,000 of one book. The same blood, muscle and tissue binds the characters together.²

From this comment on Balzac, it would appear that Faulkner intended the word "cosmos" to denote the second sense of "world", in the reference to his own work which heads this chapter. To anyone familiar with Faulkner criticism, it might seem superfluous even to mention Faulkner's cosmos. Its location, population, physical presence, sociology - from Sartoris to Snopes, red-neck farmers to Negro servants - the attitudes to nature, the past, and the human community, its humour, its pathos, its high tragedy and low farce, mapped at the back of Absalom, Absalom!,³ first described in detail in Cowley's Introduction,⁴ brought alive in Faulkner's own words in The Portable Faulkner, mapped again on the end papers of that volume, and then altered and developed

¹ Cf. Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 214.

² Cynthia Grenier, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview with William Faulkner - September, 1955," Accent, XVI (Summer, 1956), p. 168.

³ New York: Random House, 1936.

⁴ The Portable Faulkner, pp. 1 - 24. And cf. Howe, William Faulkner, Part I, Ch. IV, "Outline of a World".

by Warren,¹ must seem as familiar in its Jamesian solidity of specification as the reader's home town or county. Indeed, perhaps no "world" of any twentieth-century English or American novelist - with the exception of J.R.R. Tolkien - is capable of as detailed documentation. Where, however, Tolkien's treatment of space in his Lord of the Rings trilogy² shows the characteristic orientation of mythological space,³ with its allocation of specific powers to specific areas, Faulkner deliberately places his invented town and county within an existing state of the United States, borders it with such real towns as Memphis and Oxford, and, on occasion, allows the presence of the Mississippi River to be felt. In this sense, Faulkner's world is mythologically more "neutral" than Tolkien's. Instead of relying on supernatural powers, Faulkner relies almost entirely on individual characters for generating any mana he requires. Moreover, while Faulkner remains absolutely free to create what characters he will within the confines of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha, the impinging of empirical geographical reality beyond those narrow limits provides an indirect but powerful means of pointing up the social and spiritual relevance of what takes place within the invented world.

To Faulkner's world thus ordered and presented in the solidity of its geographical, historical, social and psychological specification, and to the mythological significances enveloping the tales which bring them out "only as a glow brings out a haze",⁴ the reader responds with

¹ "Cowley's Faulkner," The New Republic, CXV (August 12, 1946), pp. 176-180; (August 26, 1946), pp. 234-237. Repr. TDC pp. 109-124.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, 3 vols. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965).

³ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II: Mythical Thought, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 94-103.

⁴ Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," in Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether (Collected edn.; London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1946), p. 48.

a sense of familiarity. One recognises the novelist's touch in the sheer density of Faulkner's detail, and one is tempted to refer to the worlds of other Southern writers of this century. In the work of Carson McCullers,¹ for example, one finds Whites who are isolated from each other, who suffer from mental or physical disabilities which give them a sense of being grotesque; who receive what little human warmth they do find principally from Negroes. In the less numinous prose which Robert Penn Warren gives to a character in his recent novel, Flood,² one finds this characterization of the South :

The South - it is full of women like that.... Women stuck with something - the paralysed old father, the batty mother, the sister's orphan kid, the uncle with paresis, the booze-bit brother. Stuck with that - and lonesomeness.³

The human geography mapped by all three writers presents a high degree of congruency; all three unite as well in expressing the need for finding a viable human community. Warren shares Faulkner's concern with history (though they differ widely in their approach - Faulkner seems almost the bard of tribal myth), while Carson McCullers shares Faulkner's preoccupation with the inwardness of experience. But despite similarities, in neither Warren's nor Miss McCullers's case does one have the sense that their novels are more than discrete entities; Faulkner's novels, on the other hand, give one the impression that they are merely chapters in the history of a world which exists independently of those novels. As Cowley says, "each novel, each long or short story, seems to reveal more than it states explicitly and to have a subject bigger than itself."⁴

¹ E.g. The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1961); The Member of the Wedding (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1962); The Ballad of the Sad Café (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963).

² London: Collins, 1964.

³ Warren, Flood, p. 174.

⁴ The Portable Faulkner, p. 8.

But the Faulkner world described by Cowley and Warren, of statistics and maps, is not the world which first greets the reader of a typical Faulkner novel. The separate worlds of the individual novels (to return to the sense of "world" first distinguished above) are confusing places; labyrinthine, involuted; tied to an idiot's-eye view of a golf course, as in The Sound and the Fury, or Darl's view of the cotton-house (As I Lay Dying), or the claustrophobic September heat of Miss Rosa's house (Absalom, Absalom!). They are worlds where the usual chronological development is disturbed - where the ordering by clock time occasionally disappears altogether; where space is often indirectly presented, or where it is subordinate to the mental landscape of a particular narrator; where motive and action have lost the clear interdependence which one expects of a novel. The worlds of the novels are dark worlds in which the impact on the reader is more that of symbol, of myth, disturbing at a subliminal level because of the apparent absence of the reason-delighting qualities of clarity and logical sequence. In short, the worlds of the novels are deeply complex worlds where meaning has to be fought for, and where even the end of the book may offer no more clarification than the ambiguous irony of the closing words of The Sound and the Fury - "each in its ordered place." They are worlds whose darkness is the result of a skilfully manipulated variety of distancing devices, of implemented technique. Paradoxically, fictional worlds which are too readily grasped - that is, but imperfectly transformed by technique - tend to make the reader feel that they are not very "real" worlds in that they lack self-coherent complexity. In Faulkner's worlds, the darker, the more distanced they are, the greater their mythic power becomes, the more ambiguous, and universal they seem not only in their relevance to that Southern world which is the source of Faulkner's material, but to the world at large. At times, Faulkner's presentation approaches a Kafkaesque "perhaps" quality, a tentativeness which issues in indirection; a general questioning of values typical of

his century, and a willingness to face the consequences of such questioned values for the novel as form. Ultimately, Faulkner would appear to work from a realisation of the instability of any world-view - even his own. Indeed, his was not the sort of fiction calculated to please his early critics, who, as Hoffman points out, being either in the "humanist" or the "leftist" tradition, "sought a virtue of statement in literature and were much distressed when they failed to see it."¹

By means of technique, then, Faulkner is able to give his geographically narrow and relatively graspable world (described by Cowley and Warren, and peopled with individuals and families one meets again and again) a depth and complexity partaking of the depth and complexity of life itself. By means of technique, too, Faulkner is able to involve the reader directly in this depth and complexity, where he meets - as through a glass darkly - families and individuals burdened with secret griefs and private guilt. But once the reader has lived through these complexities, the narrow geographical and social limits serve to help him see the individual worlds as partially, at least, belonging together - as chapters in "The Book of Yoknapatawpha County".

Sartoris is the first novel that Faulkner explicitly located in and around Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County. It is also the last - with the exception of Sanctuary - with such reportorial directness, of which the passage below is typical :

The stairway with its white spindles and red carpet mounted in a tall slender curve into upper gloom. From the center of the ceiling hung a chandelier of crystal prisms and shades, fitted originally for candles but since wired for electricity. To the right of the entrance, beside folding doors rolled back upon a dim room emanating an atmosphere of solemn and seldom violated stateliness and known as the parlour, stood a tall mirror filled with grave obscurity like a still pool of evening water. ²

¹ TDC, p. 2.

² Sartoris, p. 7.

The fullness of relatively insignificant detail is the more surprising when one recalls that The Sound and the Fury, although published later, was written before Sartoris.¹ This is further confirmation of Warren's impression of Faulkner as a restless experimenter,² because, in the former novel, there is no direct presentation until the final section, and even then Faulkner exhibits the greatest possible economy of detail.³

Direct presentation disappears entirely in As I Lay Dying,⁴ but reappears in a modified form as a result of the omniscient narration of Light in August,⁵ as well as briefly and intermittently in Absalom, Absalom!.⁶ Although it is tempting to surmise that what Faulkner learned from writing The Sound and the Fury, and As I Lay Dying, influenced the ways in which he chose to present his world in the later novels, there is no clear line of development: different books have their individual effects, and the variety of modes of presentation seems to reflect Faulkner's "... hunting around in the carpenter's shop to find a tool that will make a better chicken-house."⁷ One cannot validly infer that Faulkner "rejects" any particular mode of presentation; rather, in each case, he is seeking the form which will make the most of his subject.

One generalisation which it does seem possible to make about Faulkner's approach to the form of his novels, Conrad Aiken early derived from a scrutiny of Faulkner's sentences, which, he wrote,

¹ Cowley, The Portable Faulkner, p. 6.

² Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 59.

³ See Ch. V, pp. 200-236 below.

⁴ See Ch. IV, pp. 142-178 below.

⁵ Discussed in detail in Ch. IV, pp. 126-129 below.

⁶ See Ch. IV, pp. 129-137 below.

⁷ FIU, p. 68.

... parallel in a curious and perhaps inevitable way, and not without aesthetic justification, the whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosure, which so often gives the characteristic shape to the novels themselves. It is a persistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screens and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays, with one express purpose; and that purpose is simply to keep the form - and the idea - fluid and unfinished, still in motion, as it were, and unknown, until the dropping into place of the very last syllable.¹

The most enigmatic of the four books which fall within the scope of this study is probably As I Lay Dying, from which directness of presentation is totally absent. In this instance, the meaning of the book is totally withheld, except from the reader who is willing to probe the consciousnesses of these narrations by exploring its sections reflexively.² In Absalom, Absalom!, despite a third-person narrator, the activities of four first-person narrators of varying reliability and with access to different sources of information, create a fictional space that is at once elusive and compelling. In The Sound and the Fury, the reader is presented with a complexity of structure and intricacy of time-patterns which the fourth section only begins to unravel. While the presence of an omniscient narrator throughout Light in August is somewhat reassuring to the reader, the delaying tactics which Faulkner employs in the disclosure of Christmas's identity create difficulties of a special kind.

By studying in detail one aspect of each of the four novels selected - characterization in Light in August, space in Absalom, Absalom!, point of view in As I Lay Dying, time in The Sound and the Fury - the present writer hopes to show in depth how the "whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning" does, in fact, shape these novels. The final chapter, "Faulkner's Tone", attempts to

¹ "The Novel as Form," TDC, p. 138.

² Cf. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Sewanee Review, LIII (Spring, 1945), pp. 221-240; continued (Summer, 1945), pp. 433-456; concluded (Autumn, 1945), pp. 645-653.

determine how far the authorial attitude - first withheld by
"a calculated system of screens and obtrusions" - can ultimately be
deduced from the individual worlds of his creating.

CHAPTER TWO

"WRITING ABOUT PEOPLE"¹ : CHARACTERIZATION

1. Characterization and Authorial Intrusion: The More Direct Devices

(a) The Use of Near Omniscience in Light in August

He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness, and ready, on the shortest notice, to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man.²

What he saw was a long wooden counter lined with backless stools, and a big, blonde woman behind a cigar case near the front and a clump of men at the far end of the counter, not eating, who all turned as one and looked at him and McEachern when they entered, through the smoke of cigarettes.³

Eighty years separate the publication of the two books from which these excerpts are taken. Apart from distance in time, there are other obvious differences of subject, theme, tone and style which are not of present concern. What they do share is a common means of narration, usually called omniscient, which determines to some extent the way in which the characters are presented. Yet, even in this respect, the two passages could hardly be more different : Dickens's description of Sir Leicester Dedlock is a "set piece", loaded with abstract qualities, and forwarding the action not one iota (the reference to dying "any death you please to mention" is largely superfluous, for Sir Leicester is never called on to do anything of the sort); the reader of the Faulkner passage might forgivably enquire precisely what it had been chosen to illustrate, so inextricably are character,

¹ FIU, p. 88.

² Charles Dickens, Bleak House, Everyman edn. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1907), p. 8.

³ LIA, p. 151.

action, and details of physical setting interwoven. The point of this comparison is not to discredit Dickens's methods of characterization, but to indicate something of the range of effects available to the author who employs an omniscient narrator, as well as to suggest how close to indirection Faulkner comes even in a novel which is told by the conventional mode of narration so widely practised in the nineteenth century.

The passage from Light in August was selected as an example of more or less direct characterization of a minor character, the "big, blonde woman", but, in fact, those two words represent the totality of directness in the passage. Even in this minor case, indirect means predominate; Faulkner uses details of environment (especially in stationing her "behind a cigar case", which conveys a nice shade of typicality), and is careful to associate the character with the slightly ominous "clump of men". At the same time, the presentation of the woman is unobtrusively combined with the action of getting Joe and McEachern inside the restaurant.

In the following paragraph, the woman is further characterized, and again Faulkner combines elements of direct presentation - for instance, a direct comment on her "respectability" - with details of her actions, and with figurative expressions, from which the reader must infer as much as he can :

At the cigar counter McEachern paid the brasshaired woman. There was about her a quality impervious to time: a belligerent and diamondsurfaced respectability. She had not so much as looked at them, even when they entered and even when McEachern gave her money. Still without looking at them she made the change, correctly and swiftly, sliding the coins onto the glass counter almost before McEachern had offered the bill; herself somehow definite behind the false glitter of the careful hair, the careful face, like a carved lioness guarding a portal, presenting respectability like a shield behind which the clotted and idle and equivocal men could slant their hats and their thwartfaced curled cigarettes. ¹

¹ LIA, p. 152.

One notices how the directness of "belligerent ... respectability" is tempered by the metaphorical indirection of "diamondsurfaced"; how vividly such a phrase as "the false glitter of the careful hair" brings the woman to life; how powerfully the lioness image symbolizes her function, while at the same time appearing a natural extension of her being stationed behind the cigar case. At the same time, her action of not looking at the customers suggests an attitude of indifference, contempt; or, perhaps, it suggests that there is something not quite straightforward about her.

It seems virtually impossible to find examples of merely direct character presentation,¹ so fully does Faulkner exploit certain possibilities of his chosen point-of-view. However, before one proceeds to a more detailed analysis of his indirect methods, one must mention Faulkner's handling of exposition. In setting out a character's thoughts or reactions, the omniscient narrator may be tempted to intrude somewhat obviously (though not necessarily to the extent of a "Dear Reader!") and to over-clarify certain points. Not only does this destroy something of their effect in context, but it also damages the verisimilitude of the tale as a whole. The following passage is a fair example of Faulkner's style of exposition :

He seemed to recognise McEachern without surprise, as if the whole situation were perfectly logical and reasonable and inescapable. Perhaps he was thinking then how he and the man could always count upon one another, depend upon one another; that it was the woman alone who was unpredictable. Perhaps he saw no incongruity at all in the fact that he was about to be punished, who had refrained from what McEachern would consider the cardinal sin which he could commit, exactly the same as if he had committed it. ²

The important words are : "seemed", "as if", and "perhaps". By means of these words, each sentence is given a tentative quality, which negates to some extent the directness of such phrases as "logical

¹ But cf. later discussion of Gavin Stevens below, Ch. IV, p. 127.

² LIA, p. 139.

and reasonable and inescapable". This "perhaps-frame" thus helps the author to control any overt intrusion to which he might incline through his narrator. Moreover, at the same time as he maintains a measure of objectivity, he is free to suggest the more universal implications latent in the particular scene. But such a frame does not display mere technical competence; the connotations of the words also serve to suggest that the element of "perhaps" is more valid in the presented world than any assertions which the frame may surround. And, finally, the presence of "perhaps" heightens the verisimilitude of the expository passages by suggesting that they partake of the very tentativeness which characterizes one's own judgments in life : minute by minute, it seems to suggest, everything changes, and one's judgments must be flexible enough to keep pace with these changes - whether in fiction or reality. Later in this chapter,¹ it will be seen how, when he abandons the relative directness of an omniscient narrator, Faulkner moves from such minor signals of indirection as "perhaps" and "as if", to wider structural units of indirection involving fragmentation of point-of-view and chronology.

When one turns to the obviously indirect means of characterization, one notices in the first instance how Faulkner exploits the possibilities inherent in characters' names. Ian Watt² rightly remarks that "the primary function of the name ... is to symbolize the fact that the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type." Most characters, however, embody a certain typicality within their individuality, and Robert Scholes³ has suggested that "it

¹ See pp. 59 - 81 below.

² The Rise of the Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p. 20.

³ Elements of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 19.

may be useful ... to think of character as a function of two impulses: the impulse to individualize and the impulse to typify." "Great and memorable characters," Scholes continues, "are the result of a powerful combination of these two impulses." One can see such combinations in the names which Faulkner gives his characters.¹ The Scottish name of Christmas's adoptive father, McEachern, is at once individually appropriate, and has a representative quality because of the particularly rigid form of Calvinism which McEachern practises. This is vividly illustrated by the scene in which he tries to force Joe to learn his catechism by whipping the eight-year-old boy every hour.² McEachern's name also contributes to the verisimilitude of the novel, as Faulkner has indicated elsewhere³ that both his mythical county and the part of the South to which it is related had a fairly high proportion of Scottish settlers.

Faulkner also uses typical names for his more two-dimensional minor characters. For instance, one is not surprised to learn that the name of the "brasshaired woman" (see pp. 28-30 above) is "Mame", while that of her cigarette-smoking man is "Max". Such names (especially in the absence of surnames) invite comparison of the characters who bear them with the stock types of popular fiction or their counterparts in other works of art, such as "Max" and "Al" in Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers". This comparison itself has a suitably debasing effect on the character concerned. Faulkner is also capable of an almost allegorical touch in the naming of such a minor but important character as the white militant, Percy Grimm.

¹ The Biblical uses of "name" are also relevant in this context. Cruden's Concordance notes:

Name is frequently used to designate the entire person, his individuality and his power.

The word is also used to mean a race, as descended from some one man. (Cf. "Sartoris" and "Snopes".)

² LIA, pp. 128-134.

³ Cf., for example, Absalom, Absalom! and Intruder in the Dust.

In naming his principal characters, Faulkner attempts to find names with a more symbolic import. Faulkner himself has commented illuminatingly on Lena Grove and her relationship to the title,¹ but, even without this help, it is possible for the reader to gather something of her name's associations with life, growth, fertility, and perhaps, even, a sacred grove, something set apart, and partaking of the "pagan" quality to which Faulkner alludes. The name, "Byron Bunch", in its comic, paradoxical union of the arch-romantic's last name and a word associated with the practical, the down-to-earth, seems not only to embody the chief qualities of the character who bears it, but also to suggest the author's attitude to that character. Gail Hightower's name suggests aloofness, withdrawal, and isolation, as well as, perhaps, the tower of the seer or poet, and thus symbolizes his fairly complex character and his various functions in the novel. In "Joanna Burden", Faulkner unites the suggestions of a passionate nature (she was named for her father's first wife, Juana, a Mexican) and the Calvinistic sense of the Negro as the "white man's burden" which was imbued in her by her father, and which dehumanizes all her relationships with negroes.

Joe Christmas's name is the only one which threatens the symbolic resonance of the book. Faulkner's avowals to the contrary notwithstanding,² the name seems so clearly allegorical as to demand treatment as an emblem rather than as a symbol. In this instance, one cannot help sympathizing with early critics such as Dr. Leavis,³ who condemned Faulkner's lack of subtlety. The impulse to typify to which Faulkner appears to have yielded is, however, counterbalanced by the minute individualizing of Christmas to which Faulkner devotes seven of his

¹ FIU, p. 199.

² FIU, pp. 117-118.

³ F.R. Leavis, "Dostoevsky or Dickens?" Scrutiny, II (June, 1933), pp. 91-93.

twenty-one chapters. Ultimately, whether or not these chapters succeed in giving sufficient individual resonance to Christmas's name can only be decided by the individual reader, and will probably continue to be a critical bone of contention.

In life, one seldom meets a person to learn his name without hearing him speak as well. And so it is, too, in the novel, where a character's dialect often betrays the man, while heightening the illusion of life for the reader. Although, to any one who has read any of Faulkner's work, it may seem superfluous to comment on the quality of Faulkner's handling of dialect, the following remarks by Warren Beck are worth quoting, both because Beck is an American, and hence well qualified to discuss this aspect, and because of his clear appreciation of the technical feat which is involved :

... there exists in almost all of Faulkner's work a realistic colloquialism, expressing lively dialogue that any playwright might envy, and even carrying over into sustained first-person narrative the flavor of regionalism and the idiosyncrasies of character. In the colloquial vein Faulkner's brilliance is unsurpassed in contemporary American fiction. He has fully mastered the central difficulty, to retain verisimilitude while subjecting the prolix and monotonous raw material of most natural speech to an artistic pruning and pointing up.¹

In the case of minor characters, a single speech will often do more than a paragraph of direct authorial comment to give the reader the sense not of a voice only, but of the personality of the speaker :

Joe had almost reached the door. "Here, Jack," the man said. Joe did not stop. "Give him his money," the man said, flat-voiced, not yet moving. The cigarette smoke would curl still across his face, unwinded by any movement. "Give it back to him," the man said. "I dont know what his racket is. But he cant work it here. Give it back to him. You better go back to the farm, Hiram. Maybe you can make a girl there with a nickel." ²

One has little difficulty in recognizing the brasshaired woman's companion, Max. The stale (almost cigarette-smoke-laden) quality of

¹ "William Faulkner's Style," TDC, p. 148.

² LIA, pp. 159-160.

the language (pointed by the omniscient narrator's use of "flat-voiced"), the repetitiveness, the slangy, pseudo-familiar use of "Jack" and "Hiram" (revealing an utter contempt for the individuality or identity of the person addressed), all contribute to the unprepossessing quality of this minor and nasty character. A further means of characterization, which will be mentioned again later, is the use of mannerism in Max's talking through the smoke rising from the cigarette in his mouth. This is not simply "irrelevant 'life'":¹ it is a mannerism which Joe acquires, and which contributes to the first impression he makes on Byron and the other men at the planing-mill.²

More important characters, such as McEachern, Byron Bunch, Hightower, and Doc Hines, all have distinctive ways of speaking. An interesting contrast is provided by comparing characteristic utterances of McEachern and Doc Hines. McEachern's speech is tinged with his sombre Calvinism, and, in both vocabulary and rhythms, betrays a marked Biblical influence :

"I have been watching you lately. And now there is nothing for it but I must misdoubt my own eyes or else believe that at last you are beginning to accept what the Lord has seen fit to allot you. But I will not have you grow vain because I have spoken well of it. You'll have time and opportunity (and inclination too, I dont doubt) to make me regret that I have spoken. To fall into sloth and idleness again. However, reward was created for man the same as chastisement. Do you see that heifer yonder? From today that calf is your own. See that I do not later regret it." ³

So dark is the man's view of human nature that he cannot make a gift without hedging it about with warnings and threats. One also senses his strong self-will in the determined, authoritarian cadence of "But I will not have you grow vain ...", while Faulkner preserves the rustic quality of McEachern's speech with such phrases as "I must misdoubt my own eyes", and "that heifer yonder".

¹ F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p. 250.

² See below, pp.

³ LIA, p. 158.

Doc Hines's speech is even more thoroughly Biblical in its language, though it is the language of an Old Testament prophet's ferocious condemnation of a wayward generation, with no compensating sense of an active divine love. In the unequivocal hatred of single vision, Doc Hines is, as the omniscient narrator characterizes him, mad. His insanity is partially portrayed by the fact that Doc Hines speaks of himself in the third person.¹ Here is a sample of the tale he tells Hightower :

"Stinking with her lust and lechery she was then, standing before old Doc Hines with the working of God's will on her that minute, who had outraged the house where God housed His fatherless and motherless. 'You aint nothing,' old Doc Hines said. 'You and all sluts. You are a instrument of God's wrathful purpose that nere a sparrow can fall to earth. You are a instrument of God, the same as Joe Christmas and old Doc Hines.' And she went away and old Doc Hines he waited and he watched and it wasn't long before she came back and her face was like the face of a ravening beast of the desert."²

The length of this tale virtually turns it into a dramatic monologue, and one can see Faulkner exploiting to the full the possibilities of ironic unconscious self-revelation in such a phrase as "'God's wrathful purpose that nere a sparrow can fall to earth'" where the Biblical phrase is wrenched from its original context, and, in Hines's fulminations, becomes significant not of divine protection and love, but of revenge and hatred.³ The effect of the monologue is not totally against Doc Hines, however, for the vividness of his comparison of the dietitian's face (one has had her version of this encounter via the omniscient narrator in Chapter Six, pp. 114-121) to "the face of a ravening beast of the desert" startles the reader into accepting this image as an illuminating albeit surreal comment on the dietitian's

¹ Cf. Darl's last section in *As I Lay Dying*, pp. 241-242.

² *LIA*, pp. 337-38.

³ Cf. Matthew 10:29-31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." Cf. also Luke 12:6-7.

state of mind.

Whatever truth there is in the old adage that "actions speak louder than words" finds lively embodiment in the novel, for what a character does provides a most important indirect clue as to what he is, and, conversely, the most successful actions are those which the author can show to have been adequately motivated by the past actions and reactions of his characters. Obviously, the central event of the novel is Christmas's murder of Joanna Burden, an action so apparently inexplicable that Faulkner suspends the more or less chronological development of the book for seven chapters while he explores Christmas's childhood and adolescence. A superficial reading of these chapters might lead one to conclude that Christmas's action is "in character" because it shares the same quality of violence with his treatment of the Negro girl, his killing of his adoptive father, his rough treatment of Bobbie, and the violence he has already shown to Brown (or Burch). But Faulkner's preparation is deeper, more subtle and complex, than this: carefully read, the seven chapters suggest why this particular crime was committed against this particular woman at this particular stage of her relationship with Christmas. There would be little point in summarizing the steps by which Christmas arrives at this action, but, by looking at one step in some detail, one may suggest something of the psychological resonance - the sense of "cliffs of sheer fall"¹ in the mind - which Faulkner achieves in his characterization of Christmas.

In the course of the seven "flashback" chapters, it becomes clear that one of the reasons why Christmas kills Joanna Burden is precisely that she is a woman. Christmas's previous experience with women, it is implied, has led him to regard them as unpredictable, incalculable

¹ Cf. G.M. Hopkins, "Carrion Comfort," in Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. by W.H. Gardner. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 60-61.

(the dietitian gives him a half-dollar instead of the punishment which he expects, Mrs. McEachern tries to be kind to him behind her husband's back); this is further complicated by Joe's inability, as an adolescent, to accept that the female menstrual cycle is part of a natural order, that "the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled [was] doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth."¹ The similarity of Joe's attitude to that of certain primitive tribes which segregate the women during menstruation suggests that it was not simply perversity on Faulkner's part which prompted him to include this material : it helps to suggest the cultural primitivism with which Christmas is imbued. And, not unexpectedly, Christmas takes refuge from what is for him an intolerable part of reality in a ritual act : he slaughters a sheep, and bathes his hands in its blood :

Then he got over it, recovered. He did not forget what the boy had told him. He just accepted it. It was as if he said, illogical and desperately calm All right. It is so, then. But not to me. Not in my life and my love Then it was three or four years ago and he had forgotten it, in the sense that a fact is forgotten when it once succumbs to the mind's insistence that it be neither true nor false.²

One notices how in this interpretation of Christmas's act Faulkner mingles direct Olympian comment with a modified form of interior monologue (from which the omniscient narrator is momentarily absent) which, in the terms which are being applied in this chapter, would technically be considered an "indirect" method, but which, in fact, provides a greater dramatic directness by the change to the first person, and the disappearance of the omniscient narrator. The interior quality of such thoughts is typographically suggested by the change to italic type and the absence of conventional punctuation at the beginning and end. This is a good example of a technique which

¹ LIA, p. 161.

² LIA, pp. 161-162.

Faulkner uses throughout the novel to provide the reader with fragments of a character's thoughts. The passages are never so long, however, that the reader forgets the omniscient frame of the narrative: these snatches of interior monologue are used to clarify certain minute particles of the book's meaning rather than to withhold it.¹

One of the criticisms which might well be raised against the chapters devoted to Christmas is that they constitute a psychological (perhaps pathological?) case history rather than an acceptable characterization. Certainly, the emphasis on Christmas's troubled experiences with sex seems to provide subject matter for an analysis of the Freudian type. At the same time, however, his experiences as presented provide material which suggests a deeper level of insight into the character's being than the more restricted nineteenth-century "outer" concentration on motive and action. And if one agrees with Robert Penn Warren that "nothing that is available in human experience is to be legislated out of poetry"²-taking "poetry" to mean "imaginative literature" - one cannot find fault with Faulkner on the grounds of his material. Technically speaking, what keeps these chapters from becoming simply a "case" is that they do not present a simple parade of facts: they present the reader with a series of scenes which have the sense of life running through them; one can sense the growth and changes in Christmas's character because the implications of the scenes (their "meaning"), the deductions a psychoanalyst might make, are left for the reader to infer. The reader is thus actively engaged in exploring Christmas's character "as an identity of consciousness through duration in time,"³ and is left to make the connections between

¹ Cf. Ch. IV pp. 129-137 below, on the opposite effect in Absalom, Absalom!.

² Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 26.

³ John Locke Human Understanding Bk. II Ch. 27 Sects. ix, x. Quoted in Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p. 21.

one scene and the next for himself. What is more, as has been suggested above, Christmas's character is not being explored for its own sake, but for the light it sheds on the central action of the book.

In marked contrast to the violent deeds which are done to Christmas, and which he in turn does to others, are the good deeds which Byron Bunch performs for Lena, "Doc" and Mrs. Hines, and Hightower. Significantly, one never sees Byron performing these actions; one only hears about them afterwards, as if Faulkner were trying to embody in his treatment of these actions the principle of true charity, which does not let the left hand know what the right is doing. The difficulty of convincingly portraying goodness in literature has often been discussed : Faulkner maintains the credibility of Byron's goodness by suggesting an ambiguity in his motives. He has Byron fall in love with Lena, and this means that the reader must consider that everything Byron does for Lena may be tinged with self-interest. Far from alienating the reader, this "flaw" in Byron's character makes him one with fallen and erring humanity, and therefore more credible and more appealing to the reader's sympathy.

Perhaps one more action might be mentioned as it illustrates the way in which, by a single stroke, Faulkner can add a touch of "roundness" to some of his flattest minor characters. In this case, it is the now-familiar "brasshaired woman", Mame :

Then the blonde woman stood above him and stooping, he watching quietly, she lifted her skirt and took from the top of her stocking a flat folded sheaf of banknotes and removed one and stopped and thrust it into the fob pocket of his trousers. Then she was gone.¹

Mame performs this action when Christmas has been beaten up by Max and a friend and has been robbed of the money which he in turn had taken from Mrs. McEachern - the money which he had hoped to use for marrying Bobbie. In making even a minor character behave in such a paradoxical,

¹ LIA, p. 193.

unpredictable, yet thoroughly human way, Faulkner at once heightens the character's life-likeness and compels the reader to guard against adopting a single simple view of the character's value or worthlessness.

Thus far, this discussion has concerned itself principally with those methods of characterization which may be considered in Faulkner's depiction of a single character, more or less in isolation from his depiction of other characters. But one of the great possibilities of the novel as an art-form is the scope which it provides not so much for considering a single character in depth, but for considering a number of characters in relationship to each other. In any novel, then, the author will employ a character's relationships with others as a major means of indirect characterization. Moreover, in a novel about the South in which one of the principal characters is unsure of his own identity, and in which the same character is forced to define himself or be defined by individuals and community alike in terms of mutually exclusive categories - Negro or White -, this particular aspect of a novelist's technique assumes fundamental thematic importance.

It is Christmas's misfortune never to have met a man or a woman who would accept him without attempting to fit the enigma of his identity into the collective categories of Negro or White, and it is the function of the seven chapters which Faulkner devotes to Christmas's growing up to indicate to the reader that Brown's words, "Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free"¹, are the culmination of a series of similar polarisations which various persons have forced on Christmas throughout his life. As in Brown's case, other characters also categorize Christmas out of a fanatical desire for self-protection, as well as fear of the ambiguity which he appears to embody.

¹ LIA, p. 85.

The dietitian at the orphanage first calls Christmas a "little nigger bastard" out of the fear and guilt she feels when she discovers Christmas behind a curtain in the room where she has been having intercourse with a young doctor. When Christmas does not respond to her half-dollar bribe (the narrator has pointed out that he is expecting punishment, and therefore does not know how to respond to the bribe), she calls him a "nigger bastard" again, and in the frenzy of uncertainty into which Christmas's silence drives her ("On the fourth day she became quite calmly and completely mad."¹), she seeks out Doc Hines ("His eyes were quite clear, quite grey, quite cold. They were quite mad too."²) in order to obtain confirmation that Christmas is a negro. She then tells the matron, who (after Christmas has been recovered from Doc Hines's attempted abduction) hurriedly "places" the boy with McEachern.

Even before McEachern leaves the matron's office, he attempts to foist another identity on the boy by insisting on changing his name :

Then it came : "Christmas. A heathenish name. Sacrilege. I will change that."

"That will be your legal right," the matron said. "We are not interested in what they are called, but in how they are treated." ³

The omniscient narrator interpolates his comments a few lines lower down, indicating how ineffectual is McEachern's attempt to deprive Joe of the only shred of identity he possesses :

The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care, anymore than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas. There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time. ⁴

¹ LIA, p. 110.

² Ibid., p. 111.

³ Ibid., p. 126.

⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

This glimpse into Christmas's real attitude is implicitly contrasted with the tranquil indifference with which the matron answers McEachern's rhetorical question, the final, ironic, "'Why not, indeed?' the matron said."¹

Bobbie, the waitress, does not use the information that Christmas may be a negro² until Christmas kills McEachern and she wants some way to escape from her involvement with him. After Bobbie departs with Max and Mame, Christmas embarks on a fifteen-year period of vacillation between living with negroes and living with whites. This period is summarized by the narrator in little more than two pages, and ends with Christmas's arrival at Joanna Burden's house.

Faulkner explores their relationship in some depth, and it becomes clear not only that Joanna Burden is unable to treat Christmas as a person, but also that she has dehumanized him in order to use him as an instrument of self-crucifixion. The reader cannot help sympathizing with her when he realizes that Joanna herself is a victim of a "burden" placed on her as a child by her father,³ who attributes the blame for the death of both his father and his son to "'the curse which God put on a whole race A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins.'"⁴ These words cause a fundamental change in Joanna's outlook :

"... after that I seemed to see them for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling,

¹ Loc.cit.

² LIA, p. 171.

³ One cannot help thinking that much of Light in August would provide invaluable material for a treatise on "Southern Varieties of Religious Experience".

⁴ LIA, p. 221.

even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross." ¹

Although the reader is left to draw his own inferences, this passage does suggest what motivates the frenzies of the "second phase" of their relationship :

Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania, her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another of such formally erotic attitudes and gestures as a Beardsley of the time of Petronius might have drawn. She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!"²

Months later, her sexual hunger abated, Joanna turns to religion, and tries to persuade Christmas to attend one of the negro colleges with which she has contact. In doing this, she is presumably still motivated by her father's injunction to "raise the shadow with you."³ The relatively unbroken chronological presentation of Christmas's life from his childhood in the orphanage helps the reader to perceive in Christmas's relationship with Joanna Burden the culmination of all the distortions and perversities he has suffered in the course of his other relationships. There is the fact that she is a woman, that she categorises him as a negro for her own peculiar purposes, and treats him as a "thing", and, finally, that she tries to inflict religion on him as McEachern had done. By the end of Chapter Twelve, the reader is in a position to comprehend with some fullness the significance of Christmas's words in Chapter Five (spoken about twenty-four hours before the murder) :

"'It's because she started praying over me,' he said."⁴

¹ Loc.cit.

² LIA, p. 227.

³ Op.cit., p. 222.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 92.

By his killing of Joanna Burden and his having told Brown that he was part negro, Christmas becomes the victim of another set of categories - those applied by the community of Jefferson. Indeed, there is reason for regarding the community as a character in this novel : it is felt as a presence acting, through various individuals, in the lives of Hightower, Joanna Burden, and Byron Bunch, as well as in Christmas's career and, naturally, its categories are the most rigid of all - it is impervious to the individual - and are applied with ritualistic rigour. In Chapter Three, Faulkner gives - partly through the omniscient narrator, partly through the narrator reporting what Byron knows - the details of how Hightower suffered at the hands of the community, and Byron thinks :

... how people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names.¹

Earlier, in Chapter Two, Joanna Burden's isolation and its causes are briefly sketched :

But even these do not know if Miss Burden knows it or not, and if they did, they would not tell her. She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes....²

But if the community's attitudes contain much that is wrong, there is also a danger of going as far wrong - if not further - for those who live apart from it, and this is the danger of refusing to acknowledge that "mortal interindebtedness"³ which another great and isolated figure in another American novel - Melville's Captain Ahab -

¹ LIA, p. 61.

² Op.cit., p. 40.

³ Herman Melville, Moby Dick (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), p. 408: " 'Cursed be that mortal interindebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books.' " (Hereafter referred to as Moby Dick.)

courses. In the course of the action, however, - and this is thematically important - all the characters become involved with one another. Byron breaks the habit of working on Saturday afternoon and then riding twenty miles to conduct a choir in a country church all day Sunday, a habit which, he believed, had kept him "safe" from harming anyone, and the breaking of it involves him in a sequence of actions in which help and harm are inextricably intertwined; Hightower abandons the notion that he has "paid", has bought immunity from the suffering involved in any human relationship, and becomes involved in helping Lena, and, with characteristic futility, in trying to save Christmas. The nature of Christmas's involvement will be discussed in the chapter on Time.¹

There is another most important aspect of indirect characterization which has been partially discussed here, but which will be discussed in full in the chapter on Point of View, and that is the use Faulkner makes of what other characters think of any particular character. As has been suggested, this is of thematic importance as well, and demands being treated in conjunction with another major aspect of Faulkner's narrative technique.

One is left, then, with the use Faulkner makes of figurative language and symbolism as a means of characterization. Faulkner's imagery is often vivid and striking in the extreme, and, on occasion, the reader may justifiably feel that it claims too much of his attention in its own right, rather than simply illuminating the person to whom it refers. For instance, he speaks of the Hineses as living "in the slack backwater of their lonely isolation, as though they had been two muskoxen strayed from the north pole, or two homeless and belated beasts from beyond the glacial period."² When one considers

¹ See below, Ch. V, pp. 190 - 191.

² LIA, pp. 298-99.

the language carefully, however, one sees how the figures work together to create a composite image of isolation and outlandishness: "backwater", "strayed", "homeless and belated beasts". And, in context, the comparison is related to - seems, in fact, to grow out of - a less noticeable simile at the top of the page : "as if they belonged to a different race, species." The sense of their belonging to a different species is precisely what the mention of the muskoxen vividly conveys. The characters are presented as ill-equipped to cope with the world in which they find themselves, and this is further borne out by their pathetic odyssey to Jefferson.

Faulkner symbolically suggests a change in Hightower's character by means of the different books he chooses to read. On the first occasion, after he has refused Byron's request to become involved in helping Lena, Hightower chooses a volume of Tennyson's poetry, which the narrator, inclining imperceptibly to Hightower's own attitude, characterizes as follows :

Soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand.¹

Such words as "gutless", "sapless", "dehydrated", and "eunuch" suggest the degree to which Hightower's sense of having bought immunity has cut him off from the sources of life. A few days later, when Hightower has become involved by acting as doctor at the birth of Lena's baby,

He moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twenty-five years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again. Neither is the book which he now chooses the Tennyson : this time also he chooses food for a man. It is Henry IV²

Not only does Faulkner succeed in providing his narrator with evocative images, but also he succeeds in putting in a character's

¹ LIA, p. 278.

² Ibid., p. 355.

mouth striking comparisons which are at once brilliantly descriptive, and consistent with the reader's overall impressions of that particular character's mental capabilities. This is illustrated in the passage below, where Byron and a fellow employee are exchanging their impressions of Brown (alias Lucas Burch), and the difference in the quality of their minds is suggested by the contrast between Byron's rather complex metaphor of a car, and Mooney's simpler (yet in its own way no less telling) more rustic comparison :

"That is so," Byron said. "He puts me in mind of one of these cars running along the street with a radio in it. You can't make out what it is saying and the car ain't going anywhere in particular and when you look at it close you see that there ain't even anybody in it."

"Yes," Mooney said. "He puts me in mind of a horse. Not a mean horse. Just a worthless horse. Looks fine in the pasture, but it's always down in the spring bottom when anybody comes to the gate with a bridle. Runs fast, all right, but it's always got a sore hoof when hitching-up time comes." ¹

In this way, the comparison itself helps to delineate the character in question, while the kind of comparison provides a further hint of the character who chooses it. ²

To suggest with comprehensiveness the direction and tenor of a character's life, Faulkner rings a fairly complicated series of changes on the image of a road. The image itself serves as a means of unifying by contrast the lives of Lena and Christmas. The static, unhurried, abiding tranquillity of Lena's days and ways is suggested early in the book :

... backrolling now behind her a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to day again, through which she advanced in identical and anonymous

¹ LIA, p. 32.

² It should be noted that Brown/Burch has a mannerism which is related to Mooney's metaphor : "... a way of jerking his head quickly and glancing over his shoulder like a mule does in front of an automobile in the road, Byron thought." (ibid., p. 32.). This mannerism is repeated in Burch's meeting with Lena - "Again he made that abrupt, mulelike, backlooking movement of the head." (p.377) - where it serves the further purpose of contributing to the unity of the book by reminding the reader of something with which he is already familiar.

and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn. ¹

In the case of Christmas, Faulkner is able to use the figure to summarize with imagistic brevity and suggestiveness the fifteen years of Christmas's life which do not particularly concern him, while at the same time contrasting the quality of Christmas's life with Lena's :

But the street ran on in its moods and phases, always empty: he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred. ²

And when, after seven days of fugitive freedom after murdering Joanna Burden, Christmas decides to re-enter the world, and to accept a passive role as society's victim, the implications of decision are symbolised in the same spatial terms :

... he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. ³

And Christmas thinks :

'I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' ⁴

Lena Grove is not the only character with whom Christmas is linked by means of symbolism. Faulkner heightens the complexity of his tale by suggesting certain similarities between the young Christmas in his persecution by McEachern, and Percy Grimm as he begins his pursuit of Christmas. In this way Faulkner not only indicates an ironic shared quality between victim and slayer, but also suggests that the two are indissolubly linked - a suggestion which is developed in

¹ LIA, p. 6.

² Ibid., p. 197.

³ Ibid., p. 296.

⁴ Loc.cit.

a vision which the dying Hightower has.¹ Christmas, as McEachern is whipping him, is described as "looking straight ahead, with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a picture."² And Grimm's face, as Grimm pursues Christmas, "had that serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows."³ In both cases, an unlikelike, static quality of abstraction, an unnatural absence of the third dimension of which human beings partake, suggests the predominance of an abstract idea over the flowing, ever-changing movement of human life. And, in part, it is Faulkner's purpose in this book to dramatize the tragic consequences of allowing any abstraction, whether Christian dogma, a preoccupation with the past, or the racial categories which a society would impose, to predominate over contact with and reverence for the shifting, unclassifiable ambiguities which every individual to some extent embodies.

The word "ambiguity" has been bandied about somewhat freely in the preceding pages; perhaps its use requires further justification at this point. Frequently, discussion of Light in August centres on an attempt to establish Christmas as either a negro or a white. In such attempts, one character or another is cited as establishing either case, and it sometimes seems that there are as many interpretations as there are critics willing to offer them. The reason for

¹ LIA, pp. 430-31 :

"The halo is full of faces They are peaceful, as though they have escaped into an apotheosis ... he can distinguish ... that of the man called Christmas. This face alone is not clear. It is confused more than any other, as though in the now peaceful throes of a more recent, a more inextricable, compositeness. Then he can see that it is two faces which seem to strive ... in turn to free themselves one from the other, then fade and blend again. But he has seen now, the other face, the one that is not Christmas. 'Why, it's ...' he thinks. 'I have seen it, recently ... Why, it's that ... boy. With that black pistol, automatic they call them. The one who ... into the kitchen where ... killed, who fired the ...'"

² Ibid., p. 131.

³ Ibid., pp. 404-05.

this is plain : this is the aspect of the book in which Faulkner has most deliberately withheld any authorial interpolation which might be considered its "meaning". As in other Faulkner novels the reader must actively engage with the resistance offered by fragmented point of view or interrupted chronology, so, in Light in August, his greatest difficulty is encountered in Faulkner's presentation of the central character.

When one first meets Christmas as he applies for work at the Jefferson planing mill, the omniscient narrator describes his flesh as being "a level dead parchment color."¹ And further than this, this most reliable source of information in the book does not commit himself.

Other whites in the book without any personal reason for disliking Christmas take him for a "foreigner", as is indicated by the attitude of the other men at the planing mill (who, ironically, momentarily treat "foreigner" and "white man" as antonyms²), by Bobbie, and by a prostitute in a Northern city. This attitude is further strengthened by the collective opinion of the people of Mottstown, who, after Christmas has given himself up, tell each other : "'He dont look any more like a nigger than I do.'"³

Of those who call Christmas a negro, Brown is the one who acts most blatantly from self-preservation. Once Brown has told the sheriff that Christmas is a "nigger", Byron tells Hightower, "'It's like he knew he had them then. Like nothing they could believe he had done would be as bad as what he could tell that somebody else had done.'"⁴ The other whites and the selfish motives which serve them better than

¹ LIA, p. 30.

² Ibid., p. 29.

³ LIA, p. 306.

⁴ Ibid., p. 85.



conclusive evidence might have done have been discussed above.¹

The only "white" who has not been dealt with in detail is Doc Hines, whose position as Christmas's grandfather seems to offer some hope of a reliable witness, and whose opinion is therefore withheld until Chapter Sixteen. Unfortunately for "the mind which is hot for certainties",² Doc Hines suffers from a religious monomania so acute, a solipsism so complete, that he is clearly the most unreliable narrator in the book. One might as soon accept Ahab's opinion of Moby Dick,³ as accept Doc Hines's assertions about Christmas's father. The suggestions are almost overpoweringly strong that "bitchery and abomination" and negritude are synonymous in this crazy old man's mind. The reader ignores the narrator's repeated use of "crazy" and "mad" at the risk of missing the meaning of the book. Doc Hines's assertion that Christmas's father was a negro, and not a Mexican, is corroborated by the owner of the circus for which he worked, but is called in question by Mrs. Hines's words :

"... and me trying to get Eupheus to lets move away because it was just that circus man that said he was a nigger and maybe he never knew for certain [*italics mine*]...."⁴

The italicised words represent the summit of the reader's knowledge of Christmas's identity. They also belong to another pattern in the book : the thematic use of such words as "know", "believe", "think", "hope" - in short, all words which describe acts of cognition, or other mental acts which men often confuse with cognition. It has been said above that Christmas is searching for an identity : Faulkner's

¹ See pp. 41 - 45.

² Robert Penn Warren, Selected Essays, p. 31.

³ cf. Moby Dick, p. 160 :

"All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick."

⁴ LIA, pp. 330 - 31.

authorial silence compels the reader to embark on a parallel quest. But what of the polarities that have been articulated? Is the reader to conclude that, in an apparently perverse attempt to become the McCavity of the novel, Faulkner has gratuitously blurred its outline; that, instead of the enveloping haze of meaning with which Conrad's Marlow surrounded his tales,¹ the reader is simply left with several hundred pages of Mississippi moonshine?

Sors tertia manet. It is feasible that Faulkner intended the reader to realize in the course of the book that complete knowledge about any individual is humanly impossible. Certainly, in one of the few really Olympian comments which Faulkner permits the omniscient narrator to make, this is explicitly stated :

Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing.²

Add to these words the frequent use of the "perhaps-frame", the scrupulous sorting, on the part of the narrator, of knowledge from belief, of belief from assumption, of assumption from hope, of all forms of cognition from the solipsistic desire to will something into existence, the inescapable mixture of good and evil even in so minor a character as Mame, and the paradoxical fusion of filth and beauty which women appear to embody, and one begins to perceive a respectable reason for Faulkner's silence on the subject of whether Christmas is white or black. It is precisely because Christmas is neither : if anything, he is both, as Moby Dick's whiteness "is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent

¹ Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," in Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether, p. 48.

² LIA, p. 41.

in things the most appalling to mankind."¹ As Melville did before him, Faulkner places at the heart of his book a symbol of a fundamental, primordial fusion of categories or amalgam, a quintessential human being who defies a reduction to categories, and, in dealing with whom, the categories of "negro" and "white"² are no more effective than the bright but deceptive allegorical interpretations which Ishmael was tempted to foist on the picture in the Spouter Inn.³

In this way, it may be seen that Faulkner's methods of presenting characters indirectly - through their names, their speech, actions, thoughts, relationships with other characters, through what others think about them, and through symbolic language - are directly related to the central theme of the novel, and are designed to encourage in the reader a more habitual mental predisposition to "rest content with half-knowledge".⁴ The writer withholds what the reader would like to believe is the "meaning", in order that the reader may begin to understand that it is not in those terms that the meaning is to be sought. And perhaps it was a generous impulse towards assisting the reader which prompted Faulkner to give his central character so unambiguous a name. In retrospect, it seems as if Joe Christmas's name was saying all the time that its bearer was not a

¹ Moby Dick, p. 170.

² In fact, it is their inability to categorise Christmas which so infuriates people: " 'He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad.' " LIA, p. 306. Compare Quentin's attitude in The Sound and the Fury, p. 106: "... the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone. That was when I realised that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among."

³ Moby Dick, p. 15.

⁴ John Keats, Letters, ed. M. Buxton Forman (4th ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1960.), p. 71.

black man or a white man, but Man (though, at the same time, an individual man), and therefore capable of sacrifice, even if this meant a conscious choice of a passive submission to the crucifixion to which his fellow man's categories would doom him. And in this submission, this weakness, Joe Christmas achieves his apotheosis as a man who was capable of a larger love for mankind : ¹

... upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. ²

(b) The Use of Limited Omniscience in Absalom, Absalom!

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, the third-person narrator in Absalom, Absalom! has a somewhat secondary role, and consequently most of the characterization is achieved indirectly through what the first-person narrators say about other characters and about each other, and what they reveal about themselves while they are saying it. In fact, even those character-narrators - especially Miss Rosa and Quentin - whom the third-person narrator presents are characterized predominantly through spatial symbols and metaphors, ³ and they, in turn, characterize Sutpen in terms of specific genres. ⁴

Because only one of the first-person narrators - Miss Rosa - can be considered an eye-witness (and her private sense of outrage makes her a far from reliable eye-witness), one seldom hears any of the Sutpens speak except through another narrator's conjectures. On two crucial occasions, however, characters do speak, even though to someone a generation or two removed from the present narrators. The

¹ Cf. Margaret Church, Time and Reality (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963.), pp. 239 - 240.

² LIA, p. 407.

³ Discussed in Ch. III below.

⁴ See Lynn G. Levins, "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!" PMLA, LXXXV (Jan., 1970), 35-47.

most notable example is what Sutpen says to General Compson in Chapter Seven. Although Quentin in telling Sutpen's story to Shreve runs together two occasions which were thirty years apart (and hence for General Compson too the meaning was withheld), it is these words which contribute most substantially to a true understanding of Sutpen.¹ The second occasion is that on which Judith Sutpen brings Quentin's grandmother a letter from Bon, giving as her reason,

" 'Because you make so little impression, you see. ... And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something - a scrap of paper - something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something....'"²

It must be admitted that these words bear the stamp of Mr. Compson's own thoughts (compare them with what he says to Quentin on page 89), but, at the same time, the words do help to set the letter in context. It stands out amidst the luxuriance of conjectural approaches and attests with singular tangibility the existence of both Bon and Judith, as well as possessing considerable meaning in itself, in that it helps the reader to characterize Bon and to deduce for himself something of Bon's relationship with Judith.

Apart from Rosa Coldfield - whose name expresses symbolically a good deal of the conflict between passion and frigidity in her nature - the most significant names are those belonging to members of the Sutpen family, and the most significant fact about those names is that, as Mr. Compson relates: "He [Sutpen] named them all himself: all his own get and all the get of his wild niggers after the country began to assimilate them."³ And Mr. Compson adds:

¹ Cf. Ch. III, pp. 119-125 below.

² AA, p. 127. And cf. Morris Beja, "A Flash, A Glare: Faulkner and Time," Renaissance, XVI (Spring, 1964), 133-141, 145.

³ AA, p. 61.

He named Clytie as he named them all, the one before Clytie and Henry and Judith even [Bon], with that same robust and sardonic temerity, naming with his own mouth his own ironic fecundity of dragon's teeth. Only I have always liked to believe that he intended to name Clytie, Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augur of his own disaster....¹

Certainly, Judith Sutpen shares much of the fortitude and endurance of her Biblical namesake, and Charles Bon's name proves most ironically fecund of anything but good for Sutpen's design. In the naming of his children, Sutpen manifests the same colossal assumption of the role of a controlling deity, as was suggested in his attitude of "Be Sutpen's Hundred" in the creation of his plantation.

A most important indirect method of characterization which Faulkner uses for Miss Rosa is her semi-interior monologue.² This may be regarded in this context as a special extension of the use of speech in indirect characterization, and provides the reader with a uniquely deep insight into Miss Rosa's life and character.

Sutpen's character is most fully revealed through his relationships with other characters, and the chief feature of it is the precedence which he allows his obsessive abstraction or "design" to take over every human relationship. Ties of marriage, blood, kinship, he ruthlessly sets aside if they are not "adjunctive or incremental" to the design, and, ironically, it is the breakings of these bonds (Jim Bond's name is no accident: the last Sutpen, an idiot and largely a negro, he remains howling around the charred ruins of the mansion), or, as in the case of his first son, Bon, the refusal to acknowledge them, which destroys the design.³

¹ Ibid., p. 62.

² See Ch. 5. "Semi-interior" because the third-person narrator interrupts towards the end of the chapter, and implies that Quentin has been her audience.

³ Dealt with in detail in Ch. III below.

The principal symbolic means of characterization which Faulkner uses in this book is that of spatial detail.¹ A powerful example is Mr. Compson's extended comparison of Ellen Coldfield Sutpen to a butterfly, which suggests at once the brightness of the appearance she maintained, while implying at the same time her real fragility, and the brevity of her time of brilliance. The length of the quotations which follow is the inescapable consequence of Mr. Compson's volubility :

... the foolish unreal voluble preserved woman now six years absent from the world - the woman who had quitted home and kin on a flood of tears and in a shadowy miasmatic region something like the bitter purlieus of Styx had produced two children and then rose like the swamp-hatched butterfly, unimpeded by weight of stomach and all the heavy organs of suffering and experience, into a perennial bright vacuum of arrested sun -²

The image recurs again before Mr. Compson uses it to depict Ellen at her death :

... the butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall and clinging there beating feebly, not with any particular stubborn clinging to life, not in particular pain since it was too light to have struck hard, nor even with very much remembrance of the bright vacuum before the gale, but just in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement - the bright trivial shell not even changed to any great extent despite the year of bad food.... Ellen had lost some flesh of course, but it was as the butterfly itself enters dissolution by actually dissolving: the area of wing and body decreasing a little, the pattern of spots drawing a little closer together, but with no wrinkle to show....³

The use of such words as "wall", "bright vacuum", "bright trivial shell", "the area of wing and body", indicates Faulkner's heavy reliance on spatial details, which permeates the book. In a novel composed so largely of talk and conjecture, the preponderance of spatial detail is of great assistance to the reader, as it serves to assure him that, for all the narrators' speculations, he is nevertheless never far from some kind of physical reality.

¹ See Ch. III below.

² AA., pp. 69-70.

³ Ibid., p. 85.

2. Characterization and Consciousness : The More Indirect Devices

But the successful creator of characters somewhat resembles the modern logician in that he starts with the fact of consciousness and personality : he does not attempt to symbolize their appearance or working. The search for techniques to portray consciousness ends with Mollys and Benjys who are as much and as obviously hypotheses as 'sense-data', or the 'super-ego' and the 'id'.

* * *

The elaborate techniques of Joyce and Faulkner do not really seem to slip us into the alien consciousness : they rather symbolize or totemize it. ¹

Bayley's statements may be taken as representative of a case which is occasionally presented against the use of the techniques of stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue in the modern novel. Such a case usually invokes the absence of "characters" (with connotations of the great creations of Tolstoy or Dickens) in the novels under fire, and tends to rank the ability to create "characters" or to give them "life" as the unmistakable mark of the great novelist. There is a certain justness in such a contention : characters answer to some extent the reader's natural interest in other human beings. Carry this too far, however, and one begins to forget to give the proper emphasis to the illusion of life which the novelist, by the means proper to his medium, strives to create. An approach to the novel which elevates the characters over every other fictional element and which takes "life" as its highest aesthetic value will tend to ignore the novel's proper mode of existence as an as-if construct, a deliberate artifice, and will tend to forget that what Aristotle maintains about characters in Tragedy holds true for the novel as well, that "in a play ... they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action." ²

¹ John Bayley, The Characters of Love (London: Constable, 1960), p.35

² Aristotle On the Art of Poetry, trans. by Ingram Bywater (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1920), vi, p. 37.

If, then, the reader attempts to attend, in his reading of a novel, to "the joint force and full result of all",¹ he will view a character in relation to the other elements in the novel. If he wishes to speak as a critic, he will not speak so much of the character himself as of the resources of technique which the novelist employs in his creation of that character. The reader-as-critic will remind himself that "a character in a novel grows only out of the units of meaning, is made of the sentences either pronounced by the figure or pronounced about it."² And if one agrees (interpreting "poetry" to mean imaginative literature) with Robert Penn Warren that "nothing that is available in human experience is to be legislated out of poetry",³ then one surely cannot be prescriptive about the techniques by which the range of human experience is to be transmuted into art. A technique is therefore best judged in particular instances of its use, for, as Humphrey has indicated, "... there is no stream-of-consciousness technique. Instead, there are several quite different techniques which are used to present stream of consciousness."⁴ To lump Molly Bloom and Benjy Compson together in a sentence of dismissal, then, is to ignore the individuality of the works in which they respectively appear, and to pre-judge a technique without attending to the nuances of the particular author's use of several different techniques and their function in particular novels.

The achievements of the novelists of past centuries in the realm of characterization are undeniably great, but it hardly seems necessary to invoke a mystique of "life" to explain their greatness.

¹ Alexander Pope An Essay on Criticism l. 246.

² Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 153.

³ Selected Essays, p. 26.

⁴ Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 4. Hereafter Stream of Consciousness.

A more reasonable approach would be to examine the text and to observe the means, the "units of meaning", by which the character is made to grow before the reader's eyes. Such an approach would reveal that there were certain techniques which were best suited to a particular writer's way of presenting his world, and one would be compelled to acknowledge the relativity of technique. This, in turn, would allow the reader to recognise, with Humphrey, that "the attempt to create human consciousness in fiction is a modern attempt to analyze human nature."¹ Stream-of-consciousness literature, as Humphrey indicates, deals with one realm of life in particular : mental and spiritual experience - "both the whatness and the howness of it"² - and the object of the writers who work within this form is to "enlarge fictional art by depicting the inner states of their characters."² Indeed, "the problem of character depiction is central to stream-of-consciousness fiction", for "the great advantage, and consequently the best justification of this type of novel, rests on its potentialities for presenting character more accurately and more realistically." At the end of his first chapter, Humphrey concludes that writers of stream-of-consciousness fiction have opened up for fiction as a whole a new area of life :

"They have added mental functioning and psychic existence to the already established domain of motive and action."³

The stream-of-consciousness writer has his own particular version of the double impulse in character creation to individualize and to typify of which Robert Scholes writes,⁴ a problem which Humphrey distinguishes in his third chapter. Such a writer

¹ Stream of Consciousness, p. 6.

² Op.cit., p. 7.

³ Op.cit., p. 22.

⁴ See above, p. 31, n. 3.

"... has to manage to represent consciousness realistically by maintaining its characteristics of privacy (the incoherence, discontinuity, and private implications), and he has to manage to communicate something to the reader through this consciousness." ¹

In order to accomplish this difficult combination of aims, most stream-of-consciousness writers have used the same basic devices, which Humphrey lists as follows :

"... (1) suspension of mental content according to the laws of psychological association, (2) representation of discontinuity and compression by standard rhetorical figures, and (3) suggestion of multiple and extreme levels of meaning by images and symbols." ²

A passage from As I Lay Dying should supply a fairly simple illustration of the general techniques at work. In this novel Faulkner achieves most remarkable effects in the dramatization of several different consciousnesses,³ largely by means of an infinitesimally slow addition of detail to detail. In the passage which follows, the reader is made to share in a small measure Vardaman's confused groping towards an understanding of the meaning of his mother's death :

When they get it finished they are going to put her in it and then for a long time I couldn't say it. I saw the dark stand up and go whirling away and I said "Are you going to nail her up in it, Cash? Cash? Cash?" I got shut up in the crib the new door it was too heavy for me it went shut I couldn't breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air. I said "Are you going to nail it shut, Cash? Nail it? Nail it?"⁴

In the first sentence there is a clear example of a change of construction which leaves the first part of the sentence broken (anacoluthon) and suggests something of the discontinuity of the child's consciousness - a discontinuity which is heightened by the omission of punctuation in the third sentence as well as by the somewhat pleonastic apposition of

¹ Stream of Consciousness, p. 62.

² Op.cit., p. 64.

³ See Ch. IV below.

⁴ As I Lay Dying, p. 62.

"the new door it was too heavy for me". The lack of punctuation also welds this deliberately ungrammatical sentence into one unit of consciousness. The sense of privacy is created by the enigmatic statement, "I saw the dark stand up and go whirling away", as well as by the apparent illogicality of the jump from Vardaman's question to Cash to his recollection of being shut in the new crib. The connection is presumably a private association growing out of Vardaman's fear that his mother would suffocate in the coffin as he felt he had nearly suffocated in the new crib. Faulkner's inclusion of direct speech vividly indicates the ironic discrepancy between the thoughts and feelings in Vardaman's consciousness and how little he is able to articulate them. This particular passage does not seem to employ any deeply significant symbols, although it does create an aura of significance around Addie's coffin which is at once private and indirectly characteristic of the character involved.

Having established an outline of the general techniques which Faulkner, in common with other stream-of-consciousness writers, employs in the dramatisation of any consciousness, one may proceed to examine specific techniques of characterization by which Faulkner presents individual characters in his two stream-of-consciousness novels.

(a) Exit Narrator : Dramatic Methods of Characterization
in As I Lay Dying

The division of narrative phases in As I Lay Dying represents a marked departure from the conventional division into chapters found in most novels. As I Lay Dying consists of fifty-nine divisions, unequally distributed among fifteen narrators, who are also characters taking part in the action - the protracted burial journey of Addie Bundren - which they help to narrate. In this way, Faulkner would appear to have achieved an extremely high degree of authorial detachment, and, accordingly, his means of characterization in this novel are the

most indirect of the four novels under discussion, for no character is presented by means of commentary. What commentary there is comes indirectly, through the consciousnesses of other characters, whose comments, moreover, possess varying degrees of unreliability. On the other hand, Faulkner's sustained use of the interior monologue¹ gives the reader many more immediate insights into the narrators' characters - a greater intensity of "felt life" - than would be within a third-person narrator's power to convey in this particular instance. As in a play, the reader is compelled to rely entirely upon what the character-narrators tell one about themselves, upon what they unconsciously reveal about themselves (the possibilities of irony latent in the convention of the prose interior monologue are as great as those of its counterpart in poetry), and upon what one learns from what other character-narrators say or think about them. The reader's task is complicated by the a-chronological distribution of narrative phases and the apparent randomness with which one character-narrator replaces another. The total effect, perhaps, resembles nothing so much as a broken mosaic picture which the reader has to reconstruct for himself. This analogy is not quite accurate, of course, as the broken pieces are given a certain unity and continuity by the inexorable progress of the burial journey.

As in the novels discussed earlier in this chapter, Faulkner's choice of names² is a telling means of indirect characterization. Dewey Dell's name suggests only too strongly her rife fecundity, while "Cash" foreshadows the practical man, preoccupied with details of measurement and proportion. The neat pseudo-morality of pluses

¹ The term is used because a higher proportion of the characters' thoughts and feelings seems on or close to the verbal level - and, hence, more grammatical in structure - than those thoughts and feelings in the depths of consciousness which one plumbs in Quentin's section of The Sound and the Fury.

² See FIU, p. 206 : "The characters usually name themselves or the situation names the characters."

and minuses by which she reconciles marriage and adultery is reflected with some irony in Addie's name, and stronger irony is present in Faulkner's calling the outcast "Darl". Both biting and gentle humour are present in "that old green-eating tub of guts" being called "Peabody", and it is interesting that his character possesses a similar mixture of the same qualities.

There is a marked difference between the inner "ideal" language of each character's interior monologue and the language which each uses in conversation with the other.¹ Although the reader gathers most of his impressions of the character-narrators from the interior parts of their monologues, their direct speech nevertheless provides valuable clues to their characters. In the first instance, almost all their direct speech has a certain homogeneity of vocabulary and grammar, for almost all of them belong to the same community of poor hill farmers. Within this homogeneity, however, slight variations signal quite marked differences in character. Anse's two sentences uttered over Addie's death-bed - "'God's will be done,' he says. 'Now I can get them teeth.'"² - crystallize the amalgam of pseudo-piety and self-interest of which he is constituted. False piety is found also in the utterances of Cora Tull and Whitfield, to which Addie's deliberate, almost brutal secularization of religious phraseology serves as an effective foil, while revealing at the same time the intensity of her passionate nature. Significantly (as will be seen in Chapter Four), Cash is the narrator-character between whose internal and external utterances there is the least discrepancy.

Jewel (whose name implies the favouritism Addie shows him because he is her love-child) speaks the least of any of the characters, and narrates only one - and, for the action, relatively

¹ See Ch. IV below.

² AIID., p. 51.

appear to the reader (whether directly or modified by another character's version of them). In this way, for instance, the reader's first impression of Cora Tull as fairly harmless, if somewhat ostentatiously pious (in her interior dealings with herself and others), is modified by her unreliability as a narrator which is exposed by Dewey Dell.¹

The "ideal" inner voice which Faulkner uses in the interior monologues, if supported only by his careful variation of grammar, vocabulary, and idiom, might nevertheless tend to become homogeneous, and flatten out the sense of individuality which it is ideally fitted to create and sustain. To avoid such a flattening out, Faulkner has portrayed each of the Bundrens as subject to a particular obsession, which meets the structural demand that the interior monologue maintain the characteristic privacy of the consciousness which it is seeking to represent.² Furthermore, these characterizing obsessions serve as a motivic means of providing continuity to individual monologues in the midst of the apparently random shifts from narrator to narrator. Anse, as he reveals in the sentences quoted above,³ is concerned to get to Jefferson as much for the sake of getting a set of false teeth, as for honouring his promise to Addie. Dewey Dell judges people and events by how much they can help or hinder her in procuring an abortion;⁴ Vardaman is preoccupied with understanding his mother's death in relation to the dead fish, and, in the course of the journey, tends to concentrate on whether the toy-train will still be in the shop-window in Jefferson; while Cash, although preoccupied with

¹ Discussed in detail in Ch. IV, pp. 152-154 below.

² See p. 62 of this section.

³ See p. 65 above.

⁴ Cf. *ALLD*, p. 114: "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon."

the engineering problems which the coffin and wagon present, nevertheless hopes the journey will enable him to buy "one of them gramophones". Only Darl and Jewel appear to be without a selfish motive for getting to Jefferson : Darl, perhaps, because his intense and illuminating penetration of the opacity of other selves has caused his life to lose the name of action, and he has no interest in going anywhere; and Jewel, because he alone appears to be doing it out of love for his mother, giving up his horse to enable his father to buy another span of mules to complete the journey. Darl, however, is not without his obsession; as the book develops, stylistic and typographical clues combine to indicate that Jewel is Darl's obsession, and, it is suggested, the reason for this is that Addie lavished on Jewel the love which she had completely denied Darl. Thematically, this mixture of motives in the principal character-narrators (which the interior monologue is able to disclose without direct authorial intervention), while it heightens the verisimilitude of the book, is directly related to Faulkner's withholding of meaning so that the reader may experience to the full the human complexities of the situation, with a minimum of interference (or relief) from a point above or outside it.

Finally, a most important means of characterization in As I Lay Dying is Faulkner's use of figurative language. The unconventional ordering of the narrative, and the absence of an omniscient narrator result in a tendency to diffuseness in the presentation of the characters. Faulkner's use of figurative language is designed to counteract this diffuseness by providing moments of startling clarity in which an impression of a character is brought into sharp focus by a vivid image. Darl's comparison of Jewel to a "cigar-store Indian" on the first page is discussed in Chapter Three. This initial image of Jewel is modified in Darl's second section, where he thinks that Jewel and his horse "are like two figures carved for a tableau savage

in the sun."¹ But, when Jewel moves, "he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake".² Such insights are not confined to Darl, however, for Dewey Dell characterizes herself as "a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth",³ and Vernon Tull (in keeping with his function as an outside observer of the Bundrens) provides the reader with this rather surrealistic view of Anse :

"... standing there like a scarecrow, like he was a steer standing knee-deep in a pond and somebody come by and set the pond up on edge and he ain't missed it yet." ⁴

By indirect means such as these, then, Faulkner attempts to represent the consciousness of his characters, while at the same time he tries to communicate something to the reader by maintaining - albeit indirectly - his novelist's commitment to some form of characterization.

(b) Stream of Consciousness Techniques and the Return of the Narrator in The Sound and the Fury

Turning from the fifty-nine sections of As I Lay Dying to the four sections of The Sound and the Fury, the reader might surmise that he was faced with a much simpler work. This is not the case, however, because Faulkner has devoted each of the first three sections to the interior monologue of a single character, and has thus taxed his reader's retentiveness to the utmost. The intricate system of check and counter-check which operates between the brief sections of As I Lay Dying is replaced by the extended dramatisation of three separate consciousnesses. As the addition of section to section in As I Lay Dying gives the reader a sense of a growing depth in his impressions of

¹ ALD., p.12.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

the character, so in The Sound and the Fury Faulkner uses a scenic method of presentation within each monologue which provides the reader with a sense of the narrator-character's growth in time. Starting each monologue in the narrative present indicated by the section heading, Faulkner then ranges back in time to significant scenes in the character's past. Faulkner does not do this in a conventionally ordered way, however, but intersperses fragments of past scenes with fragments of the narrated present, and, in two of the three monologues, Faulkner manages to use the association of fragment with fragment and the shift from one to the other as significant of the character-narrator's preoccupations - and hence as an important means of characterization.

The complications of such a method are legion, and make strenuous demands on the reader's perseverance, and, because of a virtually total lack of authorial guidance which the conventions of the interior monologue demand, the reader frequently feels threatened with complete bafflement, and is often tempted to despair of making any sense of the book at all. It is no exaggeration to maintain that in the first three sections of The Sound and the Fury Faulkner's technique of deliberately withheld meaning (which is directly related to the reader's grasping of character) reaches its highest degree of development - and comes nearest to failing completely. The centrifugal force of these sections seems to demand some centripetal principle which will give some meaning to the suspended material. This structural demand is met by the fourth section, which is told by an omniscient narrator who employs (among several other related techniques) more direct methods of character presentation, and lays the foundation for a fruitful re-reading of the first three sections. In what follows, the indirect means of characterization will be discussed first.

Names of characters are given greater thematic prominence in The Sound and the Fury than in As I Lay Dying or Light in August.

This prominence has been recognised and explored by at least one critic,¹ and, to one familiar with the text, the reason does not seem far to seek, for the book may be regarded as an exploration of what it means to be (or not to be) a Compson :

"Blood, I says, governors and generals. It's a damn good thing we never had any kings and presidents; we'd all be down there at Jackson chasing butterflies." ²

In these words, Jason facetiously echoes his mother's idea that the Compson blood is "bad" (that is, decadent through aristocratic inbreeding): it is a paradoxical notion which, while attempting to account for the alcoholism of Mr. Compson, the promiscuity of Caddy, and the idiocy of Benjy, nevertheless implies that these are afflictions suffered as a result of the nobility of the line - a mixture of snobbishness and religious fatalism which is characteristic of Mrs. Compson. The book makes it quite clear that, in Jefferson, Miss., in 1928, the name Compson, whatever overtones it may carry of earlier "governors and generals" (Quentin's grandfather was known as "General Compson") denotes just that group of maimed people that the reader meets in the course of the book - people cut off from each other, and cut off from any source of more abundant life within themselves. The bearers of the name are united only in their inability to love.

¹ Joseph M. Backus, "Names of Characters in Faulkner's 'The Sound and the Fury,'" Names, VI (December, 1958), pp. 226 - 233. One significance of "Candace" which Backus ignores is the mis-translation in the Authorised Version of Acts 8:27 : "And he arose and went : and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure" The association of eunuch with Candace is relevant to Benjy's plight; Caddy is a "queen" in more than one sense of the word; Benjy has "charge" of Caddy's memory, which would seem to be "all her treasure." The use which Faulkner makes of the Holy Bible throughout his work would seem to support Acts 8:27 as a more likely (and less erudite) source than Ovid or Chaucer.

² S&F, p. 286.

Ironically, Mrs. Compson perceives the lack within the members of her family, though she does not perceive the same lack within herself, and attempts to dissociate herself from it, by repeatedly invoking her maiden name, and separating Jason from the rest of her children :

... you have always found excuses for your own blood only Jason can do wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson while your own daughter my little daughter my baby girl she is she is no better than that when I was a girl I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not....¹

And it was her brother, Maury Bascomb, for whom she originally named Benjy. The reader is left to decide what were her motives for changing his name to Benjamin : did she wish to dissociate Benjy's idiocy from any connection with her family? did she perceive her brother's worthlessness, and wish to preserve Benjy from it? is she trying to change Benjy's luck, as one of the negroes suggests?² is it a vain attempt to infuse some religion into the family because "Benjamin came out of the bible.... It's a better name for him than Maury was," as Caddy suggests?³ and how much credence should one give Versh's sinister suggestion that, by changing Benjy's name, "They making a bluegum out of [him]"?⁴ Whatever Mrs. Compson's motives for changing Benjy's name, Faulkner's use of the "name-change" fragments would seem to suggest the traumatic effect of this on Benjy. Significantly, too, as Volpe's table⁵ indicates, the name-change fragments only occur after the castration operation, suggesting, perhaps, that there is an analogy between the violence done to his identity early in life by the changing of his name, and the violence

¹ S&F., p. 127.

² Op.cit., p. 109.

³ Op.cit., p. 71.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 84.

⁵ Volpe, Reader's Guide, pp. 364-365.

which is later done to his physical identity.

In her attitude to her own name, Dilsey provides a foil to Mrs. Compson's skittish use of her maiden name and her misguided attempts to change Benjy's identity with his name. In this respect, as in so many others, Dilsey evinces the somewhat simplistic fundamentalist Christianity from which, as Faulkner suggests, she derives her strength of character :

Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.

How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.

It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.

Can you read it, Caddy said.

Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here.¹

It is Dilsey, too, who perceives that the name Compson comes to symbolize a particular group of responses to life (of which Mrs. Compson's remark " 'Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things.' "² is perhaps typical), when she tells her son, Luster, that he " 'got jes es much Compson devilment in [him] es any of em.' "³

In Quentin's section, the Biblical connotations of Benjy's name are made explicit ("Benjamin the child of mine old age held hostage into Egypt. O Benjamin."⁴), and fragments of this sentence appear and re-appear in Quentin's stream of consciousness, usually related (after the associative, a-logical fashion of Quentin's consciousness) with reflections on the splintered nature of the Compson family, and the

¹ S&F., p. 71.

² Op.cit., p. 7.

³ Op.cit., p. 344.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 211. But cf. FIU., p. 18, for Faulkner's free use of Biblical story.

absence of any maternal qualities in Mrs. Compson. This further strengthens the reader's impression of the family's betrayal of Benjy.

The Southern obsession with "family" and "good old names" is not confined to Mrs. Compson. It is used as a motive in the comic characterization of Mrs. Bland (whom Shreve describes as "'cruel fate in eight yards of apricot silk and more metal pound for pound than a galley slave and the sole owner and proprietor of the unchallenged peripatetic john of the late Confederacy.'"¹), who had never been able to forgive Spode "for having five names, including that of a present English ducal house."²

Comparatively little is made of the first names of the other Compson children, though there is a general appropriateness about them. Candace³ is sufficiently oriental in flavour to suggest something of Caddy's Cleopatra-like appetite for men, while Quentin's name is suggestive of the romantic idealist in him. It is tempting, but not really accurate, to toy with an ironic pun on Jason's name which would allude to the way his niece fleeced him of his carefully hoarded and dishonourably obtained gold. Perhaps all three names might be seen, in their unusualness, as suggestive of the mother's aristocratic pretensions.

In a book such as The Sound and the Fury, in which the author-narrator has chosen to disappear into the extended interior monologues of three characters before appearing in the relatively omniscient narration of the fourth section, a character's speech may reasonably be considered a most important indirect means of characterization, for, if the "absent" author is skilful enough in his handling of a

¹ S&F, p. 131.

² Op.cit., p. 113.

³ See p. 71, n.1, above.

character's idiosyncrasies of speech, he can make the character "speak" directly to the reader, and in this way bring his method of characterization very close to the purely dramatic. The term "fragments of scenes" has been used earlier,¹ and one may now appreciate the accuracy of this expression : from the point of view of Faulkner's depiction of the minor characters, the separate consciousnesses of Ben, Quentin, and Jason become stages on which the other characters appear and act out their roles.² The Negroes are given a distinct and somewhat stereotyped way of speaking, and this affords the reader the aid of easily recognised "Negro-speech", while heightening the verisimilitude. However, it is what they say (and, in particular, what they say about Ben) and the mixture of hostility or affection which they evince which distinguishes one from the other, and Dilsey from the rest. Among the minor White characters, Mrs. Bland has an easily recognised and individual way of expressing herself. However, the major achievement of this particular means of characterization is Mrs. Compson. Not only has Faulkner superbly contrived a number of "give-away" remarks such as her gem about dreading Christmas,³ but he uses practically every word she utters to strengthen the reader's impression of her as a self-righteous, self-pitying, physical and spiritual hypochondriac. Because stream-of-consciousness frees him from maintaining verisimilitude of dialogue by keeping speeches short, Faulkner can give Mrs. Compson an uninterrupted soliloquy of just over two pages in Quentin's section,³ which serves as full a purpose of indirect characterization as any poetic dramatic monologue, and establishes unforgettably the tone, cadences and idiom of Mrs. Compson's speech.

¹ See p. 70 above.

² This is an oversimplification, for the consciousnesses of the three brothers are not abstract frames, but, by means of methods discussed below, are felt to be living, suffering entities in implicit interaction with those whose doings they recall or relate.

³ S&F, pp. 126 - 128.

When one turns from speech to action, one finds that the Compsons are characterized as much by the absence of rewarding action as by the presence of their speech. Ben's actions, although they are not entirely purposeless, are tied to such a limited range of stimuli that they cannot be said to contribute materially to his survival or to the welfare of others. Quentin's actions are either futile, such as his breaking of the watch glass, or the product of his quixotic chivalry; but more important than either of these in his characterization is the reader's realization that in Quentin's section, words, phrases, thoughts are of far greater moment than actions. Jason's section, on the other hand, is full of frenetic action - the "strutting and fretting" of the Macbeth passage - which, however, proves as futile as Quentin's gestures and lacks the redeeming quality of an unselfish motive. Mrs. Compson, more often than not, is to be found in bed, while the only action one sees Mr. Compson perform is his furtive operation with the side-board. Dilsey seems to be the only person capable of performing actions which have tangible results for other people : she alone manages to get things done, to get the Compsons through one more day.

In any work which employs stream-of-consciousness techniques as fully as The Sound and the Fury, one of the author's principal means of indirectly characterizing the most important figures will be through their thoughts. Therefore, it seems rather unfair of Richard Chase, after he has made the valuable observation that, "In Faulkner how a character talks makes all the difference."¹ (one immediately thinks of Mrs. Compson), to base his denigration of Faulkner's characterization of Quentin on the fact that "Faulkner clearly does not know how Quentin sounds."² One must admit that a faulty ear for a character's

¹ The American Novel and its Tradition (London: Geo. Bell and Sons, 1958), p. 230.

² Loc.cit.

speech might have led to a serious imbalance in a work which includes such easily recognised voices as those of Mrs. Compson, Dilsey (and some of the other Negroes) and Jason, had not Faulkner found other means of presenting Quentin to the reader. One must tread warily, however, in the matter of omissions in this book, for they often prove to have been deliberately designed for some particular contrastive effect. Speech and action suit such characters as the three names above, and are appropriate means of characterizing them. But Quentin's physical presence is an attenuated one : as the date of his section and his suicide isolate him from the narrated present of the other three sections, so the high degree of mental activity precludes him from much direct physical participation in the speech and action of the book. To portray the complex workings of Quentin's mind, Faulkner has employed a wide range of typographical and rhetorical conventions,¹ and these conventions are the means whereby Faulkner creates an individual inner life as rich and varicous as the relatively external life of speech, action and motivation of earlier fictional heroes.

Faulkner's arrangement of the narrative phases in the book proves of the utmost importance when one examines the relationships between characters as an indirect clue to their natures. John Bayley² provides a useful opening remark : "The form of the novel has always made it potentially solipsistic, and now it openly embraces solipsism as its necessity and its creed." While one can hardly say in the face of the evidence provided by the structure of The Sound and the Fury that this novel, although employing highly developed varieties of stream-of-consciousness technique, embraces solipsism as its creed, Bayley is justified in associating stream-of-consciousness and solipsism - in Faulkner's work at any rate. In each of the first three sections it is

¹ See Ch. V, below, pp. 206-222.

² The Characters of Love, p. 289.

the narrating "I" that dominates. Others are seen through Ben's, Quentin's or Jason's eyes and only in terms of what they mean to each. They hold little value in themselves; their dialogues, scenes, relationships are introduced, fragmented, discarded solely as the narrator's private preoccupations dictate. Each narrator is given a different day's doings to recount, so that they do not seem to share a contemporaneous existence, and in Quentin's case this is heightened by a distance of eighteen years, and a different present setting - Cambridge, Massachusetts. The first three sections are unquestionably solipsistic : there is no dialogue between the three narrator-brothers. It is the function of the fourth section to serve as an implicit measure of the degree of isolation which is present in the first three.

The most indirect, but sometimes the most revealing, means of characterization is Faulkner's use of symbolism. In Benjy's case one thinks of the cornflower-blue of his eyes which somehow see so much misery and deceit, his habit of holding fast to a broken flower (at his last appearance, it is a narcissus), and the attraction for him of an open fire, the pasture (sold for a golf course), and the mirror (and later, the lighter part of the wall-paper where the mirror used to be before, presumably, it was sold). Quentin's private symbolism, as well as the depths of his consciousness which it portrays, is discussed in Chapter Five. Mrs. Compson is hardly separable from her hot-water bottle and her camphor-soaked cloth, while Dilsey's somewhat bizarre Easter clothes remind the reader of the limitations of her human situation.

Throughout the first three sections Faulkner maintains a remarkable high degree of reticence in helping the reader to adopt an attitude toward the individual characters. One meets characters in the making as one glimpses them in action in scene-fragments; one is immersed in the flux of three different consciousnesses in which few characters seem to have any assignable value, any determinable stature. So completely

has the authorial voice been drowned by the individual voices that the reader (and, certainly, one who is tackling the book for the first time) is faced with a confusion of conflicting views by the time he reaches the end of Jason's section. Seldom has the form of a novel seemed to demand so loudly some measure of authoritative intervention: book and reader alike need the fourth section and the clarification of perspective which the relatively omniscient third person narrator brings. Faulkner does not destroy the book's richness by providing easy answers to the profound questioning of the value of existence which the first three sections adumbrate, but he does provide certain clues to the characters' relative value which make a re-perusal of the first three sections an increasingly rewarding experience. It may not solve very much to be told that Ben's wailing "might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets"¹, but it is re-assuring to have it objectively described - however hyperbolically - and given some significance other than just sound. And in the description of Dilsey at the Easter service, Faulkner, under cover of describing Dilsey's face, suggests what has given that face its character:

"Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time."²

In the fourth section, too, Jason is seen through other eyes:

- Jason told him, his sense of injury and impotence feeding upon its own sound, so that after a time he forgot his haste in the violent cumulation of his self justification and his outrage.

** ** ** **

"He repeated his story, harshly recapitulant, seeming to get an actual pleasure out of his outrage and impotence."³

¹ S&F., p. 359.

² S&F., p. 368.

³ Op.cit., p. 378.

But if Jason, in such direct characterization, is deprived of the slender appeal which his sardonic humour has for the reader in the third section, his mother fares rather better, and the reader is made to modify his otherwise completely detrimental impression of her :

"Like so many cold, weak people, when faced at last by the incontrovertible disaster she exhumed from somewhere a sort of fortitude, strength."¹

In As I Lay Dying, Faulkner avoids over-taxing his reader by keeping the narrative phases brief, and by clearly distributing each section to a particular narrator, who features as a recognisable character in the sections belonging to other narrators. This simple but effective design avoids the necessity for more authoritative guidance. The plan of The Sound and the Fury, although simpler in its divisions into four major sections, is infinitely more complex within each of the first three sections, where the varieties of consciousness itself are explored, and the forward movement of the narrative present (which, at times, virtually disappears) is impeded by a highly complicated series of flash-backs. As a result, the reader's apprehension of the characters is fragmentary and must be overwhelmingly deductive. In the welter of detail with which the reader is presented without the benefit of a conventional chronology, it is almost impossible, on a first reading, to select those incidents and images which are essential to a grasp of the characters' natures. However, Faulkner makes the reader work his way through three separate consciousnesses experiencing three separate days before granting him the reassurance of an omniscient narrator and relatively direct characterization. Paradoxically enough, the ultimate effect of that more direct characterization is to send the reader back to the richness and depth of the flow of the affective life, with which the first three sections abound, with a sense of the

¹ Op.cit., p. 373.

sheer inability of more conventional means of characterization to give one the feel of what it must be like to be a Ben, a Quentin, or a Jason Compson.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TREATMENT OF SPACE : FAULKNER'S USE OF HIS
"OWN LITTLE POSTAGE STAMP OF NATIVE SOIL"

If it is reasonable to suppose that the novelist offers a world rather than a case history of a character or an event, then in that world - as in the "real" world - the reader will expect some co-ordinates by which he may orient himself. Two basic co-ordinates of orientation in the non-fictional world are the answers to the questions "Where?" and "When?". There does not seem to be any good reason why, for the purposes of literary discussion, one may not use the same concepts of "space" and "time", in order to discuss the laws which govern any particular novelist's "world". The concept of literary time, its presence and treatment in literature, has received distinguished attention;¹ the concept of literary space - as such - has not. Spatial elements in a work of literature - where they are dealt with at all - are usually dealt with under the concept of "setting". This concept suffers from several inadequacies, not the least of which is that it is frequently used to suggest both the physical and temporal background of the work of art, and that it is semantically tied to one aspect of literary space, while virtually excluding the other related functions.² The temporal background of a novel is more logically dealt with as one aspect of literary time, while "space", which is capable of including a discussion of "setting" while being at the same time capable of including other functions of space (realistic, atmospheric, symbolic), would seem to be a preferable

¹ See, e.g.: A.A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1965); Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960); Margaret Church, Time and Reality : Studies in Contemporary Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

² Cf. the Glossaries provided by Barbara Pannwitt [The Art of Short Fiction (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1964) pp. 475-476].

term for this aspect of the novelist's world.

In a very general sense, the notion of some spatial element is essential for one's imaginative apprehension of the fictional world, for, without some indications of a "where" (all be they mere signals of an extension towards some "where") one cannot imagine either characters or events, which, just like their "real" counterparts, have to be thought of as existing or taking place somewhere. The creation of a fictive spatial dimension is not simply a trick of the strong imagination of poets and lunatics, but a fundamental part of the process of reading imaginative literature - a process which transforms the one-dimensional printed page into a three-dimensional "world".

Most writers are not content simply to locate their work "somewhere", but provide their readers with an abundance of particularities, of spatial details. And it is important to remember that the writer need not confine himself to appeals to the sense of sight; smells and sounds, too, have a space-filling quality which may tell the reader much. (In this connection one may recall the smell of the bath-water at Clongowes and its importance in young Steven Dedalus's mind.)¹

While the general spatial location of characters and events is one aspect which the world offered by a work of art may seem to share with the non-fictional world, one must remember that the particular evocation of space in any one work is the sum of all spatial details in that work, and is therefore merely a highly artificial artistic selection of spatial details from the "real" world. Moreover, in contradistinction to "real" space which can be measured by itself, fictional space has to be measured in terms of its degree of integration within the total artistic structure and in terms of its

Roy R. Male [Types of Short Fiction (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 526-530]. A more adequate definition is to be found in HBL, p. 453. Nevertheless, the term remains too specific.

¹ See James Joyce A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

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relationship to the central ideas of the work.

For the purpose of measuring fictional space, it is often helpful to distinguish three aspects: realistic, atmospheric, and symbolic. All three aspects are fundamentally interrelated, and should not be thought of as categorically distinct, but rather simply as differing in emphasis. The description of Miss Rosa's house on the opening page of Absalom, Absalom!, for instance, includes details which at once establish it as a fictionally "real" place, create a stifling atmosphere, and perform the important symbolic function of indirectly characterizing the inmate.

Faulkner's own words to Jean Stein¹ are a fairly accurate description of the early development of his treatment of space. It is not until Sartoris that the lineaments of what was to become Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County become recognizable, though it could be argued that their prototypes could be found in the anonymous Southern town of Soldier's Pay. In the first and the third novels, too, Faulkner treats space directly, in set passages which tend to become somewhat purple when the narrator shows a sentimental fondness for details which in no way relate to the central ideas of the book. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that when Faulkner moves outside Yoknapatawpha County (as he does in Mosquitoes, Pylon, and A Fable²) his novelistic touch seems less sure. On the other hand, his use of Yoknapatawpha material does not guarantee his success either; one could hardly claim that Sanctuary or Intruder in the Dust possess the artistic merits of The Sound and the Fury or Light in August.

In the four novels with which the present investigation is principally concerned, however, Faulkner's treatment of space tends to be less direct. The map of Yoknapatawpha County was first published

¹ Malcolm Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 141.

² New York: Random House, 1954.

in Absalom, Absalom! (1936), but, even without the map, it is obvious from Sartoris and the novels that followed it that Faulkner had early established a mental "map" of detailed complexity. No second reading is required for one to realise that the spatial details are all drawn from the same imaginary town (Jefferson) and the same imaginary county (Yoknapatawpha - although it is scarcely ever named), which in turn belongs to the real state of Mississippi, of the United States of America. The effects of this specific localisation are two-fold : the invention of town and country emphasizes that the characters and events are not to be interpreted literally, but are imaginative constructs which must be interpreted imaginatively ("Jefferson" signals Coleridge's "acknowledged total difference"¹ - an a priori condition for the existence of an imitation of life, rather than a copy); yet the deliberate setting of this imaginary county within a real state emphasises the realistic aspects of the work, and tends to heighten the social relevance of what Faulkner is saying. "Social relevance", however, can be one of those pseudo-critical will-o'-the-wisps which can lead novelist and critic alike into the fens of realistic social documentation, where they often lose sight of the need for imaginative transformation of the raw material. In Faulkner's best work, what mediates between his material and its presentation in the novels is his feeling for the novel as form. Faulkner's treatment of space, then, is subject to his overall concern for the design of a particular work, and, just as the existence of the whole county is implied but never fully explored, so the deliberate withholding of meaning points to the absence in the novels of any simple "social message", or, for that matter, any "message" that is in any sense simply social.

¹ See J. Shawcross, ed., Biographia Literaria, II, pp. 253-263.

1. Space in Light in August

The presence of the omniscient narrator throughout Light in August probably accounts for the reader's sense of the density of spatial details, which the narrator often presents directly. In the other three novels, spatial details often must be rendered indirectly through the consciousnesses of individual narrator-characters, and therefore the creation of verisimilitude or of atmosphere becomes a more fragmentary, subjective matter. But in Light in August, the South is there, in depth and in detail, surrounding all the characters; it is in the air they breathe, the houses they live in, the woods in which they walk, hide, or are pursued, the roads on which they travel, whether in "the hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon"¹ or at night, "the fecund earth now coolly suspirant."² This sense of the abiding earth as a presence brings a measure of reassurance and relief to the reader compelled to contemplate the horrific events of the novel.

The column of smoke from Joanna Burden's house is the first hint of disaster which troubles the placid surface of the first chapter. In Chapter Two, it is described as "straight as a monument on the horizon", and, in fact, contributes a great deal to the atmosphere of foreboding, as well as being the only monument which Joanna Burden will ever have in Jefferson.

However, it is in those details in which verisimilitude, atmosphere and a symbolic function are all fused that Faulkner shows his skill at simultaneously suggesting a meaning while avoiding directness. An example of this is, of course, Hightower's sign - "which he calls his monument"³ - on which the words "Art Lessons

¹ LIA, p. 7.

² Ibid., p. 246.

³ Ibid., p. 49.

Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards Photographs Developed"¹

suggest the dilettante element in Hightower's character as nothing else except the Tennyson passage² does. The condition of the sign indicates something of Hightower's irrelevancy and his isolation from the life of the community, while the letters "D.D." after his name, which the town glosses as "Done Damned", serve to indicate in this way the attitude which the town has adopted towards him.

Another example of spatial detail used as a means of indirect characterization is Miss Burden's plantation house. The significance of the large house has been described by Norman Holmes Pearson :

It is not unnatural that mansions should figure as symbolically in the South as they did in New England. Seven pillars are as significant of pride as seven gables. One might indeed write a history of American literature focussed on the great house not as an adornment to society but as an affront to community.³

Joanna Burden's house is therefore symbolic of her isolation, while its unkempt grounds with their tangled shrubberies suggest the dark involutions of her sexual appetites, and the "barren acres" of the ruined plantation suggest the sterility of the life into which her rigidly categorising attitudes have led her. In this way, Faulkner's use of spatial details may be seen to mirror a character's frame of mind as well as to suggest where that character stands in relation to one of the novel's major themes : the interplay between isolation and involvement in a community.⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 50.

² Ibid., p. 278.

³ "The American Writer and the Feeling for Community," American Studies Inaugural Lecture, University of Alabama, March 20, 1962, (University of Alabama, 1962), p. 10. Italics mine. Repr. English Studies, XLIII (October, 1962), 403-412.

⁴ Further discussion of the use in this book of spatial details - to suggest a character's sense of time - will be found in Chapter Five.

2. Countries of the mind : (a) The Treatment
of Space in As I Lay Dying

Faulkner's treatment of space in As I Lay Dying is governed by the fragmented point of view which determines the book's total structure. This results in the breaking of the book's physical background into an unusually large number of semi-discrete particles, consisting of the private "spaces" of the individual narrator's consciousnesses. The effect of this fragmentation is to make the spatial element in the book contribute to the book's grotesque dimension. A coherent physical background is one of the "ordered certitudes"¹ which contribute to one's sense of familiarity with the world of a novel : its absence significantly heightens the reader's sense that the world of As I Lay Dying is an estranged world, a world in which life is to be feared, when, instead of a conclusion, death brings the protracted agony of an impossible burial journey.

In this contribution to the novel's structure, space and time together subserve point of view. But, in a sense, space is almost more important than time in this instance, for, although Addie's time is at an end, her demand to be buried in Jefferson means her existence in space (emphasised by the presence of the coffin, its inescapable odour, and its attendant vultures) must be unnaturally prolonged. In fact, Addie's demand underlines her fundamental alienation and isolation; her refusal to be buried in Bundren ground indicates a conviction that it is unhallowed: Addie has marked out her own hallowed space, and it is a space which is separated (as it turns out) by every natural disaster known to man from the familiar space of the Bundrens. With the collapse of the bridge, the Bundrens are compelled to enter an alien land where movement is so slow that it seems non-existent. Space is the Bundren's enemy, for it is the sheer intolerable length of miles

¹ S & F, p. 115.

which has to be traversed, the towns which have to be passed through, the night-stops that have to be made, which add so much humiliation and suffering to their absurd journey. Perhaps it is the sheer intractability of space which Darl is trying to convey in his obscure remarks on space and time :

It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between.¹

The absence of an omniscient narrator is responsible for the fact that space in this novel can only be indirectly revealed - through the consciousnesses of the individual narrators. As a result, the atmospheric and symbolic functions of spatial details tend to be emphasized more than the realistic aspects. For example, the almost mathematical precision of Darl's opening description, loaded as it is with details which encourage the reader in mentally establishing a "realistic" space, are seen, on a second reading, to be working as part of Faulkner's indirect depiction of Darl's character. To the reader who has completed the book, they serve as important early signals of Darl's jealous obsession with Jewel, and it is seen that, in this passage, he is more concerned with the details of his spatial relationship to Jewel than with an objective description of the novel's physical setting. In a general sense, too, Faulkner uses his character-narrator's attitudes to, or association with, objects as a means of indirect characterization. One thinks of Cash and his tools - or Vardaman and his sinister abuse of them; of Jewel and his horse; of Vardaman and the fish, or the toy train; even more significantly, though, Addie, in her simplistic morality, treats her children as things to be added, subtracted, or begotten for the sake of cancelling each other out. With an ambiguity which scorns the oversimplification of even one aspect of his technique, however,

¹ AULD, p. 139.

Faulkner has both Cash and Darl offer meticulously detailed spatial information. In Darl's case, this obsession with detail temporarily conceals his insanity, while it is only by attending to the details of his carpenter's craft that Cash - much like one of Hemingway's heroes - maintains a tenuous grasp on his sanity.

More specifically, the functions of spatial details in As I Lay Dying are directly related to Faulkner's use of stream-of-consciousness techniques. Spatial details function symbolically to portray levels of consciousness which are too private to be conveyed literally. The workings of Addie's consciousness, for example, are largely conveyed by this means. In the passages that follow, it is interesting to note the growth and fusion of two originally separate images : the first image, that of the wild geese, originally representing her loneliness and frustrated sexuality, becomes fused with the second image of the thin vertical line and the horizontal earth (by which Addie symbolizes her perception of the disparity between words and deeds), and the two images together suggest at once her agonised awareness, her frustrated sexuality, and her extreme isolation. The "simplicity" of the images - the one drawn from her familiar world, the other a simple diagram - is entirely consistent with the limitations of her mind (she is no Quentin Compson), while the symbolic power of the images leaves the reader deeply troubled by his insight into her predicament.

In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring. ¹

... I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other....²

¹ AILD, p. 162.

² Ibid., p. 165.

I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people's lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.¹

The structure of the novel is such that one might speak of it as being singularly spatially constructed. The different "points of view" are just that : the reader is presented with a succession of close-ups and panoramic shots which amount to stages along the route of Addie's journey from the farm to Jefferson. The principal leaps in the narrative are spatial, not temporal, and only the reader (and the absent author) can look on this broken mosaic with anything like a total vision.

2. Countries of the Mind : (b) Space in
The Sound and the Fury

In the first three sections of The Sound and the Fury, the reader is trapped in the private spaces of the consciousnesses of Ben, Quentin, and Jason Compson. Only in the fourth section of the book does one find any objectively described space in which one may orient oneself, and where one may try to bring the blurred details into clearer focus.

In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner depicts from within the final stages in the collapse of a once-fine Southern family of the landowning class. Partly because the family's wealth had been derived from its estates, and partly because it seems to be a general human tendency to judge wealth and social status in terms of acres owned or

¹ AIID., p. 166.

objects possessed, Faulkner relies fairly heavily on the symbolic function of spatial details in this novel. The overall effect of the spatial signals is the creation of a landscape of death which imposes severe restrictions on the freedom of its inhabitants.

The first I-narrator the reader meets - Ben - is the most obviously restricted character. His idiocy confines him to the Compson property, his favourite part of which he loses when his family sell the twenty-acre pasture (the last remnant of the once famous Compson "mile") to a golf club to pay for Caddy's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard. His movements around the remaining "lot" include regular trips to his miniature graveyard, and periodic glimpses of the ditch where Nancy's bones lie. When Benjy leaves the property by himself - either to deliver a note to Mrs. Patterson, or to chase the schoolgirls - disaster follows; after the latter episode, he is castrated. The only journeys he makes are his weekly trips to the Jefferson grave-yard in the broken-down surrey; on these occasions he has to pass the Confederate monument on its right, a condition which, in itself, is a powerful symbol of his extreme and illogical physical confinement.

Mentally, too, Benjy is space-tied. The opening paragraph of his section (in which there are some fourteen prepositional phrases indicating direction and place) indicates the extent to which Benjy thinks in terms of spatial relationships. Lacking abstract concepts with which to express his perceptions, Ben relies on similes drawn from the physical world - such as "Caddy smelled like trees" - to express his sense of right and wrong. However, Ben does have a deeper relationship with nature than the rest of the Compson family, and in this respect, as in his love of an open fire (with all its related associations of life and warmth), he is seen to be superior to his "saner" relatives. It would be hard to find a more moving example of Faulkner's use of spatial details in characterization than the broken

narcissus (splinted with "a twig and two bits of string") which Benjy is seen holding on the Easter Sunday trip to the grave-yard, or the soiled, yellowed, and cracked white satin slipper which is all that he can cling to of the beloved sister he has lost.

Compared with the other members of his family, Quentin would appear to be the least confined. He has "got away from it all" to university; the present physical setting of his section is in and around Cambridge and Boston ("where the best of thought Father said clings like the dead ivy vines upon the old dead brick..."),¹ and this serves as an indirect clue to Quentin's intellectualism. But, for all his distance in space from Jefferson and his family, and despite the detachment which one might assume his intelligence would bring him, Quentin is as much tied to Jefferson landscapes of the past as Benjy is confined to those of the present. The degree to which Quentin is not free to live in the present is indicated by the nearly two hundred flashbacks which occur in his interior monologue. A sight, smell, or sound may serve as the catalyst for a change of scene, and Quentin's mind is often seen at work squeezing the maximum amount of grief out of such physical details as roses or honeysuckle. Around such items Quentin's mind gathers hosts of private connotations which become far more important for him than the things themselves. In this sense, one might say that Quentin was less restricted to the physical world than Benjy, but this is only because he is that much more bound within the narrow confines of an obsessed mental world of his own making. A brief examination of the opening paragraph of Quentin's section reveals a preponderance of abstract concepts and conceptual (or associational) relationships. The one important spatial item is, of course, the watch, which simultaneously ties Quentin to the past (not merely his own, but his family's as well) and reminds him of the inexorable onward movement

¹ S & F, pp. 117 - 118.

of the present. As Quentin's monologue progresses, the reader is enabled to see how this important spatial detail becomes the objective correlative of the multiple significances of the theme in this section, as well as in the book as a whole.

Jason is less restricted (both mentally and physically) than his brothers. He is free to come and go at will; he has a job in a store in Jefferson, and owns an automobile. It would appear that his very freedom in the physical world is the condition of his limitation, because he appears to desire nothing beyond the pursuit, possession, and retention of physical objects. He is the victim of his own obsessive materialism; his attitude to his family (both its possessions and its reputation) is : "Somebody's got to hold on to what little we have left..."¹ His day is consumed in the futile pursuit of more money (his many visits to the telegraph office); in the embezzlement of the money which Caddy sends for Quentin (in which operation he also dupes his mother); and in the furious cross-country pursuit of his niece and her boy-friend, in which he is thwarted and tricked. But while he judges everything and everyone in terms of how much they are costing him, and while his pursuit of financial success eludes him with ironic justness, the source of his frustration, as the omniscient narrator of the fourth section reveals, lies far deeper :

Of his niece he did not think at all, nor of the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it. ²

Beside an obsession so abstract and solipsistic that it is capable of reducing people to symbols of something which never existed, Ben's spatial confinement and Quentin's mental confinement would appear to have some positive value, for at least their consciousnesses (whatever

¹ S & F, p. 257.

² Ibid., p. 382.

they did with them) allowed the existence of physical objects per se. To this extent at least, Ben and Quentin seem to admit the reality of something outside themselves. In Jason's section, no physical detail seems to have reality besides the voice "harshly recapitulant, seeming to get an actual pleasure out of his outrage and impotence."¹

Like her children, Mrs. Compson is confined, if not to her bed, then to the house, except for the trips she makes to the grave-yard. These excursions symbolize the direction in which the family as an entity is moving - towards death and disintegration. Her confinement to her bed-room is self-imposed, and the camphor-soaked cloth, the hotwater bottle, the half-drawn blinds and the black dressing-gown are the spatial symbols not only of her hypochondria but of a sick withdrawal from involvement in life itself. Her absence is felt by all her children; it is articulated (characteristically) by Quentin :
"My little sister had no. If I could say Mother. Mother".²

Mrs. Compson herself, however, feels that her withdrawal is something positive :

"Yes," Mother says, "I suppose women who stay shut up like I do have no idea what goes on in this town."

"Yes," I says, "They don't."

"My life has been so different from that," Mother says.
 "Thank God I don't know about such wickedness. I don't even want to know about it. I'm not like most people."³

Quite clearly, Mrs. Compson identifies her spatial isolation with freedom from evil - or even the knowledge of evil. What she fails to perceive is that, although her withdrawal from the world may have kept her free from evil, it has, at the same time, deprived her of the power of doing good.

¹ S&F ., p. 378.

² Ibid., p. 117.

³ Ibid., p. 323.

Mrs. Compson's place is partly taken by her daughter, Caddy, whose positive attributes are suggested by Benjy's association of her with trees. Her weakness - sexual promiscuity - is suggested by her muddy drawers (Dilsey remarks: "It done soaked clean through onto you."),¹ and Quentin's association of her with honeysuckle and the arbor in which she met her lovers, as well as with "Roses. Nor virgins like dogwood, milkweed. ... Roses. Cunning and serene."² As a result of her promiscuity, Caddy has to leave home, depriving her family of the good of which she was capable. In fact, Mrs. Compson, mistakenly believing the house to be some sort of hallowed ground (the technique of the novel makes clear how far it is from being a true home worthy of a consecrated hearth), banishes Caddy to a life of vagrancy, and, with her, banishes her liveliness and affection.

The only other character who has the ability to act positively is Dilsey, though even she is restricted by her servant's position and by her negritude. She does not, however, allow these restrictions to prevent her from doing what she can to keep the Compsons together. She makes her kitchen a refuge for Ben and Miss Quentin. Her control of time is symbolised by her ability to interpret the one-handed clock - an ironic counterpart to General Compson's watch from which Quentin tries to escape. Her ability to give (despite the cost to herself) is symbolised by the birthday cake she makes for Ben with ingredients bought with her own money. Instead of following the Compson propensity for visiting the cemetery, Dilsey goes to the Negro church on Easter Sunday, and takes Ben with her. Her way lies through the Negro section of town, which is described in all its shabby detail by the omniscient narrator of the fourth section. Placed above this area, on an eminence, "a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like

¹ S&F ., p. 91.

² Ibid., p. 95.

a painted church",¹ and it is in this church, which combines an effect of theatrical illusion ("a painted cardboard set") with a sense of something fixed and immune from time ("ultimate edge of the flat earth"), that Dilsey hears the preacher from St. Louis. The physical details of the church (including the tawdry Christmas bell) are set down with great care, and serve the important function of keeping this most difficult section firmly rooted in physical reality. Although much that is positive stems from this particular place and Dilsey's experience in it, it is never sentimentalized. Similarly, the preacher's physical appearance disappoints the congregation at first, but, as his voice modulates into negroid tones, he is seen as "a worn small rock", and this emphasizes his spiritual strength and solidity. And, in the climactic experience which transforms the congregation momentarily into a true community, his whole attitude is described as "that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment". In a sense, this is what all present are able to do; Dilsey especially, with her capacity for loving and enduring, transcends the shabbiness of her racial and social stigma in actively tending the disintegrating Compson family. From the point of insight gained in the Negro church, the reader is returned to the Compson house, and stands at the gate with Ben, Luster, Frony and Dilsey, and looks up the drive "at the square, paintless house with its rotting portico."² Such an overall view is possible, in terms of Faulkner's method in this novel, only in the final section of the book, but the reader has been supplied with enough specific spatial details to fill out the picture for himself.

¹ S & F, p. 364.

² Ibid., p. 372.

3. Thomas Sutpen and the Grand Design : Space
in Absalom, Absalom!

"Unlike the narrative pattern in some of the other novels, the form of Absalom, Absalom! cannot be perceived externally through an abstract formula," writes A.C. Hoffmann,¹ clearly identifying the major problem in approaching this novel. Unlike As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom! is not structured around the stream-of-consciousness of various characters, although it contains at least one lengthy passage which would appear to be an interior monologue, and much of the narrative would appear - in its sheer amplitude and elliptical grammar - to be close to stream-of-consciousness writing. However, the presence of inverted commas in large sections of the narrative, and the apparently unmotivated shifts from narrator to narrator do not contribute to such a classification. On the other hand, Absalom, Absalom! is unlike Light in August in that, although there is an omniscient narrator present at various points in the narrative, the most important parts of the book are left to the largely conjectural work of individual character-narrators. Moreover, although A.C. Hoffmann is probably accurate in seeing a movement in each of the nine chapters towards "a climactic surprise or revelation",² such revelations (whose full significance is withheld) seem slight indeed to the reader immersed for a first or second time in the flux of the narrative. One's first impression is rather of the arbitrariness of the chapter divisions.

Another possibility suggests itself : does the use of multiple narration perhaps mean that Absalom, Absalom! is a study in point of view in the manner of Henry James? Yet such a use of technique often

¹ "Point of View in Absalom, Absalom!," UKCR, XIX (Summer, 1953), 233.

² Op.cit., p. 234.

seems to be most satisfactorily combined with an indisputable body of "fact" within the work against which the variation in point of view can be measured. There is, to be sure, a certain body of fact in Absalom, Absalom! and there are certain noticeable differences in point of view between Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve. But the body of fact is a slender one - scarcely even an articulated skeleton - and, in the last analysis, the method of the book would seem designed to prove that no such indisputable body of fact is obtainable, for, although one does require an accumulation of scraps of information about Sutpen, the overwhelming impression is that the book is one vast web of multiple conjecture.

There are two even stronger reasons for not considering point of view - in the usual sense of the term - the unlocking structural principle. The first is that all the narrators, irrespective of age, sex or place of origin, use the same "ponderous, involute, unearthly Faulknerese"¹ in their narration, which Scott elsewhere calls "a narrative style unlike that ever seen or heard anywhere at any time."² Not only do they all sound alike, but at times - and this is the second reason - they would appear to merge :

It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both : both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal³

Faced with the difficulty of beginning an adequate descriptive evaluation of Absalom, Absalom!, the reader might feel justified in

¹ Arthur L. Scott, "The Myriad Perspectives of Absalom, Absalom!," AQ, VI (Spring, 1954), 214.

² Arthur L. Scott, "The Faulknerian Sentence," Prairie Schooner, XXVII (Spring, 1953), 92.

³ AA, p. 303. See also pp. 261-262: "Yes, we are both Father ..."

resorting to Clifton Fadiman's hyperbolic description of the book's method, that "it is as if a mad child had gone to work on the chronicle with a pair of shears, and then each jagged division were narrated by a different personage."¹ Conrad Aiken, more mildly and possibly more accurately, believes that "the form is really circular - there is no beginning and no ending properly speaking, and therefore no logical point of entrance...."² If there is no logical point of entrance, then there is no logical point of exit either. Indeed, the circularity of the narrative can be seen in microcosm when Quentin (through whose mind all the other narratives and conjectures are filtered) is confronted (for the first and only time) with the only living Sutpen and has the following circular dialogue with him :

And you are _____ ?

Henry Sutpen.

And you have been here _____ ?

Four years.

And you came home _____ ?

To die. Yes.

To die?

Yes. To die.

And you have been here _____ ?

Four years.

And you are _____ ?

Henry Sutpen.³

¹ Faulkner, Extra-Special, Double-Distilled," New Yorker, XII (October 31, 1936), 62 - 64. Condensed and repr. in R.P. Warren, Faulkner : A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 289-290.

² "William Faulkner : The Novel as Form," TDC, p. 140.

³ AA., p. 373.

It is significant that this conversation is not reported until five pages from the end of the book - that is, in that part of the novel where the reader, led on through the maze of hints and half-guesses, might reasonably expect some clarification, some resolution, some scrap of information of incontestable reliability. Instead, the reader is faced with what Guetti calls "a moment of hypnotic and futile circularity",¹ and one is tempted to agree with Mr. Compson that "It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it : they don't explain and we are not supposed to know."² The ultimately hypothetical nature of the book Guetti dubs an "extended simile", and maintains that

... this quality is shown to be a constant property of the entire narrative in that Quentin is the sum of all the narrators and in that the anonymous narrator ... refuses to sanction the entire narrative as anything more than hypothesis. The story thus becomes one great "as though" based upon a supposed body of literal details like those of the "Chronology" and "Genealogy" and the attempt to make these details meaningful. All of the narrators attempt to compose these details into a story by which they will become significant both to narrator and listener, and the result is always a suspect relation between literal and metaphorical represented in the approximated story - an extended simile whose assertion of potential meaning insists that such meaning must only be potential.³

Mr. Guetti's argument is a powerful one and deserves studying in its entirety. Yet one cannot help feeling that he has possibly over-emphasized the ultimate "suspect relation between literal and metaphorical" because this particular aspect of the novel supports the tenor of his book's argument so impressively. Time may prove Mr. Guetti to have seen more clearly than other critics the true nature of the book; Absalom, Absalom! may prove to be not "one kind of novel or another but ... no novel at all"⁴ - a structural reductio ad absurdum

¹ James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 79.

² AA, p. 100.

³ Guetti, op.cit., p. 103.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 108.

more colossal than Mr. Compson's wildest dreams. The possibility must remain, because it is in the nature of this particular novel that out of its vast store of potential meanings it can support a number of quite contradictory interpretations. For a structural analysis of the novel, however, it is perhaps necessary to proceed "as though" there were a valid relation between the literal and the metaphorical, even if it means becoming an Ahab and "foisting" an interpretation on this white whale of a novel.

But perhaps "foist" is too strong a word, because much excellent work has been done (especially in the last decade)¹ on just what does constitute Faulkner's chosen perspective in this novel. The culmination of this work to date is to be found in an article by Lynn Gartrell Levins, in which she observes most shrewdly that the distinctions between the narratives in Absalom, Absalom! are not to be drawn on the grounds of style, but of literary form.² Furthermore, each genre - the Gothic novel, the Greek tragedy, the chivalric romance, and the tall tale - expresses, structurally, a particular degree of emotional involvement on the part of the fictional storyteller :

Rosa Coldfield, haunted by the moral "outrage" inflicted by the "satanic" Sutpen, shapes her narrative to the Gothic mystery, which of all genres, possesses the most affective influence on the feelings of the reader; Mr. Compson, doomed to believe in the epical grandeur of the South, relates his narrative as a Greek tragedy; Quentin, obsessed by Henry's relationship with Judith because of his own involvement with Caddy, presented in The Sound and the Fury, expresses his narrative in the framework of the chivalric romance; and Shreve, the detached Northerner, convinced that the "unbelievable" South "is better than Ben Hur" (p. 217), relieves the intensity of the preceding viewpoints by means of the ludicrous humour of the tall tale.³

According to who is narrating, then, the handling of spatial details will differ in accordance with the genre in terms of which he (or she)

¹ See below, Ch. IV, "Point of View," pp.129-131, and notes.

² "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA, LXXXV (January, 1970), 35 - 47.

³ Op.cit., p. 36.

shapes his (or her) version. Consequently, there is not one "space" for the world of this novel, but - in keeping with the exceptionally high degree of conjecture of which the book is composed - four "spaces" conjured up by the four I-narrators' genre-perspectives, plus the present settings and other spatial items contributed by the omniscient narrator.

Miss Levins has dealt in detail with the four generic spaces; it is perhaps sufficient to recapitulate briefly some of her main points. In Miss Rosa's tale, Sutpen's Hundred becomes a demonic edifice, the doomed castle of the Gothic novel, with an oppressive atmosphere and inexplicable sights and sounds. In Mr. Compson's version - "The Fall of the House of Sutpen" - the Sutpen domain is reduced to scenery and props for the tragic performance - "cleaned and polished and arranged by scene shifters who with the passing of twilight would return and strike them and carry them, hollow, fragile and without weight, back to the warehouse until they should be needed again."¹ Quentin - in characteristic defiance of the facts - prefers to imagine the conventional "flower-filled May morning" of chivalric romance, despite the fact that it is (historically speaking) winter when Judith and Bon meet. In Shreve's tall tale spatial details are employed to deflate and denigrate the larger-than-life Sutpen of Miss Rosa's and Mr. Compson's versions : Sutpen becomes an outsize ruffian and rogue. Having said this, however, one has by no means fully examined the functions of space in Absalom, Absalom!. Such an examination is perhaps better begun with a few general points about other aspects of the novel's macro-structure.

Several studies of the novel concur in finding that one of the principal structural components of the work is a time-continuum.²

¹ AA., p. 193. Quoted by Miss Levins, op.cit., p. 39.

² See, e.g., Arthur L. Scott, "The Myriad Perspectives of Absalom, Absalom!", loc.cit.; Robert H. Zoellner, "Faulkner's Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom!," Am.Lit., XXX (January, 1959), 486-502.

Zoellner¹ claims that the novel is saturated by Faulkner's conception of time as a cumulative continuum, of the present moment, its quality and tone, as the sum of all past moments.² Scott has indicated the striking parallel between the effects of this time-continuum on the reader and the effects which the Futurists set out to achieve in their painting :

The simultaneousness of states of mind in the work of art : that is the intoxicating aim of our artIn order to make the spectator live in the center of the picture ... the picture must be the synthesis of what one remembers and of what one sees.³

Part of Faulkner's method in Absalom, Absalom! might be seen as aimed at making the novel - for the reader as well as the character-narrators - a synthesis of what one remembers and of what one sees. One is expected to bring the memory of one's earliest encounters with Sutpen to bear on each subsequent meeting.

A most important part of the internal justification for such an interpretation is the passage in which Quentin speculates on the nature of "happen" :

Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds⁴

In fairness to Guetti, the persistent presence of the "as though" element - here "maybe" - must be noted : but if one wishes to cite this passage as an internal comment on the theme and method of the book, it is possible to treat "maybe" as a rather conventional distancing device which the author uses to keep himself from direct

¹ Op.cit.

² Cf. Ch.V, pp.184-186 below.

³ Arthur I. Scott, "The Myriad Perspectives of Absalom, Absalom!," AQ, VI (Spring, 1954), 217. Scott is quoting from Sheldon Cheney, The Story of Modern Art (New York: Viking Press, 1945), pp. 468-469.

⁴ AA, p. 261.

comment, while nevertheless intending that the forcefulness of the spatial image should carry its full metaphorical weight. Further internal evidence is cited by Zoellner,¹ who traces in a single "sentence" the technique of "time-alternation" which results in "the atrophy of those habitual time distinctions which the reader brings to the novel ..." and he concludes that "Faulkner obviously wishes different points in time to coalesce."

A logical corollary of the time-continuum towards which Faulkner's very syntax may be seen to tend is the creation of a space-continuum. Zoellner naturally perceives this, and points out that such spatially "distant" elements as the West Indies, or the octoroon mistress's New Orleans dwelling "have as much immediate impact and relevancy as if they were physically present in the hulking mansion at Sutpen's Hundred or Quentin's room at Harvard."² However, he prefaces this remark with the comment that "spatial relationships are relatively meaningless", which he later develops in examining a further paragraph by saying that the Jamesian "'solidity of specification' "³ is "peculiarly lacking", and speaks of "Faulkner's habit of reducing even the most solid objects to a ghostly, undimensional evanescence..."⁴ The element of ghostly unreality is undoubtedly there; Quentin himself is characterized as a ghost in conflict with itself and other ghosts in the early pages of the novel,⁵ and it may be that this pervasive sense of unreality is the price Faulkner has to pay for attempting to create a novel which partakes of "that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must

¹ Robert H. Zoellner, op.cit., p. 488.

² Op.cit., p. 493.

³ Op. cit., p. 498.

⁴ Op. cit., pp. 498 - 499.

⁵ AA, p. 9.

have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second...."¹ But it should be noted that this unreality is shared by all the elements of the particular world which Faulkner has created in this novel, and is not something peculiar to the spatial element alone. The importance of this should not be underestimated, because, once one acknowledges that one is dealing with the book in terms of its particular kind of reality (or unreality), one is free to examine in detail the various functions of space in the structure of the novel.

At first glance, it might seem that space was a singularly arbitrarily chosen aspect of Absalom, Absalom! on which to rest a defence of the significance of its structure. Yet the very fact that so much of the book is "spoken aloud" means that the spatial element is very largely indirectly presented, and therefore only appears in fragments which the reader must piece together as best he may. Thus Faulkner's treatment of space in Absalom, Absalom! clearly fits into the general pattern of deliberately withheld meaning, while - as will be seen - possessing a uniquely important thematic function in this novel.

Amid the varied physical features of the South between 1830 and 1910, Faulkner sets his narrators' reconstructions of the rise and fall of the House of Sutpen. Both meanings of "house" are relevant in this context, for, as one reads the novel, it becomes clear that Sutpen regarded his grandiose mansion and hundred square miles of land as an essential part of the dynasty he wished to establish. Not only are house and land an integral part of his "design", but in both prosperity and ruin they stand as an objective correlative for the condition of the whole. This central spatial symbol might be considered the source of the prolific number of spatial details which ramify throughout the book. It would appear that, in a work which is

¹ AA, p. 22. Unlike Miss Levins, the present writer thinks this description has wider applicability: to the novel as a whole, and not just to Miss Rosa's narrative.

preoccupied with the fortunes of a character who habitually thinks in spatial terms, Faulkner has taken care that all the related themes are similarly realised in terms of this particular aspect of novelistic technique.

It is extremely difficult, even for the sake of this discussion, to separate the functions of spatial details in Absalom, Absalom!. Seldom does one find a passage in which they do not perform the triple task of contributing to the realism, heightening the atmosphere, and carrying symbolic significance. Nevertheless, it is perhaps instructive to isolate each function briefly, in order to demonstrate the range of effects of which Faulkner proves capable.

Occasionally, Faulkner establishes by almost exclusively realistic means the spatial background which he needs for developing his drama, as may be seen in the third-person narrator's description of early Jefferson, the community which Sutpen consistently ignores :

(Jefferson was a village then: the Holston House, the courthouse, six stores, a blacksmith and livery stable, a saloon frequented by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences)...¹

Sutpen's house and plantation loom the larger in relation to the tiny village, and, moreover, its isolation from that community (it was twelve miles from Jefferson to the house) is made the more remarkable.

In the opening paragraph of the book, however, realistic and atmospheric details are combined to create an illusion of a "real place" and the pervading feeling which that place exudes. Faulkner mentions a particular room, some details of its furnishings, the nearness of a wistaria vine, and the heaviness with which its scent hangs in air which is so hot and still. These details give the reader a sense of a "real" Southern September afternoon, while at the same time suggesting a sense of claustrophobia, a sense that the room is cut off from the life going on outside. Other details contribute more

¹ AA, p. 32.

especially to atmosphere alone : the colour of Miss Rosa's dress, her posture in the chair, the contradictory suggestion of coldness amidst the heat in the adjective "iron". At the same time, as will be discussed later, these details function symbolically as means of indirect characterization :

From a little after two oclock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that - a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them. There was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window, into which sparrows came now and then in random gusts, making a dry vivid dusty sound before going away: and opposite Quentin, Miss Coldfield in the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nothusband none knew, sitting so bolt upright in the straight hard chair that was so tall for her that her legs hung straight and rigid as if she had iron shin-bones and ankles, clear of the floor with that air of impotent and static rage like children's feet. ¹

Miss Rosa's house, however, is only one of three present settings where the narrators reconstruct Sutpen's story. In each case, the third-person narrator suggests something of the character of the place, providing the reader with an indirect hint as to the relative reliability of the reconstruction which takes place there. Three chapters are located on the front gallery of the Compsons' house : the light is the gentler light of evening, the air is filled with wistaria and the smoke of Mr. Compson's cigar, and Quentin can see fireflies drifting "in soft random" in "the deep shaggy lawn".² The atmosphere is far more relaxed and much less claustrophobic than at Miss Rosa's, and Mr. Compson's narration is more whimsical, less

¹ AA, p. 7.

² AA, p. 31.

obsessive.¹ A few lines after he has suggested the atmosphere at Compsons', the narrator anticipates the setting of the last four chapters of the book - Quentin's rooms at Harvard, with "the long iron New England snow" outside - which he connects by means of the odours of this September evening and the letter which Mr. Compson will write. The purpose of this leap in time and space is to create a greater unity between the present settings of the novel, and, although in abstraction it appears a rather obvious device, it is the only hint of the present setting for nearly four chapters, and is of considerable help to the reader in a book where one tends to lose one's bearings rather easily. The coldness of the Harvard room suggests a certain detachment which is not possible in the heart of the sultry South. At the same time, this detachment may not be what is required. The narrator suggests the limits of this setting several chapters later :

... in the cold room ... dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's morality and Miss Coldfield's demonizing - this room not only dedicated to it but set aside for it and suitably so since it would be here above any other place that it (the logic and the morality) could do the least amount of harm -²

Present settings in Absalom, Absalom!, however, are not primarily important in their own right, but exist as part of the general subject-object relationship on which the book is built. They interact with and soon dissolve into historical and generic settings, and also help the reader establish certain (limited) perspectives of the past. As the book develops, present settings yield in prominence to reconstructed or imagined past scenes (in a word, they "dissolve") in which, once again, realistic and atmospheric details mingle to create the sense of a living, almost contemporaneous past, which, at the moment of telling,

¹ Miss Levins has pointed out the distance he achieves through irony.

² AA, p. 280.

becomes part of the narrated present of a tale within a tale.¹ In the description below of Oxford (Miss.) on the eve of the Civil War, Mr. Compson combines sounds and contrasts of light and shade with details of clothing, cosmetics, and drink to create a scene full of nostalgia and foreboding - a Southern version of Thackeray's ball on the eve of Waterloo :

And there would be music at night - fiddle and triangle among the blazing candles, the blowing of curtains in tall windows on the April darkness, the swing of crinoline indiscriminate within the circle of plain gray cuff of the soldier or the banded gold of rank, of an army even if not a war of gentlemen, where private and colonel called each other by their given names not as one farmer to another across a halted plow in a field or across a counter in a store laden with calico and cheese and strap oil, but as one man to another above the suave powdered shoulders of women, above the two raised glasses of scuppernong claret or bought champagne - music, the nightly repetitive last waltz as the days passed and the company waited to move...²

The past settings, however, no matter how vivid their verisimilitude or powerful their atmosphere, perform in their turn a subordinate function : the provision of a physical and spiritual circumambience for Thomas Sutpen and his colossal plantation. However, one never sees the plantation whole, for that would imply a conventional static presentation of which there is almost none in this book. To the reader, it seems as if the house is simultaneously being built, decaying, and being mentally reconstructed throughout the book as each narrator applies the conventions of his chosen genre. Having said this, though, one must concede that details of the construction of Sutpen's Hundred do tend to predominate in the earlier part of the book, but never to the extent of creating a completely coherent picture. The presentation of Sutpen's Hundred - as, indeed, the fragmented, indirect presentation of all spatial details in this book - is governed by the technique of "memory-narrative" :

¹ Depending on who the narrator is, of course, this "tale" is by turns Gothic novel, Greek tragedy, chivalric romance, or "tall" tale.

² AA, pp. 122-123.

A "memory-narrative" is an outflow of incidents from the memory which group themselves as the context around a particular person or event but which, since the mind at first recovers only an essence of that person or event, do not come forth in regular narrative sequence. A moment of importance from the past that is called to mind appears with certain visual-emotional qualities in an almost spatial context, and not immediately as the series of successive events leading up to and including that moment. ¹

Before one learns any details about Sutpen's creation of his plantation, one sees the tableau of Sutpen, his architect and slaves held in just such a "spatial context". Only after this initial image has been imprinted on the reader's mind, is one provided, by the third person narrator and Miss Rosa, with some hints as to the fundamental lay-out of the plantation. The reasons for its coming into being and for its decay - often purely conjectural - form the substance of the rest of the novel. To abstract for a moment and piece together details into a somewhat coherent picture: Sutpen acquires from Ikemotubbe "a hundred square miles of some of the best virgin bottom land in the country"², on which he builds, with the aid of a French architect and twenty "wild niggers", a plantation house " 'the size of a courthouse' ",³ which he fits out with imported silver, crystal, carpets and furniture, and which has appropriate slave quarters, formal gardens, a "scuppernong arbour" with barrelstave hammock, and, on the river, a fishing camp. This princely estate is unmistakably Southern, and, on a realistic level, is clearly relatable to the socio-economic realities of the South in the ninety-seven years which the novel spans. The obviously realistic details, however, are not there simply to create a period piece : they have a symbolic function, which, although discussed in detail later, may be briefly stated here. By means of the various spatial details

¹ Douglas M. Thomas, "Memory-Narrative in Absalom, Absalom!", Faulkner Studies, II (Summer, 1953), 20.

² AA, p. 34.

³ AA, p. 16.

relating to the swift creation and gradual crumbling into ruin of Sutpen's Hundred, the reader may infer not only the collapse of Sutpen's "design", but also the economic ruin of a sizeable part of one continent, and the passing of an entire way of life.

No less significant than the purely realistic details of the estate is the atmosphere of the house itself, for this atmosphere is not simply, in the usual sense of the term, the emotional effect of the sum total of its physical aspects, but, in Mr. Compson's view, seems to be an active and vital independent force of its own :

... as though his [Sutpen's] presence alone compelled that house to accept and retain human life; as though houses actually possess a sentience, a personality and character acquired, not so much from the people who breathe or have breathed in them inherent in the wood and brick or begotten upon the wood and brick by the man or men who conceived and built them - in this house an incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong.¹

One can also see at work in this paragraph what Zoellner² calls the peculiar metaphysic of the novel. It is not the wood or the brick that is "real" for Faulkner; they are not there in the same way as "the abstract and dimensionless spiritual condition of the protagonist and those surrounding him."³ Nevertheless, although something as solid and important as the plantation house itself seems, through the narrators' talk, to be translated to an abstract and dimensionless level of fictional existence, there are occasions when the spatial details are "real" enough to the reader to provide him with direct clues to the universals with which the book is attempting to deal. In so far, then, as spatial details point to a resonance beyond the levels of verisimilitude and atmosphere, they may be said to perform a symbolic function.

¹ AA, p. 85.

² Robert H. Zoellner, "Prose Style," AmLit, XXX, 486-502.

³ Op.cit., p. 499.

The most general symbolic use to which Faulkner puts spatial details is that of indirect characterization.¹ In his characterization of a minor character such as Ellen Coldfield Sutpen, Faulkner combines a description of her hands with details of the table furnishings to produce an impression of a woman of placid character who complacently accepts and is part of her opulent environment. The reader can readily visualize "the small plump ringed unscarified hands folded in tranquil anticipation of the food, on the damask before the Haviland beneath the candelabra..."² Ellen is a comparatively minor character, and consequently Faulkner needs little more than one or two images such as this (and the "butterfly" images)³ to denote what is essential about her character.

When one turns to Faulkner's treatment of the more important characters, one finds a similar reliance on symbolic spatial details, but here the implications are more complex. In a passage dealing with Henry Sutpen's first impressions of New Orleans, one finds his attitude to the city's architecture revealing the narrowness of his upbringing and the rigidity of his moral code, while at the same time suggesting something of the atmosphere of the city. Contrasts in kinds of movement suggest contrasting economies; details of movement, clothing, attitude suggest a greater liveliness and wealth - the tangible signs of a way of life foreign to the planter's son from Jefferson, Mississippi :

... the architecture a little curious, a little femininely flamboyant and therefore to Henry opulent, sinful; the inference of great and easy wealth measured by steamboat loads in place of a tedious inching of sweating human figures across

¹ Here again, one cannot help observing that a so-called "indirect" method is often more "direct" in the vividness of a sensory image than summary or direct authorial comment.

² AA, p. 65.

³ See Ch. II, p. 58 above.

cotton fields; the flash and glitter of a myriad carriage wheels, in which women, enthroned and immobile and passing rapidly across the vision, appeared like painted portraits beside men in linen a little finer and diamonds a little brighter and in broadcloth a little trimmer and with hats raked a little more above faces a little more darkly swaggering than any Henry had ever seen before....¹

However, it is one of the unusual features of this novel that characters do not seem to exist in their own right as do characters in other novels, but characters and character-narrators all seem subordinate to the embodying of Sutpen and all the appurtenances of his family and plantation. It would seem appropriate that the first character-narrator should be the one who, of all the narrators alive in 1910, has had the most direct dealings with Sutpen. Yet closer examination suggests that Miss Rosa is far from being an ideal narrator. Her name - "Coldfield" - and the atmosphere of her house² hint that she lacks the human warmth necessary for a sympathetic portrayal of the central figure. The third-person narrator observes that her handwriting reveals "a character cold, implacable, and even ruthless",³ and the neat picket fence of her small "grimly middleclass yard or lawn"⁴ hardly seems the best vantage-point from which to survey - let alone appraise - the soaring magnificence of Sutpen's Hundred. In fact, Miss Rosa is only apparently the most reliable person; from the symbolic spatial details which surround her, the reader is able to infer that her whole character and attitude is scarcely likely to provide reliable evidence.⁵ The "iron" shinbones, suggesting both coldness and inflexibility, her rigid posture in the chair, the black material of her

¹ AA, p. 110.

² Discussed above; see pp. 107-108.

³ AA, p. 10.

⁴ AA, p. 21.

⁵ As Miss Levins has shown, the formal perspective of a narrative is one prone to heightening for emotional effect.

dress, all contribute to the reader's impression of a narrow moral rectitude which will allow preconceptions to distort her narration of events. This is further emphasized by her use of the word "demon" - part of the somewhat hysterical language of the Gothic novel - when she refers to Sutpen. Nevertheless, it is her "outraged recapitulation"¹ that initially conjures up Sutpen's presence (the moment of origin for the memory-narrative which comprises the whole book). His presence, her vision of him, and the setting are all three characterized in spatial metaphors :

"Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water colour, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard..."²

The thunder-clap and sulphur-reek are not essential to Sutpen himself, but are the result of Miss Rosa's "demonizing"; while the comparison of her house to a "schoolprize water colour" powerfully conveys the sense of spinsterish seclusion which characterizes both house and inhabitant.

In this way, in the presence of two character-narrators, the central character is brought before the reader, and it is largely the nature of his preoccupation which the wealth of spatial details is designed to convey. Some pages into Chapter Seven, Sutpen uses the word "design" in a conversation with General Compson (reported by Quentin).³ The word is highly significant in conjunction with Sutpen, not only for its connotations of will (which faculty is highly developed in Sutpen), but also because it denotes a pattern or plan for the arrangement of objects in space. Arranging objects in space is precisely what the reader watches Sutpen doing throughout the book.

¹ AA, p. 8. Cf. the way old man Falls conjures up Colonel Sutpen in the opening pages of Sartoris (1929).

² Loc.cit.

³ AA, p. 24C.

In the first instance, Quentin and the reader share the vision which Miss Rosa conjures up :

... Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light.¹

The Biblical allusion is no accident: Faulkner would appear to use it to create a parody of the Fiat, the divine creative word of Genesis I - a parody which reflects ironically on the grandiose scale of Sutpen's design.² Significantly, there is also an impression of transience which heightens the irony at Sutpen's expense : the implication is that, if house and gardens can appear as rapidly as that, they can vanish as swiftly.

The second version of the creation of Sutpen's Hundred is seen more through the eyes of the community of Jefferson and is narrated largely by the third-person narrator. The sense of the back-breaking toil involved which this second account creates counterbalances the original impression of semi-divine effortlessness. Spatial details proliferate. With the men of Jefferson, one watches the mansion rise, "carried plank by plank and brick by brick out of the swamp where the clay and timber waited";³ one sees it standing finished, but "unpainted and unfurnished, without a pane of glass or a doorknob or hinge in it ... surrounded by its formal gardens and promenades, its slave quarters and stables and smokehouses",⁴ and one senses the accuracy of Mr. Compson's characterization of it as "the half-acre gunroom of

¹ AA, pp. 8 - 9.

² Miss Rosa, as opposed to Faulkner, uses it as part of her Gothic demonizing.

³ AA, p. 37.

⁴ AA, p. 39.

a baronial splendor."¹ Sutpen then lives in the unfinished house for three years until he makes enough money with his cotton crops to furnish it in fitting style. It takes four large wagons to carry all the furnishings, and a now completely outraged Jefferson hears how Sutpen and his "somewhat tamed" negroes had "installed the windows and doors and the spits and pots in the kitchen and the crystal chandeliers in the parlors and the furniture and the curtains and the rugs...."² This listing of items on the part of the narrators approaches the scope of the epic catalogue, and, in this way, heightens the sense of Sutpen's almost heroic power over material things.

As the novel unfolds, occasional spatial details remind the reader of the pristine wealth and grandeur of Sutpen's Hundred, but, because of the synchronous time-patterns of the novel, the brief years of Sutpen's triumph are either omitted or hastily dealt with, as the different narrators begin or leave off at seemingly arbitrary points. Sutpen's attempt to play out the role of "the biggest single landowner in the county" is ironically commented on by Mr. Compson, who, in his projection of Sutpen's story as a Greek tragedy, uses a spatial metaphor derived from the theatre to suggest the rapid invisible transition of the historical processes at work :

... he was unaware that his flowering was a forced blooming too and that while he was still playing the scene to the audience, behind him Fate, destiny, retribution, irony - the stage manager, call him what you will - was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next one. ³

The words "synthetic and spurious shadows" suggest another level of evaluation toward spatial details: although his house and land are

¹ Loc.cit.

² AA, p. 44.

³ AA, pp. 72 - 73. It is worth noting that Mr. Compson lists all the classical tragic themes - "Fate, destiny, retribution, irony".

"real" enough to Sutpen, they are but shadows to one of the narrators probing for the clue to the mystery of this man. Perhaps the alert reader should accept this as a hint not to demand too much from the spatial symbolism in the book; certainly one should also take it as one of the signals of a difference of narrative perspective in the novel.

The next "scene", portraying the decline and fall of Sutpen's Hundred, is an extended one in which the reader is deluged with details of the physical decay of the house and plantation - the outward and visible signs of the disintegration of Sutpen's design. In Chapter Five, Miss Rosa speaks of the house's "rotting portico and scaling walls", the "ruined and weed-choked flower-beds",¹ and she describes Sutpen, returned from the War, "a part of him encompassing each ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib",² not even pausing for breath before undertaking to restore his house and plantation. Sutpen eventually finds that he cannot reclaim enough of his plantation (which Miss Rosa maintains would be more accurately called "Sutpen's One" at this point) to maintain Judith, Miss Rosa, Clytie, and himself, and so takes to running his little crossroads store, where the man who had walked beneath crystal chandeliers and fanlights imported pane by pane from France is now placed among "a stock of ploughshares and hamestrings and calico and kerosene and cheap beads and ribbons...."³ Appropriately enough his degradation and defeat are symbolized by a catalogue of items, just as his triumph had been. The fact that these details have been drawn from the tales of the diametrically opposed narrators, Miss Rosa

¹ AA, p. 136.

² AA, p. 160.

³ AA, p. 181.

and Shreve, demonstrates in miniature the kind of coherent synthesis which it is possible to abstract from the fragments scattered throughout the separate tales.

The fall of Sutpen's Hundred, taking into consideration its geographical and historical location, would seem, at first, to be caused simply by the historical forces at work in the real world which Absalom, Absalom! to some extent attempts to reflect. But such an interpretation would render the involved structure of the book superfluous. The decline of the South - and of Sutpen's Hundred as its representative - is something which the reader takes more or less for granted. The book seems far more concerned with the reasons why Sutpen's individual "design" failed, and it is in terms of this that the narrators attempt to find their answers.

By the time Sutpen came to tell his story to General Compson, Quentin maintains, Sutpen himself had long since given up any hope of ever understanding it.¹ Nevertheless, he undertakes "that patient amazed recapitulation"² as if he is trying to explain "to circumstances, to fate itself" :

" 'You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family - incidentally of course, a wife.' "³

It is the italicised question which the narrator-characters are engaged in attempting to answer, and which the reader in turn must try to solve by piecing together the information which the various narrator-characters provide.

¹ AA, p. 263.

² Loc.cit.

³ Ibid. Italics mine.

In the first instance, it is clear that the word "design" means something more to Sutpen than a pattern or plan for the arrangement of objects in space, although in this particular direction Sutpen proves himself something of a prodigy. In twenty-five years Sutpen accomplishes by ruthless strength what it had taken other men generations to achieve, and, even in the general ruin of the South, Sutpen preserves sufficient genius with material things to get two Italian marble tombstones weighing one thousand pounds each "past a sea coast so closely blockaded that the incoming runners refused any cargo except ammunition...."¹ But the design includes people as well as things: a family, and ("incidentally, of course") a wife, although the people are regarded as subordinate to the design, and a wife is only incidental.

In putting his design before people, Sutpen makes his fundamental error. Returning from the War to find his plantation beyond repair and his son a murderer in voluntary exile, Sutpen turns his attention to procuring another wife on whom he may beget another heir. This drives him to the desperate ruse of proposing to Miss Rosa that they "breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry...."² This proposal so outrages Miss Rosa (and it is not only her strict moral rectitude which is affronted, but also her basic humanity) that she withdraws totally from Sutpen's world for forty-three years, just as her father had retreated to his attic and starved himself to death at the outbreak of the Civil War. Having failed with Miss Rosa, Sutpen then proceeds to get Wash Jones's granddaughter with child. When this child turns out to be a girl, Sutpen spurns mother and daughter with less concern than he evinced

¹ AA, p. 189.

² Op.cit., p. 177.

for his foaling mare. This treatment so infuriates Wash Jones - who (largely owing to the perspective of Shreve's narration) has been consistently represented as the lowest form of human life - that, forgetting his previous hero-worship of the "Cunnel", he kills Sutpen with a rusty scythe as he leaves the girl's bedside.¹ In both instances, it is made clear that Sutpen's obsession with his design renders him incapable of treating human beings on human terms, and, in this way, he brings about his own death.

In the course of the book, it is made clear that, in his relationships with Miss Rosa and Jones's granddaughter, Sutpen is simply compounding the error which he had initially made in "putting aside" (the term is his own) his Haitian bride when he discovered that she was part negro, and therefore could never be "adjunctive or incremental"² to the design he had in mind. The child of this first marriage is, of course, Charles Bon, who is later responsible for the ruin of what was, in fact, Sutpen's second attempt to implement his design - the near success he achieves in Mississippi. The fact that Sutpen meets his death at the hands of a man who possesses merely the vestiges of humanity suggests how fundamentally inhuman Sutpen was in his dealings with his fellow men and women. The clue to his mistake is in the words "adjunctive or incremental" as well as the word "design" itself. All three have overtones of impersonality, as if they are best used when applied to objects which occupy a certain space, rather than to human beings. And it is precisely in having a design which includes other human beings, in applying spatially derived terms to human situations, that Sutpen makes his mistake. His lack of awareness of what is amiss is what General Compson calls his "innocence" -³

¹ Cf. the short story, "Wash".

² AA, p. 240.

³ Cf. Addie Bundren's morality in As I Lay Dying.

"... that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out...." ¹

In a sense, Sutpen is representative of all mankind in his setting up of a neat scheme which omits the element of incalculability in human affairs. In another sense, he is Faulknerian Man defeated by the forces represented by Faulknerian Woman,² forces of which he, in his "innocence" is largely ignorant. He is also tragic man, pitting himself against fate, against a scheme of things ordered differently from his conception of them. Historically speaking, he is Southern man defeated by the particular cataclysm of the Civil War. But there is another sense in which Sutpen is at once more individual and more representative of Southern man, and this is a sense which is directly concerned with mythic space.

Sutpen first finds out what he "had to do" when, as a poor-white boy on a Tidewater plantation, he was sent on an errand to the plantation house, knocked on the front door, and was told by the negro butler to go around to the back. It is clear he has broken a social norm; on a mythic level, he has violated hallowed ground. For hallowing, as Cassirer describes it,

... begins when a specific zone is detached from space as a whole, when it is distinguished from other zones and one might say religiously hedged around. This concept of a religious hallowing manifested concurrently as a spatial delimitation has found its linguistic deposit in the word templum.³

¹ AA, p. 263.

² Cf. Quentin in S&F and Christmas in LIA. Discussed in Ch. V, p.217, and AA, p. 265: "'... didn't the dread and fear of females which you must have drawn in with the primary mammalian milk teach you better? What kind of abysmal and purblind innocence could that have been which someone told you to call virginity? what conscience to trade with which would have warranted you in the belief that you could have bought immunity from her for no other coin but justice?' -"

³ Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II : Mythical Thought, transl. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 99 - 100.

Furthermore, Cassirer describes the "primordial mythical-religious feeling"¹ linked with the fact of the spatial "threshold". From the veneration of the temple threshold, which spatially separates the house of the god from the profane world, Cassirer maintains, the fundamental juridical religious concept of property seems to have developed.²

Sutpen in his "innocence" transgresses a religiously sanctioned "threshold", and receives a shock so profound that his determination to repay the affront dominates him throughout the rest of his life, to the exclusion of all feeling for the people who may be "adjunctive or incremental" to his design. And because the design is copied from the Southern society of which he is a part, it naturally excludes negroes from its hallowed space (except in a subordinate capacity), and, in being faithful to his design, Sutpen is forced to exclude his own son from his house, and, it is suggested, forbids Bon's marriage to Judith not because it would be bigamous (though that idea is present), nor because it would be incestuous (though that would be true too), but because of his fear of miscegenation.. Sutpen refuses to utter the words of acceptance and love, "My son, my son," because his design excludes men of mixed blood. Ironically, the only Sutpen descendant who survives the final holocaust is a part-negro idiot, a living symbol of the folly of the original design.

There are further ironies surrounding the concept of threshold in Absalom, Absalom!. As Frank Baldanza has pointed out, the book :

... is organised around a series of confrontations at doorways or gates : Sutpen being turned away by a liveried Negro at the door of the Virginia plantation, Sutpen and his bride being pelted by garbage at the church door, Wash Jones shouting outside Miss Rosa's door, Rosa being restrained at the foot of the stairs at Sutpen's Hundred by Clytie on two occasions, Bon being halted and shot at the gate to Sutpen's Hundred by Henry, and³ finally Thomas Sutpen being killed at Wash Jones's front door.

¹ Op.cit., p. 103.

² Ibid.

³ "The Structure of Light in August," MES, XIII (Spring, 1967), 68.

It is on the first occasion that Clytie restrains Miss Rosa at the foot of the stairs, in the touch of flesh with flesh that Miss Rosa watches "the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too" - the very thing which Sutpen had erected his threshold to create and maintain. Moreover, Quentin's inability to comprehend more of Miss Rosa's tale is described as "something which he too could not pass".¹ Quentin, as the character-narrator in whom all the tales converge, is, ultimately, unable to pass the threshold of simply denying that he hates the South. Like Marlow in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and like Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby, Quentin's discovery of himself is intimately linked with what he is able to reconstruct about Sutpen and the South. But unlike Marlow or Nick, Quentin remains unable to make a choice on which he can act. And it is because Quentin is unable to translate what he has learnt about the past into anything decisive in the present in which he finds himself, that the book remains an open structure; Quentin is left with heart and mind hopelessly divided, and the reader is left entirely to make his own choice as best he can.

By treating Sutpen's design as he does, Faulkner would seem to be suggesting that, in the Southern design, the "sacred places" are in fact profane, because they destroy human community, and are, in fact, the symbol of an individual's setting himself up against the community. The big house is used as a weapon by its possessor to exclude others. Sutpen's biological involvement with Bon seems to symbolize the inextricable relationship of White and Black, a relationship which the Whites would deny by setting up their individual templa, excluding the Blacks from them, and moving them to a nomansland where they cannot pose a threat because they cannot acquire the ownership of land. Faulkner appears to invert the entire notion of hallowing,

¹ AA, p. 172.

and seems to suggest that it is the whole which is sacred because it is inclusive, and that the individual templum is an affront to humanity, foredoomed by its "design" to decay and ruin. Sutpen's design included everything but love - that is, that which is fundamentally human, and which cannot be measured or calculated in spatial terms; that which causes man to sacrifice his space-occupying objects, his possessions, to break down artificial thresholds, or which, being lacked, renders those possessions and those sacred precincts so much dust and ashes.

Sutpen himself was responsible for the collapse of his design. His story is, to some extent, historically representative; in so far as he represents the man who will not acknowledge a common bond with a man of another race, preferring an abstraction - symbolised in Absalom, Absalom! in the spatial term "design" - to a human relationship, Sutpen's fall is a moral fable of the South. But, by extension, in so far as Sutpen evinces a universal human tendency to prefer the tangible to the intangible, he may be seen as a universally representative figure, preferring what can be measured to what is most strong in its immeasurability, the spatial to the spiritual.

CHAPTER FOUR

MANY WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD :

THE FUNCTIONS OF POINT OF VIEW

1. Point of view in Light in August

The most obvious feature of point of view in Light in August is the presence of an omniscient narrator, who is free to move about in time and space and to jump from character to character without overstepping the conventions which govern his novelistic use. Having remarked on his presence, however, the reader might hasten to conclude that the possibilities for withholding meaning with such a narrator were slight indeed. But this would be to reckon without Faulkner's skill: in an earlier chapter,¹ the narrator's almost compulsive use of "perhaps" has been noted, as well as the delayed introduction of characters (such as Doc Hines) who have important information, and the further complication which results from finding that such a character is (perhaps!) to be trusted less than others with less "knowledge". In the following chapter, Faulkner's use of fragmented chronology (a most important way of withholding meaning) in all four novels will be discussed in detail.

The liberties which the narrator takes with chronology in Light in August permit him to settle on one character or another, and, temporarily limiting his omniscience, to tell some portion of the story as it appeared to that particular character. In such a situation, moreover, the narrator further withholds the meaning by refraining from any Olympian comment as to the reliability of that character's point of view. The beginning of Chapter Two shows the narrator employing

¹ See above, Ch. II, pp. 29-31.

just such a shift in the opening words : "Byron Bunch knows this : ...", and the reader then receives his first impression of Christmas through the thoughts which Christmas's appearance evokes in Byron and his fellow-workers. In this way, the reader tends to share the dislike which these men take to Christmas's sneering indifference and total isolation. When, however, in Chapter Six, the narrator virtually dissolves himself into Christmas's consciousness, and the reader begins to understand Christmas from his own point of view, indifference and dislike are replaced by sympathy, understanding, and a measure of acceptance. Faulkner thus uses point of view in Light in August to purge the reader of the very categorical habits of thinking which distort the attitudes of so many of the characters in the book.

Perhaps it is because Faulkner has an exalted notion of his reader's responsiveness that he allows his narrator to include, with little or no hint of its rightness or wrongness (other than the word "theory"), Gavin Stevens's account of what prompted Christmas to break away from the deputy. If one accepts the reading of the book which was substantially advanced in Chapter Two above, then one must not fail to criticize Stevens's view, despite the impressive list of the man's credentials. In fact, in terms of the present writer's understanding of the book, Stevens's credentials become highly ironic, because, for all his education, with his talk of Christmas's "white blood" and his "black blood", it becomes quite clear that he is no freer of categorical habits of mind than his fellow townsmen. In fact, his theorizing ends with a simple reversion of the verdict Mottstown had passed on Christmas's passivity: the community had regarded it as a sign that he was "acting like a nigger for the first time" when he simply "took" Halliday's blows; Stevens regards Christmas's final passivity as a sign that he was defying "the black blood". Both views are equally categorical, and both, confronted with the fundamental ambiguity of Christmas's being, prove equally misleading.

Faulkner's use of a multiplicity of points of view is not exclusively devoted to making the reader work for the meaning; often, from within a particular character's point of view, a most illuminating comment is provided. Hightower is used to this end both in Chapter Sixteen, and in Chapter Twenty. In the latter chapter, as has been pointed out elsewhere,¹ Hightower provides a choric comment on the action; in the former, his thoughts on hearing the "stern and implacable" music from the nearby church offer a clear insight into the motives of the community. Hightower seems to hear within the music "the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own envired blood Pleasure, ectasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?"² And he sees them crucifying Christmas gladly, " 'Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves.' "³ Such clarity of perception is entirely in character for Hightower, for not only is he an educated man, but he is also an ordained minister, and would therefore naturally think in terms of "crucifixion". Moreover, he himself has suffered at the hands of this same community, so his comments may be seen to emerge from his past experience. By using such a character's point of view to its fullest extent, Faulkner is able to avoid the distancing effects of Olympian comment, while continuing to guide his reader to the meaning of the book.

But a certain amount of distancing of painful material is not always unwelcome, particularly when that distance may help one to

¹ See Ch. II, p.50.

² Light in August, p. 322. Whether or not Hightower can be considered the "moral protagonist" as Carl Benson ["Thematic Design in Light in August", SAQ, LIII (October, 1954), 542] seems to think, depends on how much attention one is prepared to pay the implicit criticism of Hightower elsewhere in the novel.

³ Loc.cit.

place certain events in their proper perspective. And it is to provide the reader with just such perspective that the point of view of the last chapter is transferred to the nameless furniture-dealer from the eastern part of the state, to whose lot it falls to assist Lena in her scarce-interrupted progress, and to witness Byron's humiliation. The tragedy of Christmas is complete, and the reader is allowed to escape through the whimsical and superficial point of view of one who understands almost nothing of what lies below the surface, but who nevertheless has a healthy, if limited, earthiness of vision.

2. Genre as Perspective : Modes of Observation
in Absalom, Absalom!

Although Absalom, Absalom! itself is a juggernaut of a book which is liable to crush reader and critic alike beneath the monstrous weight of its thunderous rhetoric, its treatment by the critics is one of the few instances in Faulkner criticism where definite progress towards a clarification of its structure is observable. Clifton Fadiman's image of the mad child going to work on the Sutpen chronicle with a pair of shears must have appealed to many of the first readers of the book.¹ Five years later, Joseph Warren Beach felt that "half the time we are swimming under water, holding our breath and straining our eyes to read off the meaning of submarine phenomena.... We are forever on the point of giving up, throwing ourselves upon some reef and letting the ocean thunder by."² Writing some twelve years after

¹ "Faulkner, Extra-Special, Double-Distilled," loc.cit., p. 290.

² American Fiction 1920-1940 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), p.160. Quoted in Arthur L. Scott, "The Myriad Perspectives of Absalom, Absalom!," AQ, VI (Spring, 1954), 211-212. Beach does recognise, however, that the arrangement of the novel, which he calls "one of the most extraordinary tricks of narrative skill in the history of fiction", is "not a mere trick in plotting." (Loc.cit., p. 213.)

Beach's book was published, A.C. Hoffmann - missing the clarity of outline of The Sound and the Fury - declared that Faulkner "is not interested here in overemphasizing specific points of view."¹ In the following year, Arthur L. Scott clearly identified the five principal narrators and the areas of the book which they respectively dominate,² and then proceeded to draw some fruitful analogies between the effect achieved by fragmentation of point of view in Absalom, Absalom! and the intentions of Futurists and Cubists in the plastic arts.

Subsequently, two distinguished attempts were made, by Ilse Lind³ and Richard B. Sewall,⁴ to establish the form of Absalom, Absalom! as that of a classic tragedy. The greatest progress, however, has been made in the last decade. In 1961, Robert M. Slabey remarked (but failed to develop the idea to the full) that, "depending on who the narrator is, Sutpen's story resembles a Gothic novel, a chivalric romance, or a fairy tale (when Miss Rosa is telling it), a Greek tragedy (when Mr. Compson is), or a romantic love story (when Quentin and Shreve are)."⁵ The following year, James H. Justus wrote an article⁶ in which he

¹ "Point of View in Absalom, Absalom!," UKCR, XIX (Summer, 1953), 234.

² "The Myriad Perspectives of Absalom, Absalom!," AQ, VI, pp. 210-220. Scott gives the following table as a "rough breakdown" (p. 211) :

[Narrator]	[Pages]
Rosa.....	7-30; 134-173.
Mr. Compson.....	43-134.
Quentin.....	174-292; 358-378.
Shreve.....	293-345.
Omniscient author.....	31-43; 346-358.

³ "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA, LXX (December, 1955), 887-912. Repr. in TDC, 278-304.

⁴ "Absalom, Absalom!," in his Vision of Tragedy (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 133-147.

⁵ "Faulkner's 'Waste Land' : Vision in Absalom, Absalom!," Miss Q, XIV (Summer, 1961), 153-161. Quoted in Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion, p. 181, n. 13.

⁶ "The Epic Design of Absalom, Absalom!," TSLH, IV (Summer, 1962), 156-176.

pointed out that although the interpretation of Absalom, Absalom! as Greek tragedy is a recognition of the depth and scope of the action presented, it does not explain the structural prominence which is accorded the Judith-Bon-Henry plot. On these grounds, Justus argues that the formal design of the book is that of the epic. Six years later, Adams¹ substantially endorsed Slabey's interpretation, modifying it only by giving it his predominantly archetypal emphasis.

But perhaps the clearest - and, in many respects, the most revealing - account of the nature of point of view in Absalom, Absalom! is that given by Lynn Gartrell Levins in a recent article.² While agreeing with Ilse Lind,³ A.C. Hoffmann,⁴ and Arthur Scott⁵ that the four different recreations of the Sutpen legend by the four different narrators are presented in one overall sound pattern of complex sentence structure and sustained rhetoric, Miss Levins joins James Justus⁶ in denying Irving Howe's charge that the narrators seem "echoes of a master ventriloquist rather than individual voices attuned to Jamesian distinctions."⁷ Miss Levins maintains :

¹ Faulkner : Myth and Motion, p. 181.

² "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA, LXXXV (January, 1970), 35-47. Miss Levins would find interesting support for her thesis about Faulkner's use of literary forms in his works in the articles of : (a) Jorm M. Howell, "Hemingway and Fitzgerald in Sound and Fury," PLL, II (Summer, 1966), 234-242, who discusses Faulkner's parodies in S&F of "the romantic despair and cynicism" of Hemingway and Fitzgerald; and (b) Joyce W. Warren, "Faulkner's 'Portrait of the Artist'," Miss Q, XIX (Summer, 1966), 121-131, who discusses Faulkner's debt to Joyce in Mosquitoes.

³ Op.cit.

⁴ Op.cit.

⁵ Op.cit.

⁶ Op.cit.

⁷ William Faulkner : A Critical Study, p. 226.

The distinction among the narratives in Absalom, Absalom! does not involve differences of style, but form. Faulkner effects a structural differentiation among the viewpoints in the novel by shaping each of the four narrative perspectives after a different literary genre: the Gothic [Miss Rosa's narration], the Greek tragedy [Mr. Compson's], the chivalric romance [Quentin's], and the tall tale [Shreve's].¹

The rest of her article is devoted to a detailed documentation of this thesis. It succeeds in clarifying memorably most of the structural organisation of this novel.

However, as Scott² points out, there are not four, but five narrators in the novel. Of this, Miss Levins seems to take no cognisance, except to speak of something said by the third-person narrator as "Faulkner, in one of his few authorial comments".³ One cannot have it both ways: either all the voices in the book are "echoes of a master ventriloquist", or they are all artistic devices, and this fifth narrator must be characterized accordingly. In fairness to Miss Levins, the fifth narrator falls outside the scope of her study. He has an important, if somewhat subsidiary, role in the novel, which is discussed in some detail below.⁴ For the moment, however, it is sufficient to acknowledge the justness of Guetti's observation that "the anonymous narrator ... refuses to sanction the entire narrative as anything more than hypothesis."⁵

The question of perspective in Absalom, Absalom! is more complex than Miss Levins seems to recognise: not only is there the enigmatic third-person narrator, but each of the I-narrators is also a character in the total tale, and, in addition, possesses scraps of evidence and fragments of further tales which have been filtered to him (or her) by

¹ Op.cit., p. 37.

² "The Myriad Perspectives," AQ, VI, p. 211.

³ Op.cit., p. 42.

⁴ See pp. 134-135.

⁵ James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor, p. 103.

such secondary narrators as General Compson, the Sutpens, Wash Jones, and spokesmen for the community of Jefferson. Even if one omits the secondary narrators, one is still left with something more than five perspectives, because the reliability of the I-narrators is largely determined by their qualities as characters, while their qualities as characters would appear to govern which literary genre¹ they choose as the shaping principle of their narration. Thus, in addition to the four perspectives which the four literary genres provide in terms of the formal patterns which they, as genres, impose on the disordered mass of facts, hints, guesses, and conjectures which comprise the available data on Sutpen, the perspectives of the I-narrators are also modified (as in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying) by the private preoccupations and obsessions of the four narrators as characters. The total effect is perhaps one of the most massive testimonies to how fully an intuition of the relativity of human knowledge is capable of informing the shape and substance of a novel.

Faulkner himself provides informal acknowledgement of the influence of this sense of relative knowledge by using a metaphor supplied by an interlocutor from a poem by Wallace Stevens² :

... the old man [Sutpen] was himself a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see all at once. It would have taken perhaps a wiser or more tolerant or more sensitive or more thoughtful person to see him as he was. It was, as you say, thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird which I would like to think is the truth.³

¹ For the sake of economy, Miss Levins's use of the term has been adopted.

² Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," Poems by Wallace Stevens, selected by Samuel French Morse, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 12.

³ FIU, p. 274.

And Faulkner's use of point of view in this novel not only rings seemingly infinite changes on the subject-object relationship of the narrators to Sutpen and to each other (one narrator becomes a character in another's narration), but also, through severely limiting the omniscience of the third-person narrator, it demands that the reader enter into a critical relationship with each narrator, as well as with the book as a whole.¹ The fourteenth view of the blackbird is perhaps the hardest won of all.

Miss Levins deals fully and competently with the four I-narrators, but something remains to be said about the functions of the third-person narrator. The third-person narrator sets the book in motion, describes the first present setting of the novel, characterizes Miss Rosa and Quentin, and then allows Miss Rosa to begin talking. Once the talking is set in motion, the narrator only reappears at isolated moments to give some sort of continuity between the talking of the other narrators, as well as accomplishing the change in present setting (from Miss Rosa's to Compson's, and then to Harvard). For the most part, however, he disappears behind the others' talk. Occasionally, he intervenes with an Olympian comment to indicate that the reader must not trust the other narrators too far :

... the two of them [Shreve and Quentin], whether they knew it or not, in the cold room (it was quite cold now) dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's morality and Miss Coldfield's demonizing²

And, on other occasions, he includes a tentative indication that the other narrators are near the truth :

... four of them who sat in that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough³

¹ The ultimate "critical relationship" is perhaps that adopted by James Guetti in *The Limits of Metaphor*. For a discussion of his argument, see Ch. III "Space", above, pp. 101-102.

² *AA*, p. 280.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

At one point, at the end of Chapter Five, he interrupts Miss Rosa's semi-interior monologue, from which he has so far been totally absent, to point out that Quentin cannot follow her any further at this point. The narrator then covers the leap in present setting and time, beginning Chapter Six with the evocation of Harvard, January 1910. Here Faulkner is clearly employing this narrator to suspend the disclosure of meaning, of which Miss Rosa's monologue, if continued, might have revealed too much before the reader was equipped with enough information from other sources to approach Miss Rosa's view of the Sutpen legend with more judicious detachment. Clearly, too, it is a device to make the reader think he has been cheated of a full explanation, when, in fact, he has been given all that will be useful. In this way, Faulkner not only suspends his meaning, but makes it appear to the reader that he has withheld even more than he has.

Ultimately, the third-person narrator is of limited value in the book. His functions are largely restricted to the present time and setting of the book, and to the task of providing occasional, if somewhat minor, hints to the reader as the tale unfolds. Only on one occasion does he provide the reader with knowledge of Sutpen, when, at the beginning of Chapter Two, he recounts what little the community of Jefferson knew about Sutpen - his first appearance there, his gaining of his "Hundred", and the building of his house. At this point, the narrator disappears, and Mr. Compson picks up the tale with scarcely a break.

Faulkner's heavy reliance on individual narrators seems to suggest an implicit criticism of the Olympian omniscient point of view as a means of arriving at a worthwhile fictional knowledge of outer reality. In structuring his book so that the reader "hears" much of the tale from a variety of first-person narrators, each with his own version to tell, Faulkner seems to be pushing the illusion of

life which the book creates at least one stage closer to life itself. At the same time, the tale gains in apparent veracity from the reports of "people who were there" or who are descended from such persons, and the first-person narrators also involve the reader's emotions more immediately. All the first-person narrators possess fragments of the truth (for example, the letter from Bon to Judith which Mr. Compson produces), but not one of them is in a position to see the whole :

"Your father," Shreve said. "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?"

"He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it."

"Then who did tell him?"

"I did." Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. "The day after we - after that night when we -" ¹

But precisely because they are individuals, these narrators are permitted to imagine and conjecture as a third-person narrator never could (without violating the conventions governing his existence), and it is these imaginings and conjectures which provide some of the deepest insights of the book into the ambiguities of "the human heart in conflict with itself."²

Naturally, however, with the introduction of first-person narrators, the reader's sense of security to which omniscience tends to pander loses its foundations. Not only do the various narrators simply not have enough information, but they also fabricate where they are unsure, and, moreover, they allow their private preoccupations to colour their treatment of what information they possess. Once again, Faulkner is stressing

¹ AA, p. 266.

² William Faulkner, "Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1950," Essays, Speeches and Public Letters, ed. by James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 119.

the relativity of man's ability to apprehend reality, as well as suggesting the frequency with which similar distortions occur in life. The narrators criticize each other's conjectures (as Quentin and Shreve do in Chapter Nine), and are also implicitly criticized by the third-person narrator's characterizations of them. Shreve's robustness is limited by his total lack of first-hand information, while Quentin's sense of almost knowing the tale before it is told is handicapped by his physical frailty.

Does Faulkner's handling of point of view in Absalom, Absalom! simply "multiply variety in a wilderness of mirrors"?¹ Does he withhold meaning to the point of meaninglessness? Certainly, the fourteenth blackbird does not pop magically out of a secret pie in the last page, and perhaps the amount of re-reading required will encourage some to escape by labelling it "unreadable"; but for those who persevere, and who are made to grow in wisdom, tolerance, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness in the process, there are glimpses of a fourteenth view, that of the object-in-the-process-of-being-perceived. When all the narrators and their functions have been enumerated, there is one - the most important - left uncounted : the point of view of the reader himself. Not a few, however, will feel that, for all their care, the blackbird has escaped their net. Their experience Mr. Compson himself has memorably anticipated :

"... you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens : just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs."²

¹ T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion," Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 41.

² AA, p. 101.

3. Idiocy, Neurosis, "Sanity", and Omniscience : The Four
Points of View in The Sound and the Fury

Later in this chapter, it will be shown how, in As I Lay Dying, Faulkner exploited certain ironic possibilities of first-person narration in interior monologue. In The Sound and the Fury, however, Faulkner places less emphasis on the interplay of section with section, and, in its structure of four major divisions, emphasises instead three characters' apprehension of their world. Through the extensive use of fragmentary flashbacks, Faulkner gives the reader a sense of the character's growth in time, providing at once an oblique view of the events which have shaped that particular character, and a less oblique intimation of the character's response to those events.

One begins at what is apparently the furthest remove from reliability: the narration of the events of April Seventh, 1928 is controlled by the severely limited point of view of a congenital idiot who lacks all sense of time, and whose narration of present events is constantly broken by snatches of past events. The only help the reader is given is a typographical one: italics are used to indicate a shift in time; in all other respects, the reader must grapple with the discontinuous narration of events which are distant in time from each other, without the remotest suggestion of any logical or associational link between them. The effect on anyone reading this section for the first time is complete bafflement - amounting to annoyance - at so deliberate a violation of almost all the conventions of novelistic narration. And yet, there is a seductive clarity in the telling, a freshness such as one finds also in As I Lay Dying, which somewhat offsets the reader's dismay, and which suggests why Faulkner chose this particular point of view with which to begin his novel. In the first instance, Faulkner apparently wants the reader to abandon the comfortably conventional way of apprehending existence which the more

usual methods of narration reflect, and, to some extent, support. Secondly, Benjy is extremely useful as a narrator-character, because, on account of his idiocy, the other characters behave as if he were not present, and reveal their true natures more fully than they would had Benjy been normal. In this respect, Benjy's point of view comes extremely close to that of an invisible third-person narrator; in all others, however, the reader is reminded of the very real limitations of his point of view: his lack of a sense of time, and his single wailing response to everything that does not fit his sense of what is right. Further reading of the book, however, suggests that Benjy's temporal confusion of Damuddy's death, Caddy's loss of virginity and her marriage is a most significant one: these seemingly separate events do have something in common, and perhaps Benjy's moan is the most fitting response to them. In adopting the point of view of an idiot for the first exploration of his material, Faulkner undertakes an almost theoretical examination of how much a severely restricted narrative device is capable of revealing. To the reflective reader, and in the context of the whole book, the results are by no means slender.

Quentin's point of view is less severely restricted: if he, too, has a measure of insanity, he is at least rational enough to have gained admission to Harvard. But as Benjy is tied to the golfers' shouts of "caddie", so Quentin is tied to the concept of Caddy's virginity, which is as lost in his world as Caddy is physically absent from Benjy's world in 1928. Quentin's consciousness is tyrannised by words, concepts, thoughts; he squeezes the maximum agony out of his present by associating everything with some part of his past experience with Caddy. In fact, though, it is wrong to attribute too high a degree of deliberateness to Quentin: Faulkner uses the resources of stream-of-consciousness presentation to suggest that these associations

force their way into Quentin's mind. The reader finds himself in a monologue where everything is charged with private emotion-laden connotations: the difference of mentality between Quentin and Benjy only means an increase in the complexity of the time-shifts and their motivation and, consequently, an increase in the difficulty of the reader's task. However, Faulkner does not leave the reader without aid: apart from a variety of typographical clues which he provides, the most important device is the inclusion of another point of view - that of Mr. Compson. Sardonic as much of his commentary (in the form of remarks which Quentin recalls) is, it nevertheless expresses a more balanced view of the nature of women, and provides the most illuminating explanation of Quentin and his obsessions - within the frame of the interior monologue. In this way, Faulkner manages to "build in" a critical commentary without violating the conventional autonomy of the interior monologue.

The reader turns with a sense of relief to the apparent simplicity of Jason's monologue, only to discover that his monologue suffers as much from his deficiencies of character as either Ben's or Quentin's does. If Quentin suffers from the excesses of a misdirected love, and Ben, like one of Pavlov's dogs, remains tied to a word which sounds the same as the name of the sister he loves though that sister is now absent, both nevertheless evince a capacity for love. In Jason's monologue, it is precisely the absence of all love (except self-love), and the presence of resentment and hatred of everyone and everything, that makes his section such unpleasant reading. Here is the third personal perspective on the Compson family, and its effect is to make the reader feel that the confusions of Benjy's world or the high-coloured complexities of Quentin's are infinitely preferable to this harsh, monochromatic world of the obtrusive "I" and its flat, machine-made clichés.

The respite offered by the third-person narrator is real, as opposed to the illusory relief the other changes of narrator provide. The reader emerges into an objectively ordered world, and is provided with a comprehensive external - and, to some extent, panoramic - view of the characters and their reactions. But for all the comparative ease with which the reader moves through this section, it is nevertheless with something of a sense of loss that one thinks back on the rich intimacy of the personal testimonies, and realizes the limitations of the third-person point of view where the rendering of an individual's apprehension of his world is required. The reader of The Sound and the Fury is called upon not only to try to solve the complexities to be found within each section, but also to compare one section with another, not alone for reliability or factual accuracy, but for its capacity for rendering that totality of an experience which one might dare to call its truth. This "truth", it is clear, does not reside in any one section, but subsists, perhaps in the relationships which the sections bear one to another, in a drama of structure which involves and taxes the reader to his utmost. The stillness which Dilsey achieves in the absolute sense of community in the Negro church on Easter Sunday 1928, and which the reader may share through the third-person narration, must be seen to emerge amidst the gabble of clamorous I-narrators each trapped within the limitations of a solipsistic monologue. Robert Penn Warren's words are singularly applicable to the function of point of view in this novel :

The saint proves his vision by stepping cheerfully into the fires. The poet, somewhat less spectacularly, proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony - to the drama of his structure - in the hope that the fires will refine it. In other words, the poet wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned, that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradictions of experience. ¹

¹ "Pure and Impure Poetry," Selected Essays, p. 29.

4. Irony and Indirection : Point of View in As I Lay Dying

" ... by indirections find directions out ..."

Hamlet

The virtues of first-person narration - vividness, immediacy, an illusion of intimacy, to name only three - seem to have a severe limitation for sustained narrative: the reader can only accept that any one person has seen, felt, observed, overheard or been told just so much; beyond a certain point the reader will no longer suspend his disbelief, and the book's verisimilitude suffers. In As I Lay Dying (where the very title suggests a first-person narrative) Faulkner attempts to have it both ways: with the exception of one or two passages which require special discussion, the entire book is told in the first person, but Faulkner avoids loss of credibility by fragment the narrating "I" into no less than fifteen individual narrators, each of whom tells short parts of the story. In this way, conventional story interest and the linear development of plot are fragmented to throw point of view into prominence, just as, in The Sound and the Fury the narrative phases are grouped under four dates to highlight the temporal emphasis in that novel.

The fifteen individuals have a dual function: they are partial tellers of the tale in which they are also characters; while they report and comment on their own and others' actions, they unconsciously reveal their own preoccupations and the limitations of their own point of view. The technique is one of indirect characterization and oblique criticism, exploiting to the full the possibilities for irony which are inherent in the interior monologue. The retention of the first person throughout maintains an intense immediacy, such as is also found in Alain Robbe-Grillet's work,¹ while Faulkner is set free

¹ E.g. Jealousy, trans. by Richard Howard, Evergreen Books (New York: Grove Press, 1959).

Last Year at Marienbad, trans. by Richard Howard (London: John Calder, 1962).

The Erasers, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966).

to explore not so much reality as man's manifold ways of approaching reality. The demands on the reader are considerable: if he does not actively engage in fitting the pieces together, the book remains a series of dislocated fragments.

The narrator-characters fall into two principal groups: members of the Bundren family, and members of the community in which they live, or of communities through which they pass. The seven Bundrens collectively are responsible for the narration of forty-three sections; the other sixteen sections are distributed among eight outsiders. The Bundren family, united in the honouring of the mother's absurd wish to be buried in Jefferson, form a closed group, and the principal function of the "outsiders" is to provide "normal" perspectives which will heighten the reader's sense of the Bundrens' isolation from everyday life and concerns, while at the same time keeping their story implicitly related to the familiar world.

The opening paragraphs of the book are a representative sample of the degree of clarity and immediacy which the reader finds throughout the book. The effect is largely achieved by the scrupulous description of such spatial details as length, height, angularity, colour, movement, and tactile qualities:¹

Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cottonhouse can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own.

The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laid-by cotton, to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision.

The cottonhouse is of rough logs, from between which the chinking has long fallen. Square, with a broken roof set at a single pitch, it leans in empty and shimmering dilapidation in the sunlight, a single broad window in two opposite walls giving onto the approaches

¹ AIID., pp. 3 - 4.

of the path. When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff.

The effect is somewhat similar to that induced by successful concrete poetry where only one or two significant words are altered in each stanza. The first sentence of the first paragraph mentions the path which becomes the subject of the second paragraph; the second sentence mentions the cotton-house, which, in turn, is treated at length in the third paragraph.

Few novelists could afford such a technical sense of genesis at the cost of so much detail. One seems to be going nowhere rapidly. Yet this is only an appearance: by the end of the third paragraph one has literally arrived with Jewel and Darl "at the foot of the bluff", while, figuratively, one has covered a good deal more than that physical distance. The technique of description-on-the-run can only be described as cinematic in what it achieves so quickly. On a first reading, one tends to forget the "I", and one yields to the apparently "dramatic", "impersonal" picture which the "I" unfolds. One is in a world of crystalline clarity in which each detail is perceived in itself and placed in relation to other details. Moreover, the simplicity seems to fit the social milieu of the narrator. One does not stop to ask how the second son of a poor Mississippi hill-farmer could know (let alone use correctly) such phrases as "in fading precision", or "in empty and shimmering dilapidation", yet, once one does, the whole scene seems to collapse: it would appear that Faulkner has, in his very first pages, violated the principle of verisimilitude. The book, apparently, has an author, and an intrusive one at that. However, if one reads on, one discovers that the book establishes its own conventions: in return

for the immediacy of the physical world which the opening paragraphs introduce, the book asks the reader to accept that the parts of individual sections which are not punctuated for dialogue are parts of individual interior monologues spoken by an "ideal" inner voice of the subconscious which is allowed the license of words, comparisons and concepts of which the character's public voice never shows any knowledge.¹ Each inner voice is quite clearly distinguished; after a few pages, the names of the principal characters at the beginning of a new section become almost superfluous, for the reader can recognize the character by his preoccupations. In each case, Faulkner is attempting to render the quality of individuals' total responses, and in this sense, never violates the internal consistency of each monologue.

The reader is meant, nevertheless, to pause at Darl's phrases; one is meant to recognise their clarity as unusual even in terms of the special conventions of the book. One is prepared for this by the second sentence of the first paragraph. On returning to it, one notices the sudden and inexplicable shift in point of view which is introduced by the phrase "anyone watching us". Quite suddenly, Darl and Jewel are seen as this hypothetical observer would see them. The reader is meant to recognise this as strange, and to retain this knowledge until it is needed again. This is a single instance of the degree of awareness demanded of the reader by Faulkner's technique from the very beginning of As I Lay Dying.

There is a further point which must be raised in connection with the metaphor which Darl uses in the third paragraph, when he speaks of Jewel walking "... with the rigid gravity of a cigar-store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down...!"

¹ This would moderate, to some extent, the strictures laid on Vardaman's thoughts in the barn (p. 55) by R.W. Franklin in his "Narrative Management in As I Lay Dying," MFS, XIII (Spring, 1967), 59.

This is the first of several figurative expressions which Darl will use, and which will help the reader see other characters more vividly. Its rather bizarre quality is accountable for in terms of Darl's individual consciousness (indeed, it helps characterize that consciousness), while at the same time, it provides from within the particular conventions of this book a choric comment on one of the other characters. But the reader must not make the mistake of trusting Darl too far: despite the nineteen sections which Faulkner allows him, he is not to be considered as voicing the authorial view-point. Faulkner's realism is too consistent to countenance so obvious a contrivance: the reader is repeatedly given hints that Darl is "queer" and "different", hints which the reader, because of the impersonality of Faulkner's technique, is tempted to disregard because one tends to like and trust Darl as a narrator, until, at the end of the book, Darl pays a hideous price for the degree of insight granted him.¹ Ultimately, the reader has to admit that the superb realism and clarity of the opening pages is supremely deceptive, for, while it enchants one with a sense of absolute honesty and clarity, and while it makes one think one is virtually in a world of objectivity, Darl later deceives the reader by concealing the fact that he started the fire in Gillespie's barn, and one will slowly come to realize that Darl's consciousness, for all its clarity, is hermetically sealed within itself, and, once subjected to the horrors and outrage of Addie's funeral journey, will break under the strain of non-communication and become totally insane. In this way, Faulkner pushes his "illusion of life" one degree closer to life itself, because the reader is not allowed to trust any one interpretation: he must accept that only a

¹ Cf. J.L. Roberts, "The Individual and the Family : Faulkner's As I Lay Dying," AQ, XVI (Spring, 1960), who insists (pp. 35-36) that "Darl did not go insane." The present study adduces evidence to the contrary, and suggests reasons for Darl's insanity.

multiplicity of viewpoints, held, juggled, retained somehow in suspension, will reveal anything approaching the total reality of the situation.

Having begun with language and point of view, one seems to have been irresistibly led on to a discussion of character, and, finally, theme. In such a book as the present, character and point of view are separable only in the abstractions of theoretical discussion, and it is only through what the narrator-characters themselves say that theme is revealed. Perhaps, then, further examination of Darl as a narrator-character is a necessary step in this discussion of point of view.

It is fitting that the first words of Darl's first section should be "Jewel and I", because, as Darl's sections multiply, the reader realises that Darl is obsessed with Jewel: Darl manipulates Anse so that Jewel will be away delivering a load of wood when Addie dies; while they are on this trip, Darl first taunts Jewel with the fact that his mother is dying, and then, after he (Darl) has intuited Addie's death (a shift in place which is handled with such skill that the reader accepts it without question), Darl tells Jewel that Addie is dead. Darl has perceived the special relationship between Jewel and Addie (the true nature of which - along with the causes of Darl's bitterness - one only learns in Addie's section); and he has also perceived that Jewel's working for his own horse and the intense love and hate Jewel manifests towards the creature represent Jewel's attempt to escape from his mother's excessive love, while, at the same time, he is able to transfer to the animal the feelings he has for her. By the time Darl says "'It's not your horse that's dead, Jewel,'"¹ the reader is in a position to gather something of the viciousness of this cut at Jewel's already exacerbated sensibility.

¹ AILD, p. 88.

Further on in Darl's section on page 89, one comes across two crucial sentences. The first takes the reader a considerable distance in further understanding Darl as a character: "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother."¹ As one later learns in Addie's section, Addie violently repudiated Darl, withdrawing all affection from him before he was even born. Darl has apparently attempted to compensate for this by distancing himself from all emotional involvement. Thus one is led to a retrospective understanding of Darl's use of the third person in this sentence of the opening section: "Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in."² When one first comes across this, one naturally thinks nothing of it; if anything, it heightens the degree of credibility which we accord Darl. Only when one knows that Darl is actually a member of Addie's family, does one appreciate the ramifications of this simple, subtle shift.

The second sentence - "Jewel's mother is a horse" - has ramifications of a slightly different kind. Only ten pages earlier, Vardaman has a section which consists solely of the sentence, "My mother is a fish." His earlier section prepares the reader for this, for Faulkner has dramatised his child's consciousness battling unaided with the fact of his mother's death. The final reading of the identification which Vardaman makes must remain ambiguous: some readers may see it as his way of escaping having to accept his mother's death; others may see it as the symbolic way in which he manages both to understand and to accept Addie's death. Whichever way one reads the last page of Vardaman's earlier section (p. 64), it nevertheless provides an intelligible context for his strange identification. One can only conclude that those who

¹ Cf. Quentin in S&F, p. 117: "My little had sister no. If I could say Mother. Mother"

² AIID., pp. 4 - 5.

find this unnecessarily gruesome have overlooked Faulkner's careful preparation for it. Darl's sentence is, as the first paragraph above indicates, equally prepared for, and intelligible in its context. But, remove these sentences from their respective private contexts, put them in the world of public utterance, and one has a strange serio-comic non-dialogue in which the painful strugglings of a child's emerging consciousness are mingled with the bitter gropings of an adult mind deranged (Vardaman's section) :

... Jewel's eyes look like marbles. "You leave that horse here," pa says. "We'll all go in the wagon with ma, like she wanted."

But my mother is a fish. Vernon seen it. He was there.

"Jewel's mother is a horse," Darl said.

"Then mine can be a fish, cant it, Darl?" I said.

Jewel is my brother.

"Then mine will have to be a horse, too," I said.

"Why?" Darl said. "If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to be a horse just because Jewel's is?"

"Why does it?" I said. "Why does it, Darl?"

Darl is my brother.

"Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.

"I haven't got ere one," Darl said. "Because if I had one, it is was. And if it is was, it cant be is. Can it?"¹

The above passage, so deceptively simple in its vocabulary, is, like other passages in the book, virtually unintelligible taken out of context, but when read in the light of what comes before and after, the economy of effect becomes apparent. The comparison, "Jewel's eyes look like marbles", is powerful in the quality of hard glassiness it suggests, but at the same time it is entirely consistent with the narrator's consciousness, in that marbles belong to a child's familiar world. Moreover, the "innocent" narration of the child intensifies

¹ AIID, pp. 94-95.

the effect of Darl's jibe, which is so similar in form to Vardaman's earlier thought, and so different in its malicious intention. Finally, one might notice in passing that Darl persists in using "it" to refer to his mother. It is in ways such as these that Faulkner's use of point of view in this novel furthers the dramatic revelation of character, attitude, and the inner workings of consciousness.

The above discussion grew out of a closer look at two sentences in one of Darl's sections. It might have suggested, however, that it is only by leaping several pages forwards or backwards that the reader can make any sense of the book. This is not the case, but it might be as well to pause and examine some of the ways in which Faulkner attempts to counteract the centrifugal force of the fifty-nine separate sections.

It has already been remarked how the first three paragraphs of the book move unobtrusively forward; their movement is a microcosm of the movement of the book as a whole. The story-line is a simple one: the Bundren family is committed to taking their mother's body to her family's burial plot in Jefferson, some forty miles distant; in the process, they encounter every obstacle and misfortune ("If ever was such a misfortunate man," pa says.") that man can suffer, and outrage the entire community with the odour of the decomposing body. A lesser craftsman might have woven these slender facts into a creditable short story: Faulkner's interest, however, does not lie in the direction of brevity, for he is concerned to explore the impact of these facts on the different consciousnesses involved, as well as to expose the complex web of motives in which each individual is entangled, and, for this purpose, it is essential that the procession be intolerably prolonged. It is the epic complexity of interests which demands expression in nothing less than a novel, while the "story", simple as it is, appears to take care of itself, moving forward slowly but inexorably as each

new narrator takes the page.

Very few sections do not advance the story-line at least one notch: those that do not will be discussed later. However, the story is not the only - or, indeed, the principal - means by which section is linked to section. One of the principal means of transition which Faulkner employs is to bring the individual whose section is to follow into the conversation, range of vision, or thoughts of the current narrator, usually towards the end of his or her section. Thus, in the first section, Tull's wagon with its two chairs is mentioned, and Darl's last sentence begins : "I go on to the house ...", which half prepares the reader for the next narrator, Cora Tull, and for the shift in place to the interior of the Bundren's house. And, in turn, the last paragraph of her section begins : "Someone comes through the hall. It is Darl.", and the way is prepared for Darl's next section.

Despite its unobtrusiveness, Faulkner does not use this device in every section. Once the reader has been introduced to a number of the characters and their preoccupations, he can adjust more easily to more violent shifts in time, place, point of view, or all three at once. The characters' preoccupations serve as motifs which help to give a sense of continuity, while at the same time adding to the indirect characterization of the individuals concerned. Anse has two preoccupations in getting to Jefferson : to bury Addie's body, and to buy himself some false teeth. Dewey Dell judges people and events solely by how useful they will be to her in procuring an abortion drug; Vardaman hopes to see the toy-train again; and Cash hopes to buy "one of them graphophones". Only Darl and Jewel seem without a vested interest in going to Jefferson: Darl, perhaps, because he has no interest in going anywhere, and Jewel, because he alone is doing it out of love for his mother, as is shown by his sacrificing his horse to procure another team of mules.

Thus far, only the shifts between sections have been discussed. But, in Darl's case, there are quite daring leaps beyond the strict point of view of the section, for which the reader is subtly prepared. In Darl's second section, Darl answers his father's question as to Jewel's whereabouts with the words : "'Down to the barn ... Harnessing the team.'"¹ which he corrects internally with: "Down there fooling with that horse." This is followed by two statements in the future tense which function as a bridge passage, preparing for the shift to the present tense in the middle of the second sentence. The rest of this section is narrated in this now hypothetical present (because Darl is only following Jewel in his mind) into which Darl has put the reader :

Down there fooling with that horse. He will go on through the barn, into the pasture. The horse will not be in sight: he is up there among the pine seedlings, in the cool. Jewel whistles, once and shrill.

It may seem picayune to stress a grammatical point, but it should be obvious that through his grammar Faulkner is at once avoiding violent stress on the verisimilitude of Darl's monologue, and indicating a shift from one level of consciousness to another. As he does not provide another view of the same event, Faulkner apparently does not wish to suggest a lack of reliability in Darl's narration at this point.

Cora Tull's next section² provides a strong contrast in reliability, which gives it both a retrospective and a prospective irony. It is important for the reader's understanding of the narrator-characters that he should know who persuades Anse to let Darl and Jewel take the wagon with another load of wood. This is an important moment, as the decision to go initiates the chain of disasters which follows : if the two men had not gone, they would not have been too late to get across the bridge with Addie's body before the flood carried it away,

¹ AILLD, p. 11.

² Ibid., pp. 20-24.

and if they had got across the bridge, they would not have lost the mules. The progression of the story is temporarily suspended while the reader examines the incident from the points of view of Darl, Cora, and Dewey Dell. The reader learns in Darl's own words the facts of the situation: he sees Darl working not only on Anse's cupidity, but also on Jewel's unwillingness to admit that his mother is going to die; if he does not consent to go with Darl, this will be a tacit admission of the imminence of his mother's death.¹

In Cora's section, Darl has reached the door of Addie's room, and Cora comments :

It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. It was like he knew he would never see her again, that Anse Bundren was driving him from his mother's death-bed, never to see her in this world again. I always said Darl was different from those others.²

Darl is, of course, "different" from the others, but in a totally different way from that which Cora intends to suggest. She attributes to Darl the emotions which Jewel is feeling, while Darl's attitude is really one of artificial detachment. An unreliable interpretation of another character's attitude is an easily understood error, but worse is to follow, for Cora reports at the end :

"What you want, Darl?" Dewey Dell said, not stopping the fan, speaking up quick, keeping even him from her. He didn't answer. He just stogd and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words.³

The last phrase is not only a telling cliché which reveals a good deal about the quality of Cora's mind, but, in this instance, it conceals the fact that Darl did actually speak.

It is in the section that follows, narrated by Dewey Dell, that the extent of Cora's unreliability is fully revealed, in a few matter-of-fact lines of dialogue :

¹ AIID, pp. 16-19.

² Ibid., p. 20.

³ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

"What you want, Darl?" I say.

"She is going to die," he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.

"When is she going to die?" I say.

"Before we get back," he says.

"Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.

"I want him to help me load," he says.¹

The monotonous simplicity of the "I say", "he says" counterpoints the emotional overtones of these simple utterances. It is important to note, as well, that the lack of punctuation between "die" and "but" makes Dewey Dell's thought of "fooling them" about her pregnancy continuous with the thought of her mother's death. Dewey Dell later says to herself: "I wish I had time to let her die."² Her pre-occupation with concealing her pregnancy excludes all thought for anyone else. The progress of the action has been halted, with Darl, at the door of Addie's bedroom since the end of Darl's section, yet the reader has progressed immensely in his understanding of three characters. Cora Tull has been shown to be a narrator whose attitudes cannot be trusted, and, moreover, as one who is prepared to suppress facts in the interests of her own preconceptions. This, in turn, ironically renders her rigid moral judgements almost totally invalid, as the reader is indirectly brought to realise that the "truth" of the feelings of the individuals involved lies elsewhere. One has also been introduced to Dewey Dell and her problem, and one has been given important information about Darl, which is all the more important for having been won out of mis-information. All this contributes materially to the "action" of the book in the broadest sense of the word.

One of the major objections which must be acknowledged in describing Faulkner's technique in this novel, is that Faulkner seems

¹ AIID, pp. 26-27.

² Ibid., p. 114.

deliberately to flout the conventions which he has established for himself,¹ by allowing Darl to narrate events at which he is not present. Something of this has been said above,² but it cannot be so lightly dismissed, particularly when the central, or originative event of the book - Addie's death - is narrated in this way. One is compelled to ask whether this sudden violation of the apparent limitations which Faulkner has imposed on point of view in this novel represents a technical *gaucherie* on his part.³ Ultimately, perhaps, the answer will depend on how much sympathy the reader is generally prepared to allow Faulkner: at this stage, one can simply mention one or two ways in which Faulkner prepares the reader for this departure.

In the first instance, if the reader has been scrupulously attentive, the shift in place (though not, perhaps, in time) is not something that is suddenly introduced for Addie's death scene. It has already been remarked how, in the opening paragraph of the book, Darl includes another point of view with the words: "... anyone watching us from the cotton-house ..."⁴. Secondly, the scrupulous attention to sensory detail in both his first and second sections helps to establish Darl's sensitivity as rarefied. This passage from his second section is representative:

¹ A rigidly schematic application of technical categories which disregards the larger structural elements is to be found in R.W. Franklin, "Narrative Management in As I Lay Dying," MFS, XIII (Spring, 1967), 57-65. Franklin is led to conclude (somewhat pettily): "Instead of attempting forced explanations, we are more accurate simply to judge the anachronisms inconsistent, the narrative management faulty, and to recognise that As I Lay Dying shows the great haste in which it was written."

² See p. 147 above.

³ For Faulkner's comments on this point, see FIU, p. 113.

⁴ AILD, p. 3.

... When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells. It has to set at least six hours, and be drunk from a gourd. Water should never be drunk from metal.¹

In the same section comes the subtle shift (also described on page 152 above) which covers Jewel's actions with the horse, which one tends to accept, both because, though interesting, it is not a vital scene, and because Faulkner provides no other, conflicting view. If one accepts the validity of this scene, one is a third of the way towards accepting Darl's report of the death-scene.

Further justification is provided in Darl's fourth section,² where he accurately predicts that Peabody will have to be hauled up the bluff by rope. In his fifth section³ - the first of the crucial ones - Darl's reliability is attested by an item in his report which duplicates something in Peabody's, which had immediately preceded it :

(Peabody reporting) ... A minute later she calls his name, her voice harsh and strong.

"Cash," she says; "You, Cash!"⁴

(Darl reporting) "... You, Cash," she shouts, her voice harsh, strong, unimpaired. "You, Cash!"⁵

This congruence of reports is a clear sign that Faulkner wants the reader to trust Darl at this point; one has already had experience of how he handles unreliable narrators.⁶

Darl's omniscience takes over completely from these words of Addie's: the reader is taken outside the room to see Cash looking in at Addie, then back inside the room for the death until Anse's words

¹ ALLD, p. 10.

² Ibid., pp. 38-39.

³ Ibid., pp. 46-51.

⁴ Ibid., p.45.

⁵ Ibid., p.47.

⁶ Cf. pp. 152-154 above.

"'Durn them boys'"¹ precipitates a shift (signalled by italic type) to Darl's consciousness of Jewel and himself on the wagon. After one paragraph, the type returns to normal, and one is again in Addie's room until Darl's mind follows Dewey Dell out of the room, when the type is changed, and the future tense - "she will go out" - is used, as in the earlier scene with Jewel and the horse. There is another return to Anse in Addie's room (and here, be it noted, Darl knows exactly how much his father is preoccupied with a new set of teeth), and then the narration returns to a final italicised paragraph with Jewel and Darl on the wagon, and Darl saying (one cannot be sure whether he says this aloud, as there are no inverted commas), on the authority of his second sight : "Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead".² This is the most difficult of the sections in the number of shifts in point of view it presents. However, if the reader once grants that Darl has some kind of second sight, Faulkner makes it perfectly clear where one is at each moment.

Darl's second report-in-absentia presents fewer difficulties: there is only one shift - a return to where he is lying beneath a strange roof - at the end. However, there is an intensification of sensory detail which is reminiscent of Darl's opening section; as the reader has learned by now, Darl is the only narrator-character who can create scenes with such vividness. The "plot" demands that Darl is away from home with Jewel, while the narration demands an intensity and clarity which only Darl seems equipped to provide. Darl's visionary powers seem to be Faulkner's compromise between strict verisimilitude and the demands of the tale. In the passage which follows, one finds a familiar attention to spatial detail, as well as a simile which helps the reader both to see and to define the scene :

¹ AIID, p.48.

² Ibid., p.51.

The lantern sits on a stump. Rusted, grease-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth. Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas.¹

The shift in this section² returns the reader to the house where Darl and Jewel have been forced to spend the night by the accident to the wagon. It consists of a painful interior monologue in which Darl gropes for a sense of his own identity, and for some kind of relationship to his mother and family. One witnesses similar agonies of confused consciousness in Vardaman, where, partially at least, they are accounted for by his youth; in Darl's section, they simply help to heighten the sense of his very real strangeness. Darl's tortuous illogic is followed by one simple sentence which is most moving in its pathos :

"How often have I laid beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home."³

There is no change in punctuation in this section, and it becomes clear that the imaginary and the real have become one for Darl, and are made so for the reader as well. In this way, the visionary level of consciousness, through sheer lack of technical differentiation, is made part of the inner reality of consciousness which the book is attempting to explore.

It would appear that, within Darl's section, Darl's narration is consistent in terms of the expectations his earlier sections arouse, but it remains to be seen whether the rest of the book provides any external justification for such strange insights. Naturally, one who has read the book for the first time will immediately adduce the fact that Darl is committed to an insane asylum at the end of the book.

¹ AIID, p. 71.

² Ibid., pp. 71-76.

³ Ibid., p. 76.

Such a piece of evidence, though, relies too much on critical hindsight: if there is no other preparation, one cannot expect the reader to reflect on so distant a connection.¹ Closer scrutiny reveals that Cora Tull in her second section² twice mentions Darl's "queerness", though she puts a misleading interpretation on it. Further evidence is provided by Dewey Dell's description of Darl in her first section :

... Darl ... that sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land.³

Two paragraphs later, she describes how Darl sensed without being told that she had had intercourse with Lefe. Anse, too, in his first section⁴ mentions that some people have been trying to "talk [him] out of" Darl. All these points, then, can be considered as external preparations for Darl's description of Addie's death. But perhaps the fullest external comment is that provided by Vernon Tull later in the book :

He [Darl] is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes.⁵

Here, from within the point of view of one of the other characters in the book, couched in his own terms, one has the definition of Darl's function as one experiences it in his nineteen sections: no matter who Darl is describing, such is the range of his point of view, that, for the reader, it is always as if that character is looking at himself

¹ Cf. n.1, p.146 above.

² AIID, pp. 20-24.

³ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 34-37.

⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

"outen" Darl's eyes.

A similar problem of the violation of verisimilitude as well as the conventions of time and place is presented by Addie's section,¹ which is placed long after Addie has ceased to live. At the level of verisimilitude, one can meet this problem by pointing to Addie's central position in the book as a whole: she is, after all, the "I" of the title, taken at its most literal level, and she has shaped to her own will all the Bundrens, and continues to dominate their lives even more powerfully in death than she did in life. It would therefore seem a small metaphoric extension for this "presence" to be given a voice at some point before she is interred.

It is at the level of technique, however, that the serious problems arise. Faulkner's technique of deliberately withheld meaning is a technique which creates a suspense of its own which is not inferior to the suspense which deliberately withheld facts create in the "murder mystery" genre. Judged on its own terms, then, the technique in As I Lay Dying is most successful where it is most dramatic: it has already been shown how, in Darl's case, Faulkner pushes the "dramatic" beyond its usual limits; the extent to which this is justified has been argued, but perhaps needs to be briefly advanced a stage further. It was stated above² that Darl was not to be considered as a mask for the authorial view-point. The reason for this is now clear: not only at the end of the book when he is removed to the state asylum at Jackson, but at various crucial stages in the course of the book, Darl's reliability as a narrator is called in question by his "queerness" as a character. This "flaw" has a double function: as a character, it keeps him human, and, as a narrator, it keeps him consistent with the

¹ AILD, pp. 161-168.

² P.146 above.

conventions of unreliable reliability which govern all the other narrators. If the subject of the book, considered in its widest sense, might be said to be the refraction of one episode in the lives of a small group of people within the consciousnesses of the individuals who make up that group, then any intrusion of a perfectly objective, reliable point of view would not only be a "violation", but would destroy the special kind of suspense which the technique itself attempts to generate.

On the other hand, as Wayne C. Booth has remarked, "... impersonal narration has raised moral difficulties too often for us to dismiss moral questions as irrelevant to technique."¹ The reader is faced, ultimately, with the task of evaluating the reliability of each narrator. There is judging, both explicit and condemnatory, going on all the time in the book, but Faulkner's method of getting behind the judgements into the minds that formulate them compels the reader to mistrust these facile, and often solipsistic, handlings of good and evil. The problem for the reader is stupendous. He must be given some aid, some clue: the only person who is both at the centre of the book, and at the same time "above" the action, is Addie. She is the person in relationship to whom the members of her family define themselves:² her attitude towards and treatment of her husband and children has made them what they are. She is free to range further back in time to her own young womanhood, and to indicate the motivating forces of the characters in their origins in her own life and consciousness. Faulkner avoids spoiling the book's peculiar suspense by not including Addie's section until after the flood episodes. When the reader does

¹ The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 378.

² Cf. Olga W. Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness : As I Lay Dying," The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), pp. 50-65. Repr. in TDC, pp. 232-247.

reach her section, he finds that Addie's thoughts themselves are so abstruse, so much a part of a private context, that one has to work extremely hard at making the necessary connections.

Addie's section is preceded by Cora Tull's third section.¹

Cora was last heard misinterpreting Darl: in this section she seems no closer to the truth than earlier - though, ironically, she talks about God more than any other character - but she does report several remarks of Addie's which become significant in the light which Addie's section will cast. In a technical sense, Cora's section may be said to "generate" Addie's - as earlier sections did subsequent ones - by the narrator talking about, and concentrating on, the character whose section is to follow. By introducing Addie through the already familiar Cora, Faulkner avoids too violent a shift from the scene on the banks of the flooded river. Cora's section is a simple flash-back with none of the conventional signals except the opening words: "One day we were talking..."²

Apart from Cora's self-righteous and quasi-religious pronouncements on Addie, the reader has learned relatively little about her up to this point in the book. What one does know, of course, is that she has exacted a promise from Anse that he will take her body back to Jefferson when she dies; why she has done so remains obscure until her own section. One knows also, from Darl and Cora, that Addie favoured Jewel, and an earlier section of Darl's³ has shown one just how much she favoured him. If one were exceptionally acute, one might deduce from the last sentences of that section - "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day." - that Jewel and Addie are somehow involved in some relationship

¹ ALLD, pp. 158-160.

² Ibid., p. 158.

³ Ibid., pp. 121-129.

beyond the usual. Other than this evidence, two sentences of Anse's strike one as premonitory : "'She was ever a private woman.'"¹ and "'She was ever one to clean up after herself.'"² It is supremely ironic that this "private" woman, who was always so particular "to clean up after herself", once dead, should be dragged about at her own behest and publicly exposed in all the appalling nakedness of physical dissolution.

When one turns to Addie's section itself,³ the first impression Addie makes on the reader in her own right is that of a violent, irrational nature :

In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them. ⁴

One discovers the reason for this hate in the next paragraph, where one learns of the gloom cast over her life by her father's warning that the "reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time." Addie dislikes the life of a school-teacher and finds the isolation unbearable :

... And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me. I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. ⁵

Her father's philosophy apparently instilled in Addie a desire for intense experience - a hunger for life, one might say - which,

¹ AILD, p.18.

² Ibid., p.19.

³ Ibid., pp.161-168.

⁴ Ibid., p.161.

⁵ Ibid., pp.161-162.

frustrated by her isolation, sought expression in the contact available to her, the violent sado-masochistic beating of her pupils. It is important to perceive beneath the violence a longing for shared experience: it is no accident that the words "my flesh" and "my blood" appear in the same sentence.

"And so [she] took Anse", presumably in the hope that through a sexual relationship she would achieve communion with another human being. But it was not until she conceived Cash that Addie

... knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at I knew ... that my aloneness ... had never been violated until Cash came My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle.¹

In this way, Addie becomes committed to a physical, mindless level of existence: she feels a word is "just a shape to fill a lack". Addie believes "that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter blood boiling through the land."² She claims total possession of her children, "My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth ...",³ and feels that Anse is dead. She takes a lover - Whitfield, the preacher - and delights in using the world's words (such as "sin") against it. In her total self-absorption one can perceive the limitations of her allegiance to the dark gods: she cannot free her children for their own lives. Darl is permanently maimed, presumably by the resentment Addie tells the reader she felt when she conceived him; Jewel resorts to violence and intense outbursts of love and hate; Dewey Dell is also totally self-absorbed, and feels "like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth."⁴

¹ AULD, pp. 163-164.

² Ibid., p. 166.

³ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

Addie extorts the promise about her burial from Anse as a means of being finally revenged on him for the relationship they failed to achieve, but, in one of the major ironic turns in the book, this revenge in fact makes Anse bring deed and word together despite every natural disaster, and in thus being true to his word, he is set at liberty: he feels, quite justifiably, that he has discharged his obligation, he has been pius in the Virgilian sense, and is now free to marry again. A further irony has already been mentioned, namely that, at the last, this woman who was ever "private" and refused to be "beholden" to anybody, should be dragged in a state of palpable corruption through the communities of two counties, and that the success of the journey should depend so largely on the charity and aid of all the neighbours she spurned in life. Presumably, however, to Addie, "charity" and "privacy" would just be words, too. Her section is admirably controlled: Faulkner calls indirectly for the reader's sympathy while furthering his understanding, not only of Addie, but also of various technical aspects of the book, and allows her to present her monologue without many obtrusive ironies. The character of Addie that emerges is that of a passionate nature horribly twisted by isolation, turning to sado-masochism as its only form of expression; a woman passionately devoted to living, and to truth-to-experience, exacerbated by others less passionate who were content to use words for emotions they did not feel, and who substituted, on crucial occasions, words for emotions or deeds. Only the book as a whole provides an adequate framework in which the ironic outcome of Addie's attitudes may be assessed.

One further major irony arising out of Addie's section remains to be discussed. Addie believes that she has "cleaned [her] house":¹

¹
AILD, p.168.

I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die.

In these words, Addie reveals a morality based on a mathematical system of pluses and minuses as well as a basic naivety as to the possibility of ever "cleaning one's house" in so final a way. In moral outlook, Addie is as "innocent" as Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!.¹ It would be pretty to think that human affairs were so arithmetically soluble, yet what the organisation, the whole technique of As I Lay Dying is designed to reveal is precisely the opposite: that in a world where complete knowledge is never possible to the inhabitants, where a simple promise can have repercussions of injury, madness, and loss of property, and require the aid of a whole community in its fulfilment, the task of assessing good and evil must be undertaken with means more sophisticated than a plus-and-minus morality. The reader's inside knowledge of each of the narrator-characters assures him (and here again to speak of technique is to speak of meaning too) that none of the Bundrens can be tidily parcelled up, that one life is inextricably involved with another, that "aloneness" is an illusion (to borrow a phrase from Mr. Compson²) of philosophers and fools. Perhaps the strongest proof of this is that, in this paragraph dealing with Addie's limitations, one is compelled to turn aside to notice that, for all her wrongheadedness, Addie has the last word about Cora Tull, in words which provide a direct link with that previous section:

One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too.³

¹ See pp.119-123 above.

² Cf. S&F, p. 93.

³ AIID, p. 168.

Preceded by a section narrated by a woman "to whom salvation is just a matter of words", Addie's section is followed by that of her lover (and Jewel's father) the preacher, Whitfield, to whom, if to anyone, salvation should be more than just a matter of words. Faulkner dramatises Whitfield working himself up for a public confession of guilt, and then, through cowardice, absolving himself before he confesses - all done internally, through words alone. In terms of the book's time-structure, this section is a flash-back - Whitfield is on his way to Addie's death-bed - and one discovers, on looking back, that it was not only fully anticipated earlier in one of Vernon Tull's sections,¹ but that Tull, in his homely way, provides a description of Whitfield which is only fully understood after one has read the latter's section :

Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad. ²

Addie, though misguided, had a fierce desire for the kind of truth which arises from an inseparability of word and deed : Whitfield is a prime example of a man using others by the words he speaks.

After the Cora-Addie-Whitfield triptych, the story-line moves forward again : the Bundrens have lost their mules in the flooded river; they still have nearly all the way to go to fulfill Anse's promise. In this way, the tension of incomprehension in the reader, which the three sections just discussed have to some extent relaxed, is counter-balanced by an increased interest in how Anse is going to complete his pledge. Darl takes up the narration again: the italicised phrases all involve Jewel, and presumably this is Faulkner's

¹ AILD, pp. 80-87.

² Ibid., p. 86.

typographic means of suggesting an intensification in Darl's already obsessive awareness of Jewel. Darl's growing madness is emphasized by juxtaposing four of his sections with three of Vardaman's, while in these sections Darl's point of view becomes increasingly like that of Vardaman.¹ Moreover, Darl conceals from the reader that he has set the barn alight. This is the only time in the book that Darl actually brings himself to act, and, in accordance with the ironies attendant on this particular world, it is this act which compels his family to send him to the asylum, lest the owner prosecute them all. In Darl's last section, one finds that he has split into two voices : as he began by speaking of his mother in the third person, so he ends by speaking of himself in the same way, his sense of identity fissured beyond repair :

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said.

"Yes yes yes yes yes." ²

It is Cash to whom Faulkner gives the description of Darl's capture, and the difficult task of trying to assess the deed. Cash has had only three sections up to this point. The first was a tabulation of his reasons for making Addie's coffin on the bevel, which left the reader with the impression that this obsession with the details of carpentry was Cash's way of avoiding thinking about Addie's death.³ From other narrator-characters, one learns that Cash is a good workman (in this he is contrasted to Jewel, who indulges in violent heroics), and that, prior to the action of the book, he had

¹ This is not to suggest, as J.L. Roberts ["The Individual and the Family," *AQ* (Spring, 1960), 26] does, that Vardaman is an idiot.

² *AIID*, p. 243.

³ Cf. R.W. Franklin, "Narrative Management in *As I Lay Dying*," *MFS*, XIII (Spring, 1967), 59. Far from "destroying the illusion of a mind at work," this passage would seem to give a vivid impression of a mind in the act of deliberately avoiding a particular thought.

broken his leg in a fall from a steeple. He breaks his leg again in the course of the funeral journey, but endures this pain without complaint, as well as the further agonies induced by the cement in which the others coat the break to stop it jolting. In his other two sections, his only concern is that Addie's coffin should balance. In his fourth section,¹ the reader discovers that Cash's concern for balance has a certain symbolic resonance, and that through his long-suffering endurance, he has developed into a tolerant, rational person, who contemplates Darl's certification with insight, compassion, and regret :

Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.²

It is important to notice that Cash's interior speech is exactly the same as his exterior: there is no divorce in his consciousness between the way he thinks and the way he would speak what he thought.

Technically, the book bears out what Cash thinks : the reader is compelled to acknowledge the importance, not so much of a person's simple act, but of "the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it." The technique of As I Lay Dying is designed to force the reader to look at a number of individuals from within and without, to purge him of the rigidity of an over-moralistic view ("just words"), and to shake the certain certainties which a single point of view might tend to endorse :

But I ain't so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what ain't. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the

¹ AIID, p.90.

² Ibid., p.157.

sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. ¹

After the violence, the horror, the sacrifice, the endurance, the pain of body and mind which Addie's journey has imposed on her family, Faulkner is able to bring the book to a quiet close through introducing Cash's point of view more strongly. Although he had also thought of burning the barn to end what was rapidly becoming a macabre procession, and feels implicated in the guilt for which Darl's removal is made to atone, Cash is perhaps the most saintly character in the book, in that his attitude is at once the most balanced and the most compassionate. He has suffered, and has endured to the end of the journey, and is indirectly rewarded, for Anse, freed of the burden of his promise, extorts her abortion money from Dewey Dell (one is not allowed to emerge into pure sweetness and light), buys himself a set of false teeth and a marriage license, and returns to the wagon with a new wife who possesses a gramophone. Dewey Dell is cheated and seduced by the druggist (his attitude is diametrically opposed to the outrage evinced by Moseley, the Mottstown druggist - even the most minor narrator-characters are played off against each other), and Vardaman misses seeing the toy train. Cash is allowed the last section in the book, and his words convey the irreducible complexity of any fully human response :

And then I see that grip she was carrying was one of them little graphophones. It was for a fact, all shut up as pretty as a picture, and every time a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too [sic]. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life. ²

One can hardly miss the quality of Cash's thoughts, placed as they are so near the end of this particular work, nor can one fail to see their

¹ AIID, p. 228.

² Ibid., pp. 249-250.

relevance as a brief choric comment on the book. What makes his words at the same time a triumph of technique is that they emerge from the tangibles of the situation through the persona of one of the dramatically involved actors. The comment comes from within the conventions governing point of view in this book : protagonist and chorus are both one and many.

It might appear that, having traced various functions of point of view to the end of the book, one had exhausted point of view as a topic. Yet something remains unsaid: there is a quality to this book which has eluded the categories that have been employed thus far. It is something that has been half guessed at in such phrases as "the mother's absurd wish",¹ "the horrors and outrage of Addie's funeral journey",² "intolerably prolonged",³ and "becoming a macabre procession".⁴ In her admirable chapter on As I Lay Dying, Olga W. Vickery⁵ touches on the same quality in discussing the functions of the minor narrator-characters :

While acting as reverberator for the actions of the Bundrens, these eight characters offer release from the tension through humorous or ironic remarks. Because only the actions of the Bundrens and not their thoughts and emotions are perceived, they become grotesques. What is horror and pain for the family becomes farce for those who are not themselves involved and who merely observe with the physical eye.

The key words are : "they become grotesques." Miss Vickery's remarks are most helpful (indeed, her chapter deserves to be read in full), but while it is clear that she has sensed the same quality which the present writer is seeking, she has not developed far enough the possibilities latent in the phrase which she herself uses.

¹ Above, p. 146.

² Above, p. 146.

³ Above, p. 150.

⁴ Above, p. 170.

⁵ "The Dimensions of Consciousness," TDC, p. 246.

In the same context, it is significant to note what Faulkner's early mentor, Sherwood Anderson, wrote in "The Book of the Grotesque" in Winesburg, Ohio :

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.¹

In one sense, the hermetic sections of As I Lay Dying are designed to dramatise the degree to which people who take a truth to themselves do become grotesques, but this does not sufficiently explain the over-all effect of the novel's form.

The most significant help in developing the full implications of the word "grotesque" as it may be applied to As I Lay Dying, however, does not come from a book directly connected with Faulkner, but from the work of the German aesthetician, Wolfgang Kayser. In the course of his book, Kayser examines the morphology of the term, as well as the works of graphic and literary art to which it has been applied from Roman times to the present century, and concludes that, as "the word 'grotesque' applies to three different realms - the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception," this is "significant and appropriate as an indication that it has the makings of a basic aesthetic category."² Moreover, if the grotesque is "to gain currency as a basic aesthetic category", Kayser finds it necessary to speak of it as "a comprehensive structural principle of works of art."³ If one wishes, then, to apply this term meaningfully to As I Lay Dying,

¹ Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (Modern Library ed.; New York: Random House, 1947), p. 5.

² The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 180.

³ Loc.cit.

it is not enough to speak only of a "quality" which must be defined, or to speak of the characters to the exclusion of the other elements within the book. The grotesque will have to be shown to be a "comprehensive structural principle" of As I Lay Dying, or one will have to seek one's terms of reference elsewhere.

Considered in the abstract, the story of As I Lay Dying, based on the ancient motive of the perilous journey, embraces a single action of an almost Aristotelian unity. Even at the level of verisimilitude, however, the action is a deliberately protracted one : it takes the Bundrens nine days¹ to get Addie to Jefferson over a circuitous route of some forty miles. The reader is obviously meant to compare the duration of this particular burial journey with the normal two- or three-day lapse between death and interment - a lapse which is often further foreshortened in the absence of embalming. But if, instead of foreshortening the interval, one trebly prolongs it, the physical aspects alone of an unembalmed body's swift decay are disturbing enough to leave the emotional effects on those involved - which in this instance includes the reader - to be inferred. Faulkner has taken an event - death - which, in the natural order, has a definite finality about it, and has swollen it into an interminably drawn out process, a suspended action, in which the normal sense of finality is questioned in such a way that the reader feels that this process could go on for ever - an impression which is further strengthened by the incomplete action denoted by the participial title-phrase. By thus prolonging a familiar action of the familiar world to the point of severe distortion, Faulkner has produced an image of life in terms of which life becomes intolerable, a world where the central motif is that of one long journey to the graveyard, a world which seems to threaten the basic assumptions

¹ Volpe, Reader's Guide, pp. 377-382.

of life itself, to which the only response for a thinking person is insanity.¹

As has been suggested in the course of this chapter, however, one cannot use the word "action" in a narrow sense in connection with As I Lay Dying. It is necessary to widen the term to include action-as-filtered-through-consciousness ("mind action"), so that the action of the novel fully stated is "the funeral procession of Addie Bundren as played out in fifteen different consciousnesses." The emphasis in this sub-chapter so far has been on Faulkner's means of establishing his narrators both as real characters and as distinct novelistic points of view. But it is now necessary to admit that one cannot establish the book's quality in terms of verisimilitude alone, for the fragmentation of point of view serves a more profound and more embracing purpose. Faulkner employs the technique of a fragmented point of view as a fundamental structural means of alienating the reader from the world of the book. Just as the reader's preconceptions of the duration of a funeral are flouted by a nine-day horror with an unembalmed corpse, so all his expectations of the orderly, chronological development of a clearly distinguishable "plot" involving recognisable "characters" are deliberately ignored. Instead, one finds oneself, as it were, going from window to window in the wall of a vast fish-tank, past which and in front of which various forms swim or materialize out of the murk. One is never sure of what is going to happen until a later section describes it as having happened.²

¹ This quality has been noted, though not related to the structure of the book, by such critics as William Rossky in his "As I Lay Dying: The Insane World," TSLI, IV (Spring, 1962), 87-95; J.L. Roberts in his "The Individual and the Family: Faulkner's As I Lay Dying," AQ, XVI (Spring, 1960), 26-36; and Elmo Howell in his "Faulkner's Jumbles: The Nonsense World of As I Lay Dying," op.cit., pp. 70-78.

² Cf. Aiken, "The Novel as Form," TDC, pp. 135-142.

One is now in a position to appreciate the applicability to this book of Kayser's summary of the nature of "the grotesque" :

The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be summed up in a phrase ... : THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD In literature the grotesque appears in a scene or an animated tableau. Its representations in the plastic arts, too, do not refer to a state of repose but to an action, a "pregnant moment", or at least - in the case of Kafka - a situation that is filled with ominous tension. In this way the kind of strangeness we have in mind is somewhat more closely defined. We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death. [Italics mine.] Structurally, it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable. ¹

It would appear, then, that As I Lay Dying is a work belonging most properly to the aesthetic category of the grotesque, and that the function of point of view is not simply to provide (as Miss Vickery suggests)² an occasional view of the Bundrens as "grotesques", nor is it, as Miss Vickery also suggests, to provide comic relief, for, as Kayser says, "the grotesque elements to be found in certain works are not properly judged when interpreted in the comic or humorous sense."³ Its function is rather that of a comprehensive structural principle affecting the form and the reception of the book as a whole.

Once this is accepted, various details of the book acquire a heightened significance and a clearer functional relevance. One obvious detail is Vardaman's drilling of holes in the coffin, and piercing his mother's face with the auger, which may be seen to embody the threat which all tools misused seem to hold for human flesh. Another example is the use of cement on Cash's leg, which implies that it is being treated as a piece of dead matter - "The mechanical object is alienated by being brought to life, the human being by being deprived of it."⁴

¹ Kayser, The Grotesque..., pp. 184-185.

² "The Dimensions of Consciousness," TDC, p. 246.

³ Op.cit., p. 181.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 183.

The presence of the buzzards, as well as reminding one that the smell of the decaying body is alienating the surrounding space, contributes a further detail to the grotesque world, for, as Kayser says, "even in animals that are familiar to him, modern man may experience the strangeness of something totally different from himself and suggestive of abysmal ominousness."¹ The effectiveness of the buzzards is heightened by Darl and Vardaman referring to them exclusively as "them", which suggests an impersonal, threatening presence. But perhaps the most interesting thematic indication of the book's quality, lies in Darl's madness, for, as Kayser points out,

In the insane person, human nature itself seems to have taken on ominous overtones. Once more it is as if an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit, had entered the soul. The encounter with madness is one of the basic experiences of the grotesque which life forces upon us.²

In Darl's madness, Faulkner has found a condition which at once contributes signally to the grotesque quality of the book, while heightening its verisimilitude. From within the text itself, the following brief remark of Doc Peabody suggests a slight internal awareness of what Faulkner's technique makes externally available to the reader :

"That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long...."³

Book-length studies of Faulkner's work (Miss Vickery's work excepted) are inclined to do As I Lay Dying less than full justice,⁴ partly, one supposes, simply because it is shorter than many

¹ Kayser, op.cit., p. 182.

² Op.cit., p. 184.

³ AIID, pp. 43-44.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Melvin Backman, Faulkner : The Major Years, Midland Books (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Irving Howe, William Faulkner : A Critical Study, Vintage Books (2nd. ed.; New York: Random House, 1962).

of his later books. In some articles,¹ it is treated contrastively in company with The Sound and the Fury, and in such company - not surprisingly - is found to be slighter. One cannot help wondering to what extent Faulkner's own remarks on the subject have influenced the bias of his critics :

I took this family and subjected them to the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer - flood and fire, that's all. That was simple tour de force. That was written in six weeks without changing a word because I knew from the first where that was going.²

Certainly, As I Lay Dying does not have the tragic sweep of Light in August, the historical density of Absalom, Absalom!, or the emotional complexity of The Sound and the Fury, but this is not to say that it is not a significant part of the Faulkner canon. It has a unity of action which would have delighted Aristotle, and this gives rise to a clearly defined shape which discloses further delights on every re-perusal; it illuminates the tortuous workings of the human mind without becoming tortuous itself. The brevity of its sections and frequent changes of pace make the technique of interior monologue acceptable to many to whom the technique of Ulysses is merely an endurance test, while the language is of such clarity as to provide many of the delights of living in the natural world. There is intense feeling here, but mastered, controlled by irony and shifts in point of view, and, once the book is treated on its own terms, its true significance as a modern contribution to the literature of the grotesque may be seen in numerous details as well as in its overall design. Clearly, Faulkner "knew where it was going", but it would be foolish to insist that confusion of purpose in a work of art is a virtue. So closely are material and

¹ Cf. e.g. Harry M. Campbell, "Experiment and Achievement : As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury," Sewanee Review, LI (April, 1943), 305-320; and Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying," Princeton University Library Chronicle, XVIII (Spring, 1957), 114-123.

² FIU, p. 87.

structure united in this work that, for the reader - if not for the writer - the process of reading this book is an active participation in "the idea discovered in its making".

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BROKEN WATCH : FAULKNER'S HANDLING OF TIME

Perhaps no single aspect of Faulkner's work has exercised his critics as much as his treatment of time. Partly, no doubt, this may be understood as a reflection of this century's general preoccupation with time in both literature and life,¹ but it is also partly an indication of the particular significance which time has in the structure of Faulkner's novels. Jean-Paul Sartre has already identified a Faulknerian "metaphysic" of time,² and part of the purpose of this chapter will be to trace some of the details of that metaphysic. Faulkner, however, was not a philosopher (his interviews at the University of Virginia³ indicate the extent to which he went in fear of abstractions); nor was he, as Sartre is, a philosophical writer; both his fictional practice and his more explicit comments would seem to indicate the importance of insisting that Faulkner was primarily a novelist, and used whatever resource struck him as most effective at the moment of writing. If one examines Faulkner's more important statements on time outside his novels, one finds they possess a paradoxical combination of philosophical naivety with a high degree of relevance for his narrative technique.

In the interview with Jean Stein which took place in 1956,⁴ Faulkner stated :

¹ Cf. A.A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), Chs. I and II.

² "Time in Faulkner," TDC, pp. 225-232. For full details see Bibliography.

³ FIU, passim.

⁴ Malcolm Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 141.

... time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as was - only is. If was existed, there would be no grief or sorrow.

In the following year, at the University of Virginia, Faulkner answered a question about his use of the long sentence in such a way that he illuminated his aims as an artist, and the relation of those aims to an aspect of his technique, as well as his attitude to time :

... he [Everyone] is trying to put the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin, you might say. Also, to me, no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his and her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him, and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something ...¹

In an infrequently reprinted conversation with a French political science student in November, 1952, Faulkner said :

"There isn't any timeIn fact I agree pretty much with Bergson's theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity. In my opinion time can be shaped quite a bit by the artist"²

In answer to a question about French writers who influenced him, Faulkner replied :

"I was influenced by Flaubert and by BalzacAnd by Bergson, obviously. And I feel very close to Proust. After I had read A la Recherche du Temps Perdu I said 'This is it!' - and I wished I had written it myself."³

Margaret Church, in her excellent chapter on Faulkner,⁴ points out the paradox, in terms of the Bergsonian and Proustian attitudes to

¹ FIU, p. 84. Final suspension points are the editors'.

² Loïc Bouvard, "Conversation with William Faulkner," transl. Henry Dan Piper, Modern Fiction Studies, V (Winter, 1959-1960), 362.

³ Cp.cit., pp. 363-364.

⁴ Margaret Church, Time and Reality : Studies in Contemporary Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), Ch. 8.

time which she distinguishes in her opening chapter, in Faulkner's time sense. As can be seen above, Faulkner would appear to draw on both indiscriminately. So much of what Miss Church has to say is so illuminating - especially on Light in August and The Sound and the Fury - that it is presumptuous to quibble with her interpretations.

Granted her premises, all must follow as she says, and yet one cannot help feeling that in making her premises she is assuming abstract concepts in Faulkner's world, which, if there, are not easily discovered. Just as an over-rigorous application of the Snopes-Sartoris opposition can lead to the ignoring of an individual book's peculiar excellence, so, on occasion, does Miss Church's Proustian-Bergsonian dualism fail to capture the fullness of a book's time-sense, because, in her pursuit of a thematic element, she tends to overlook the significance of time as an element of structure.

If, as Meyerhoff indicates,¹ a discussion of time in literature may profitably begin with an acknowledgement of the dilemma with which man is faced between his inner, psychological time measured by significance ("time as an immediate datum of consciousness"), and the outer, impersonal time measured by clocks and calendars ("time as a logical construct claiming objective validity"), such a discussion must then proceed to examine the techniques by which these two senses of time and their permutations are rendered organic parts of a fictional whole. Mendilow² indicates in detail how both clock time and psychological (also called "mind") time affect in turn the reader, the writer, and the "pseudo-chronological duration of the theme of the novel".³ In addition, psychological time is present in the sense of

¹ Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 6.

² Time and the Novel, passim.

³ Op.cit., p. 71.

varying duration which the characters experience under the stress of circumstances within the novel. This has an important effect for an author such as Faulkner, for whom time avowedly "has no existence except in the avatars of individual people"¹:

... seeing that the comment ab extra of the intrusive author is less convincing than direct projection and fails to bring the reader to vibrate at the same rate of intensity as the character, the restricted point of view and the stream of consciousness technique lend themselves with particular effectiveness to the conveying of this effect of varying durational speeds.²

However, if the author's interest is exclusively in the direction of his characters' psychological time, the plot - the traditional back-bone of the novel and possibly the greatest contribution of clock time to its structure - will diminish in importance, or even disappear entirely. At the same time, as Humphrey points out:

The reader of fiction ... must have [pattern, discipline, and clarity] in order to have his own undisciplined consciousness focused and in order to be able to understand and interpret.³

An important instrument in the creation of a sense of order in a novel is the selection of "one point of time in the story which serves as the point of reference" from which "the fictive present may be considered as beginning."⁴ In the stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue techniques, the author usually anticipates the "temporal transfer"⁵ which the engrossed reader makes in his imagination, by using the present tense. He cannot escape using a point of reference (such as the dates in The Sound and the Fury, the present settings in Absalom, Absalom!, or the restricted points of view in

¹ Jean Stein, loc.cit.

² Time and the Novel, p. 132.

³ Op.cit., p. 86.

⁴ Time and the Novel, p. 96. In the present study, the "fictive present" is also referred to as the "narrated present".

⁵ Loc.cit.

As I Lay Dying), and he may well counterpoint a character's privately ordered moments with the passage of clock time (as in the last pages of Quentin's section in The Sound and the Fury), but, by treating exposition (what traditionally came "before" the point of reference) as part of the main action, he creates a suspension of the pseudo-chronological development, and simply continues to expand the point of reference itself. As Mendilow says - and it is interesting to note how closely his words echo Faulkner's :

The focus of presentness shifts continually; the relative pastness and presentness are deliberately dissolved; the tenses are confused or rather fused, so that the past is felt not as distinct from the present but included in it and permeating it. Every moment is conceived as the condensation of earlier history, and the past is not separate and completed but an ever-developing part of a changing present

* * *

In fact, for such writers, ... there is no past as such at all, only a growing present, for no part of the past has an independent identity; the whole grows and alters as the present shifts.¹

However, even in The Sound and the Fury, the novel in which he employs his most complicated form of stream-of-consciousness technique, Faulkner never totally abandons a plot which unfolds in the more traditional way (Miss Quentin's elopement). Far from abandoning clock time, he builds the contrast between clock time and mind time into a major theme. The diminished plot is replaced by the Christian Easter as the major structural element which both provides shape and points up significance. Presumably, it was Faulkner's interest in the inner life of his characters - their "mental functioning and psychic existence"² - which induced him to adapt to his own purposes the two techniques of modern fiction most suited to the depiction of inner states, where a linear

¹ Time and the Novel, pp. 104 - 105.

² Stream of Consciousness, p. 22.

sense of time was inapplicable. And perhaps it is Faulkner's handling of time which indicates most clearly the deliberateness with which he withholds the meaning of his novels, "until the dropping into place of the very last syllable."¹ For, as Mendilow says :

There is no place in the modern novel except the end at which the reader can say : 'The story has now reached such and such a point'.²

There is both external and internal evidence to support the theory that it is the moment which is the basic structural principle in The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!.³

Its importance can be sensed, too, in Light in August, but the presence of the omniscient narrator is perhaps of greater structural significance in that work. In an interview with Cynthia Grenier⁴ in 1955, Faulkner replied as follows to her question as to how he shaped his novels :

There's always a moment in experience - a thought - an incident - that's there. Then all I do is work up to that moment. I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after that moment.

Then, in the Paris Review interview with Jean Stein, there is

Faulkner's well-known remark on the origin of The Sound and the Fury :

It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree⁵

¹ Aiken, TDC, p. 138.

² Time and the Novel, p. 105.

³ The internal evidence will appear in the discussion of the individual works; the present discussion deals only with external evidence.

⁴ "The Art of Fiction : An Interview with William Faulkner - September, 1955," Accent, XVI (Summer, 1956), 171.

⁵ Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 130.

There is a sense in which Faulkner is striving to give each of the three books the quality of a moment, a unit, a "word-continuum",¹ which is self-contained, and held above the passage of chronological time. As he said to Jean Stein:

The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life.²

One can see the reason for Faulkner's preoccupation with Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn",³ which both celebrates just such an achievement, and becomes such a "moment" in itself. In using the word "moment", however, one must be allowed a certain metaphorical license. In the sense in which Faulkner used it in interviews, it was, literally, the instant in which a book was conceived. When applied to his novels, its meaning must be extended to mean the psychological duration of the book for the reader. Because the meaning is withheld as long as possible, the reader is left with a greater than usual sense of incompleteness whenever he leaves off reading the book before reaching the end; the unit of the book's duration, through the time-shift technique (the "chronological looping method" of Ford Madox Ford and Conrad), is suspended until the "last syllable of recorded time" is read. There is nothing especially remarkable in this as an artistic effect: it is what the "organicist"⁴ school of criticism has long maintained about

¹ Lawrence Durrell, "Author's Note," Clea (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

² Op.cit., p. 139. Cf. Adams, Myth and Motion, who builds his book on this remark.

³ References to, or images deriving from, this poem may be found in Soldier's Pay, Sartoris, Light in August, and Go Down, Moses (in "The Bear"), in which McCaslin reads the poem to the boy, Ike, and glosses it for him:

"He [Keats] was talking about truth. Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart ..."
(Go Down, Moses) [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960], p. 226.)

⁴ See M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1958).

the experience of all the time-arts. What is new, and perhaps remarkable, is the way in which Faulkner (and most other writers who successfully employ stream-of-consciousness techniques) manipulates the time-structure of his novels to this end, heightening so significantly by this single structural device the "illusion of life" and the meaningful insight into life which those novels present.

1. The Road : Time in Light in August

As has been pointed out in a previous chapter,¹ Faulkner controls his point of view in this novel so that the reader receives the least sympathetic view of Christmas first. Not surprisingly, Faulkner handles the chronology of the novel to produce the same effect. The fact that he uses an omniscient narrator allows Faulkner a great deal of latitude in the range of time he wishes to cover. For instance, in the first chapter, he is able to give a brief biographical sketch of Lena without impairing the progress of the present action. In fact, though the span of the present action is roughly two weeks (twelve days, if one omits Chapter Twenty-One), in an August in the twentieth century, the narrator ranges back in time beyond the Civil War as he provides the reader with information about Joanna Burden's and Hightower's respective grandfathers. A character's actions in Light in August are not only caused by the past experience of that particular individual, but also by experiences and attitudes inherited from past generations, and the narrator's omniscience equips him for the presentation of such a view.

The central action of the book involves a seemingly incomprehensible crime committed by a man about whom nobody in Jefferson knows very much : after allowing Byron Bunch to narrate as much as he knows to

¹ Cf. Ch. IV pp. 126-127.

Hightower on the Sunday night after the discovery of Joanna Burden's body on the Saturday, Faulkner introduces a flashback in Chapter Five which concentrates on Christmas's doings in the twenty-four hours prior to the murder (Thursday evening to Friday night), and then suspends the present action for nearly seven chapters while he dramatizes the formative experiences of Christmas's youth. Towards the end of Chapter Twelve, there is a change of tenses in mid-paragraph, and the narrator swiftly meshes Christmas's recent past with the present situation which had been left suspended at the end of Chapter Five :

... he would hear the voice again, monotonous, calm, and despairing, saying what and to what or whom he dared not learn nor suspect. And as he sat in the shadows of the ruined garden on that August night three months later and heard the clock in the courthouse two miles away strike ten and then eleven¹

At the end of the chapter, there is a slight shift to the next morning and the investigation. At the end of the investigation, Lena is reintroduced, as the wagon from which she is descending holds up the caravan of returning cars, and in this way, her story becomes involved with Christmas's, while at the same time, the reader is carried back to the narrated present of the first chapter.

Chapters Fourteen to Eighteen proceed more or less chronologically² through the ensuing nine days, but in Chapter Eighteen, the narrator becomes apparently preoccupied with Byron and Burch, so that the reader

¹ LIA, p. 244. Italics mine.

² There seems to be a minor hiatus in Faulkner's dating at one point, for in Chapter Fifteen, the reader is told that Christmas was captured in Mottstown on a Friday, yet in the same chapter, Faulkner states that it was a Saturday (p. 306), and Byron, visiting Hightower on Sunday afternoon, tells him that they had caught Christmas on the previous day. This slip on Faulkner's part, however, does not affect Faulkner's presentation of theme, and, like the "Double Time" problem in Othello, is best dismissed with the observation that one only notices it when drawing up an abstract time-chart, and not as one reads.

does not learn of Christmas's death until it is over. The reader learns of it as Byron does - from the driver of a wagon. The flash-back pattern which Faulkner used with Joanna Burden's murder is then used again, and Chapter Nineteen first presents Gavin Stevens's summing up of what he thinks motivated Christmas's last actions, and then, with the introduction of Percy Grimm, the reader is led through the details of Christmas's escape and death. Chapter Twenty is devoted to Hightower's dying thoughts, which act partially as a choric comment from within the main story, while Chapter Twenty-One, with its complete change of point of view, acts almost as a satyr-play to the tragedy which has preceded it.

Margaret Church has made a perceptive analysis of the relationship to the time of Lena, Hightower, and Christmas.¹ In Light in August, as in The Sound and the Fury, a character's attitude towards time is an important means of indirect characterization. It was pointed out in the chapter on Characterization² that Faulkner suggests that Lena's movement is "like something moving forever and without progress across an urn,"³ and this image undoubtedly imparts a quality of timelessness to Lena's life, but one would hesitate to go as far as Miss Church and speak of "Lena's acceptance of her fate and her intuitive knowledge of time ...".⁴ Certainly, however, one could not apply the same image to the two men with whom Lena is contrasted.

Hightower's relationship to time is a false one. As the omniscient narrator points out :

¹ Time and Reality, pp. 238 - 240.

² See pp. 48-49 above.

³ LIA, p. 6.

⁴ Op.cit., p. 238.

He lives dissociated from mechanical time. Yet for that reason he has never lost it.¹

His dissociation from time is an index of his isolation from the human community. In Chapter Twenty, Hightower, having delivered Lena's baby, and having been struck over the head in his attempt to save Christmas, attains a measure of clairvoyance. In realising the power which he has allowed his adulation of the past (his grandfather's death in a raid on a hen-house twenty years before he was born) to hold over his life, Hightower realises the destruction which this false sense of time has wrought and realises for the first time his own complicity in his wife's death :

"And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay : I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife ... the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife ..."²

This moment of revelation Faulkner cleverly envelops within the moment at sunset for which Hightower waits every day of his life, when he could "hear" the thunder of hooves which symbolize for him the transcendent moment - the moment of his grandfather's death. In this way, Faulkner suspends the moment in which Hightower had always imagined he had lived (and which, therefore, was the nearest to what one could call his "clock time"), and allows the moment, in which he really re-enters community time by perceiving his responsibility, to unfold within it. This "frozen moment" in which the clock is stopped while the individual's time swells to include his whole past (three generations, in this instance) is a microcosm of similar effects for which Faulkner strives in the larger structural units in The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!

¹ LIA, p. 320.

² Op.cit., p. 430.

Christmas possesses the most complex time-sense of the three, because, as Miss Church points out,¹ he possesses the ability to think about time. On at least one occasion, too, Christmas experiences a Proustian moment in and out of time when the field peas he eats in Joanna Burden's kitchen precipitate a flashback to his childhood, with McEachern saying an interminable grace. It is interesting to note that Faulkner places this recovery of the past immediately before Joanna Burden enters as if to recapitulate Christmas's whole being and to indicate to the reader the range of awareness he must maintain in trying to understand Christmas's actions.

The degree to which Christmas surrenders to fatalism as he prepares to kill Joanna is indicated not only by his mental use of the past tense before he has acted, but also by his experiencing time as a two-dimensional pattern :

The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on : tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment²

The flatness is presumably the result of Christmas's temporary abandoning of the freedom to choose. This abandoning is only temporary, however, because on the Wednesday after the murder, Christmas is again thinking about time, and feeling that he has escaped it :

When he thinks about time, it seems to him now that for thirty years he has lived inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets, and that one night he went to sleep and when he waked up he was outside of them.³

But on Thursday night, Christmas finds himself trying to calculate the day of the week, "as though now and at last he had an actual and urgent

¹ Time and Reality, p. 239.

² LIA, p. 246.

³ Ibid., pp. 289-290.

need to strike off the accomplished days towards some purpose, some definite day or act ...".¹ The next day, Christmas again asks what day of the week it is, and then moves off "like a man who knows where he is and where he wants to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in."² He finds a gravelled road, and hitches a ride to Mottstown; as it comes into view, Christmas perceives he is re-entering his life in time again (symbolised by the street), and realises that he has "travelled further" in the last seven days than in all the thirty years before, because he has come to the conscious realisation that one cannot cut oneself off from time without cutting oneself off from life, and therefore he can accept that he has never broken out of the ring of what he has already done and cannot ever undo. By accepting responsibility for the inescapable ring of his life in time, Christmas is free to re-enter time, and to accept the passive role of victim through which he transcends time.³ Finally, Hightower's vision in Chapter Twenty⁴ shows that Christmas's decision to act and suffer within time has involved him in mankind, and that therefore, in this visionary apotheosis, his face has "a more inextricable compositeness", than any of the others.

When one has noted the powerful evocation of Christmas's childhood and the clear yet deep insight it provides into his motivation, and when one has noted the neat meshing of one story with another, there yet lingers a sense of dissatisfaction with the structure of the book. The seven chapters devoted to Christmas, proceeding linearly in time, cannot help but strike the reader as exposition of an almost Homeric

¹ LIA, p. 293.

² Ibid., p. 295.

³ See LIA, p. 407, and the discussion in Ch. II, pp. 53-55 above.

⁴ LIA, p. 430.

directness. One misses in Light in August the subtle "intercalations"¹ of expository material which are handled so skilfully in the other three novels, and without the sense of past and present continuously² interacting, the inevitability of Joanna Burden's death seems somewhat forced.

2. A Moment of History : Time in Absalom, Absalom!

In the first paragraph of this novel, the third-person narrator gives the present setting, and creates one of the points of reference for the fictive present of the novel, the September afternoon, 1909, at Miss Rosa's house. The duration of this afternoon, its evening and night comprises the outer layer of fictive present of the novel. Although, in Chapter Six, there is a leap in present setting and time to a January night at Harvard, where Chapters Six to Nine are re-constructed largely by Shreve and Quentin within roughly one hour of clock time per chapter, the reader does not learn the conclusion of the September night's visit, nor the conclusion of Mr. Compson's letter which appears early in Chapter Six, until the last pages of Chapter Nine. Thus the unit of fictive present may be said to be distended to include the whole book.

But the shifts in present time and place are not the principal contents of the "moment" of the book. This is rather comprised of what would traditionally be referred to as the "past", the chronological duration of which, expressed in linear terms, stretches from 1807 up to and including the January night in 1910 which finds Shreve and Quentin at Harvard. This book represents Faulkner's most gargantuan

¹ Mendilow, Time and the Novel, p. 105.

² There is, of course, the more or less isolated example of the "Proustian" recall precipitated by the field peas.

attempt to put "the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin,"¹ or, one might say, to condense the whole history of Yoknapatawpha County into two "talking sessions" of a total duration of probably not more than fifteen hours. And it is the sense of the speaking voice - which meets one almost everywhere in Absalom, Absalom! - which heightens the illusion that it is all happening simultaneously. Using the device of tales within a tale to achieve his time-effects, Faulkner persuades the reader that narrators and listeners alike within the book have, by imaginative transfer, turned the past of the tale which they are both telling and hearing into a fictive present of their own. And thus the third-person narrator can speak of "... not two of them there and then either but four of them riding the two horses through the iron darkness...."²

The disappearance of tenses begins in the second paragraph, where Miss Rosa's voice "just vanishes" as does the preacher's in the fourth section of The Sound and the Fury. This is a fairly common Faulknerian signal³ for the beginning of a simultaneity of tenses, and in this case the vanishing of the voice summons a "moving tableau" - the first glimpse which either Quentin or the reader has of Thomas Sutpen. Faulkner deliberately presents Sutpen and his "wild niggers" as another author might present a group of statuary; only when the composite static image is complete, does Faulkner release the latent movement suggested by such phrases as "attitudes wild and reposed" and "huddled quietly", and allow them to produce Sutpen's Hundred almost instantaneously. In this way, the moment of the book's origin is created before the reader's eyes : the rest of the book is a working

¹ FIU, p. 84.

² AA, p. 295.

³ Cf. the opening pages of Sartoris (1929).

out of what comes "before" and "after" this moment. "Before" and "after" are highly relative terms in this context, however, as each narrator has a different conjecture for almost every event in Sutpen's career, and consequently covers his whole career as fully as his or her knowledge permits. Although this "generative image" of the book has already been covered in some detail¹ its importance for the time-structure of the book would seem to justify its quotation in full at this juncture. The first two sentences of the paragraph achieve the "dissolving" of the Coldfield house, and then the third sentence begins :

... Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran. Immobile, bearded and hand palm-lifted the horseman sat; behind him the wild blacks and the captive architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest. Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light.²

There is another aspect of the relationship between this novel and time which Faulkner employs to heighten the illusion of the book as a continuum : he manipulates the chronological duration of the time it takes for the reader to complete the book. As has been stated above, the chronological time in which the narrators are portrayed as completing the narration, is probably not above fifteen hours.³ The time which it takes the reader to complete a reading of the book is

¹ Cf. Ch. III, pp. 110-115 above.

² AA, pp. 8 - 9.

³ From two o'clock to late evening on the September date, and from some time in the evening to about 1 a.m. on the January date.

considerably longer than that.¹ However, because of the imaginative temporal transfer which Mendilow discusses,² the engrossed reader will accept the narrators' fifteen hours as the "real" duration of the book, and hence, at the chronological level alone, will experience a tremendously swollen durational "present". The paradox involved is anticipated in the third-person narrator's description³ of Quentin's experience as he listens to Miss Rosa's tale :

It should have been later than it was; it should have been late, yet the yellow slashes of mote-palpitant sunlight were latticed no higher up the impalpable wall of gloom which separated them; the sun seemed hardly to have moved. It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity - horror or pleasure or amazement - depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. ⁴

In this way, Faulkner incorporates and anticipates within the book a description of the reader's experience, so that, in fact, the gap between reader and narrator is reduced by several degrees, and Faulkner's handling of the time-structure in Absalom, Absalom! reflects his general intention of involving the reader in the active creation of the fourteenth way of looking at the blackbird.⁵

¹ A quick averaging of words per line and lines per page revealed that there are roughly 1,024,740 words in the book, which it would take one 41 hours to read at the rate of 420 words per minute. Few readers could manage that pace on a first reading of this work.

² Time and the Novel, pp. 96 - 99.

³ I am indebted to Warren Beck ("William Faulkner's Style," TDC, pp. 142-156) for drawing my attention to this passage, although I employ it to a different end.

⁴ AA, p. 22.

⁵ See above, Ch. IV, p. 133.

3. The River : Time in As I Lay Dying

The time structure of As I Lay Dying contributes to the book's grotesque design. It has already been remarked¹ how the chronological duration of the Bundrens' journey (in which an action which is usually completed within a short space of time is dragged out to unbearable lengths) is so handled that it instills in the reader a fear of life under such conditions. The distortion of the chronological duration of the journey, however, is comparatively simple compared to the distortion of the chronological unfolding of the narrative which is caused by the absence of a third-person narrator, and Faulkner's use of interior monologue throughout. Instead of the familiar direct distribution of narrative phases by chapters, the progress of the narrative in As I Lay Dying must be inferred indirectly from remarks made by the individual characters. The distribution is "breadthwise" and "depthwise" in the direction of space and indirect characterization, rather than "lengthwise", in the direction of time."² In this way, the book is ordered by the mind time of the fifteen narrators, which considerably prolongs the physical act of reading as well as enhancing the reader's psychological involvement. However, lest fifteen fairly long sections each narrated by one character should seem to suggest too much of a chronological development, Faulkner fragments the narration even further - into fifty-nine sections. It is this fragmentation which is Faulkner's principal technical means of achieving the illusion of a chronological duration extended beyond the limits of human endurance. Miss Church³ quite rightly seizes on a part of one of Darl's

¹ In Ch. IV above, pp. 173-174.

² André Gide Les Faux-monnayeurs, quoted in J.W. Beach, The Twentieth-Century Novel (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), p.425.

³ Time and Reality, p. 235.

sentences as describing the motion of the book : "We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferent of progress..."¹

Darl is the only narrator-character in As I Lay Dying who thinks on a level of abstraction that is high enough to enable him to give such a comment on an action in which he is also involved. The range of his comments extends, predictably enough, to include some remarks on time, as in the concluding clause of the sentence quoted above : "... as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it [Jewel's horse]." In context, this remark is probably not more than a vivid metaphorical way of expressing the near-stasis of the wagon's motion, and an indirect suggestion of the extraordinary quality of Darl's mind. In his twelfth section, however, Darl has more to say on the subject of time :

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between.²

The reader is immediately struck with the difficulty of grasping the meaning of this passage. Perhaps this is intentional on Faulkner's part: perhaps one is simply meant to accept the incomprehensibility as one of Faulkner's indirect means of characterizing Darl's mind. And yet the passage seems to cry aloud for comment. In a noble attempt to see this passage as part of the whole book, Miss Church³ perhaps allows her interpretation to be coloured too highly by ideas directly

¹ AILD, p. 101.

² Op.cit., p. 139.

³ Time and Reality, pp. 235-237.

derived from other Faulkner novels. Certainly she gives the impression that the passage is easier to explicate than it in fact is. The first difficulty that one encounters is the phrase "the only things in sight not of that ..." which may very tentatively be glossed as implying that "pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell" are not in sight of the river ("that single monotony of desolation"), and hence are not in a position to share Darl's vision of the river. In the absence of punctuation, "leaning" could qualify either the group of people or the river. If it qualifies the river, then, in combination with "that terrific quality", it seems to suggest a movement so swift, so accelerated that it gives the illusion of standing still. As elsewhere in the book, this power of perception separates Darl from the other members of his family as well as all the other characters in the book. At this point, it seems as if his experience of time is different from theirs as well, as he seems about to experience a "suspended" or timeless moment. The others "appear dwarfed" although "the river itself is not a hundred yards across" : this further suggests the degree of Darl's isolation. Darl next speaks of the space between them as if it were "time: an irrevocable quality." Margaret Church glosses this comment as follows :

For Darl ... time actually becomes the river, a horizontal quality and not something running ahead of him. The distance between bank and bank becomes then, not an interval, but the crossing or transcendence of time itself.¹

It is difficult to see how Miss Church derives this interpretation from this passage. In the first instance, Darl speaks of the river as possessing an "irrevocable", not a "horizontal" quality; this would seem to emphasize the permanence of Darl's isolation : a space can be re-crossed, it allows revocation where time does not. Miss Church seems to have fused this sentence in the Faulkner passage with

¹ Op.cit., p. 236.

the one which follows it, where Darl launches into a conceit so abstruse as to defy all but the most tentative explication. Darl begins with a familiar metaphor for the chronological progression of time, and suggests that it is now not applicable ("no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line"), that the passage of time has ceased for them, and time "now runs parallel between [them] like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between." This image seems to suggest that "time has run out" for the Bundrens, that they are left futureless. In forming a loop, no matter how large, string recrosses itself at some point, hence a temporal order conceived in such terms would be static, deprived of any sense of the progress which a simple linear figure suggests. It would appear, then, that the aspect of time which is emphasized in this passage is one of futurelessness, a duration without progression, rather than a point at which it may be transcended. This interpretation of the passage, if at all acceptable, would coincide more closely with the impressions created by the other aspects of time in this novel than Miss Church's suggestions, which seem more concerned with certain thematic patterns more clearly suggested by Light in August or The Sound and the Fury, rather than As I Lay Dying. Miss Church perceptively remarks that "the time sense in As I Lay Dying is perfectly consistent"¹ : one could extend this perception in order to relate Darl's time sense to Faulkner's time structure, where the same integrating power seems to be at work.

¹ Time and Reality, p. 237.

4. Time for Such Words : The Sound and the Fury

A glance at the table of contents reveals the apparent simplicity of the novel's design. The narrative phases are arranged under four dates : April Seventh, 1928; June Second, 1910; April Sixth, 1928; April Eighth, 1928. The replacement of conventional chapter-headings by dates immediately draws the reader's attention to the structural importance of units of time in the novel, as well as indicating the apparently stringent limitation of the book's temporal scope. The un-chronological order of the phases indicates, too, that Faulkner has chosen to plunge the reader in medias res, and that the third and fourth phases comprise a "before" and an "after" respectively. In terms of this neat pattern, the second phase seems something of an excrescence which apparently violates the unity of the three 1928 dates. This will be considered in detail at a later stage.

The title of the book naturally brings to mind the passage from Macbeth from which it is derived.¹ Told of his wife's death, Macbeth replies that amid the general collapse of meaning in his life, this event is deprived of its proper gravity. The future has become a succession of meaningless "to-morrows"; the past seems equally without significance. From this despairing attitude to time, he moves to an equally despairing view of life as

" ... a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

¹ "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

(Macbeth, V, v, 19-28.)

A reading of Faulkner's novel would seem to suggest that the choice of title was perhaps prompted by his perception of how a person's attitude to time may reveal a great deal about his attitude to life.¹ The emphasis on time in the arrangement of the narrative phases of the book has already been remarked upon; that time is also of thematic importance would seem to be indicated by the opening sentence of the second section: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch."² The title appears to have been well chosen; how far the despair of the Macbeth context is present in this novel will emerge as the discussion proceeds.

The first three sections of the book explore the inner time of three characters, creating a tension between the substance of the section and the impersonal nature of its heading, while in the fourth section, the ordering is done by an omniscient narrator, and thus corresponds to the objectivity of the heading. It is in the final section that the reader learns beyond doubt that April 6th, 7th and 8th correspond to Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday for 1928. By itself, the table of contents suggests a book organised around four significant dates in the lives of the people in the book, but this is obviously not enough for Faulkner, for he has chosen his dates to coincide with three of the most significant fixed days of the Christian calendar, thus availing himself of a far greater potential universality for both structure and theme. In the Christian calendar, Easter is fixed in order to recall annually an event intended to be of significance for all men for time and eternity, and it is against this timelessly meaningful pattern of Christ's sacrifice, death and resurrection that Faulkner sets his depiction of meaningless suffering,

¹ But see Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (London: Constable, 1966), pp.86-103 on the importance of the earlier title, "Twilight".

² S&F, p. 93.

self-inflicted death, and the disintegration of a family and a way of life.

a. April Seventh, 1928 : A Tale Told by an Idiot

Faulkner introduces his reader gently to the violent dislocations of narrated time which are later to occur, by providing at the beginning of the book a fairly long scene from the narrated present of this section. In fact, the reader finds himself in the middle of a scene :

"Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence." ¹

The first-person narrator is Benjy Compson, who is, as one subsequently gathers, a simpleton. He is the fictional means whereby Faulkner can have his tale literally told by an idiot in the first instance. Clearly, Faulkner is not aiming at a naturalistic portrayal of a retarded mentality; rather he is asking the reader to accept the convention of a point of view which is severely limited in certain directions. As a convention, this has certain advantages: some of the characters behave as if Ben were not there, thus revealing more of their true selves; Ben cannot communicate with the others except by means of his "moan" or "bellow", hence his perceptions are not clouded by the demands of interaction; and what is most important, his responses have the appearance of complete illogicality, so that when, in the course of subsequent sections, the reader begins to perceive the significance of sights, sounds, or smells to which Ben responded with his moan, Ben's response is seen, with retrospective irony, as the supremely logical one.

It would appear, then, that the interest of Ben's point of view is not a purely technical one, for it is not without moral overtones.

¹ S&F, p. 1.

In this respect, Ben might be seen as a modern version of the Shakespearean wise fool, as one whose ingenuous, stimulus-tied perceptions both reveal more than those of either of his brothers, and serve as a comment on the deceptions which they practise on themselves and others. Ben is functioning in a novel, however, and his normative function only emerges indirectly as one reads on, or pauses to reflect; if he does assist the reader in some ways, however, his point of view hinders one in others - most notably in the problems posed by Ben's lack of any sense of time.

Ben presents his creator with a two-fold difficulty : he must present a retarded consciousness at work, while not straining his reader's comprehension beyond endurance. The first object Faulkner achieves by the following means : circumlocution - using "where the flag was" instead of "the green" - which keeps the terms of description simple while implying an imperfect grasp on reality; the omission of question-marks and exclamation-marks, which suggests an unsophisticated narrator; and, most important, the rapid, jagged shifts from scene to scene, without any preparation or any obvious links. All the fragments are in the same tense, and thus are contemporaneous. Although as a reader one must use the terms "past" and "present" to distinguish events which occurred prior to April Seventh from those which take place on that date, one must not make the error of supposing Ben attaches any meaning to these words : he is unable to make temporal distinctions of this kind. All his experiences constitute one kaleidoscopic experience, clustering and breaking up and reforming as the result of an apparently mechanical form of association. One cannot use the word "recall" because Ben's experiences are not mentally dated in any way.

How, then, does Faulkner avoid the total confusion which such methods would suggest? On a typographical level, Faulkner helps the reader by changing the type-face for the first paragraph of a

fragmentary incident. Apparently, his original intention "was to use different¹ colored inks, but that would have cost so much, the publisher couldn't undertake it."¹ The system of italics which is used is only moderately helpful: As Volpe's table² indicates, there are five scene-shifts which are not signalled by a type-shift; in addition, where the fragment consists of only one paragraph, the resumption of normal type-face suggests a return to the interrupted scene, whereas it quite often indicates a new scene-fragment. In the reader's favour, however, is the fact that although there are, by Volpe's reckoning, some ninety-nine scene-shifts, there are only fifteen basic scenes, apart from the narrated present, from which the fragments are taken. Some of these scenes, and especially those belonging to the narrated present, have recurrent characters or themes, by which they are the more easily recognised. For example, the signals by which the reader can recognise the present are the fact that it is Ben's thirty-third birthday; that he is to have a cake with candles; that his attendant is Luster, who is searching for a lost quarter.

One must now ask what effects the fragmentation of time and the limited point of view (of which it is so important a part) allow the author. In the first place, the author is free to range widely in time, and thus may include crucial scenes from Ben's and the family's past. These fragments, as the reader only discovers later in the novel, provide one with much essential raw material for the family's story. For example, one receives a telling impression of Mrs. Compson's physical and spiritual invalidism from the following remark she makes to her brother :

¹ FIU, p. 94.

² Volpe, A Reader's Guide, pp. 353-373.

"I know." Mother said. "Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things. I wish for Jason's and the children's sake I was stronger." ¹

Only as the novel progresses does the reader realise to what extent this sort of attitude on Mrs. Compson's part has been responsible for the disintegration of the individual Compsons as well as of the family as a whole.

The second important effect of Faulkner's technique is the free and apparently random juxtaposition of scene-fragments. This is best illustrated by an excerpt from Volpe's table :²

Page number:	First Words of Scene	Time
18	<u>See you all at the show</u>	Present
18	"If we go slow,	Damuddy's Death
18	<u>The cows came jumping</u>	Caddy's Wedding
20	<u>At the top of the hill Versh</u>	Damuddy's Death

The fragments seem so clearly unrelated that the reader is almost driven to discover some meaning, and, indeed, when one returns to this section with the knowledge gained in the other sections of the book, it becomes clear that Faulkner has deliberately used the fragmentation of chronology to create a montage of scenes with the strongest possible thematic ties. The key word is "death" - to which, whenever he "smells" it, Ben responds with his moaning - for the day of Damuddy's death is also the day on which Caddy got her drawers muddy; this symbolically foreshadows her loss of virginity and promiscuity (which both she and her mother regard as a kind of death),³ which in turn

¹ S&F, p. 7.

² Op.cit., p. 363.

³ Caddy says to Quentin:

"yes I hate him I would die for him I've already died for him over and over again every time this goes " (S&F, p. 188.)

And Jason says of his mother :

"... like that time when she happened to see one of them kissing Caddy and all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil and even Father couldn't get her to say a word except crying and saying her little daughter was dead ..." (S&F, p. 286.)

necessitates her marriage, which is also a kind of death - a moral one here - for she is selling herself to preserve the family's respectability. It then becomes clear that Ben's seemingly causeless moaning was in fact a response to something which he did not like - perhaps, ironically, it is the only response that a normal mentality would make under similar circumstances. It is one of the strongest ironies of Faulkner's technique in this book that Ben's severely limited point of view is nevertheless in touch with a kind of reality: he knows without being told that Damuddy is dead - "He smell hit" - as Versh says; he can perceive immediately that Caddy has become promiscuous; in short, as Roskus says, " 'He know lot more than folks thinks.' "¹

It would appear, then, that the overall effect of Faulkner's technique in this first part of The Sound and the Fury, is, by means of dislocating the reader's expectations of a conventional chronology, to free him from the polite deceptions which are a part of that same ordered world, and to put him more immediately in touch with the horror which lurks just beneath that seemingly smooth veneer. The reader is to witness the final disintegration of a declining family; the first narrator, by the simple fact that he is an idiot, would seem to suggest that all is not well; but this is not enough for Faulkner: he takes the reader inside Benjy's consciousness, and there, in the broken narrated present of a single day, which nevertheless recapitulates thirty years in the life of the family, he presents the raw materials out of which the book is made.

b. June Second, 1910 : Full of Sound and Fury

This second section, narrated by Quentin, poses a number of problems for the unity of the book. On internal evidence, it is not

¹ S&F, p. 37.

clear that it is part of the Easter pattern, nor (though the reference to the boat-race's imminence might be the clue) is it clearly the last day of the academic year as Faulkner seemed to think it was in the Appendix he added seventeen years later :

Committed suicide in Cambridge Massachusetts, June 1910, two months after his sister's wedding, waiting first to complete the current academic year and so get the full value of his paid-in-advance tuition, not because he had his old Culloden and Carolina and Kentucky grandfathers in him but because the remaining piece of the old Compson mile which had been sold to pay for his sister's wedding and his year at Harvard had been the one thing, excepting that same sister and the sight of an open fire, which his youngest brother, born an idiot, had loved. ¹

Thirdly, there is very little preparation for Quentin's section in Ben's narrative. Volpe's table cites only two scene-fragments as referring to the presence of Quentin's body, both of which are within the first thirty pages of the book, and so oblique as to escape the reader almost entirely. The only real preparation for Quentin and his suicide plans is the prevalence of death in the scene-fragments of Ben's section.

External evidence, on the other hand, has considerably more to show. Combining astute research with a deliberate attempt to elucidate the Christian and Freudian patterns of the book, Carvel Collins discovered :

... The date of Quentin Compson's monologue turns out to fall on a Thursday so that even though it is in 1910 rather than the 1928 of the other three carefully dated sections, it makes Quentin's section form with them a sequence of Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. ²

Eleven years later, in a letter to the editor of a collection of criticism on The Sound and the Fury, Collins added :

¹ Malcolm Cowley, ed., The Portable Faulkner (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), pp. 743-744.

² Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, XVIII (Spring, 1957), 115-119. Repr. in part in Cowan (See n.1, p. 208).

The date at the head of Quentin's monologue is the date of the Octave of Corpus Christi in 1910, and Corpus Christi is Holy Thursday reenacted in a happier context at another time of year and with the addition of new elements, one of them the carrying of bread through the streets (cf. Quentin and the little Italian girl with her loaf).¹

In this way, Collins fits Quentin's section into the week-day and the Christian patterns of the novel. The only objection one can raise is the degree of external research required for such an interpretation. In a novel which is otherwise so carefully patterned from within, it seems unnecessarily careless of Faulkner not to have provided some inner indication of the significance of the date of June Second, 1910, and its place in the time-patterns of the book. Despite Collins's careful work, Quentin's section remains less well integrated than the other three sections.

Perhaps, however, the very lack of integration might be part of Faulkner's meaning; perhaps he has deliberately violated the unity of time in the book to suggest that, in the story of a family as atomised as the Compsons, one can expect nothing but violent dislocations. Certainly, the effect is to seal Quentin's narrative more firmly within itself, as his death seals him off from the narrated present of the rest of the book. As in Addie's single section in As I Lay Dying, the reader receives here a commentary from a point removed in time from the events of the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth of April, 1928. Quentin's death-day (counterpointing Ben's birthday, in the previous section) constitutes an action that is already complete within the larger action of the book, where the issues and characters with which he attempted to deal are still very much alive.

Having said this, one is free to examine the thematic ties which Quentin's section does have with the rest of the book. The

¹ Michael H. Cowan, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Sound and the Fury (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 71.

characters are the same, though naturally one sees slightly different facets (this is part of both method and meaning in all four sections), and the theme of death is pervasive. Ben's section owes some of its obliquity to the attempts of others to keep him away from the house when there is a death; Quentin's section derives its shape from Quentin's deliberate preparation for, and movement towards a pre-arranged moment of suicide. Quentin, in his own way, is as obsessed with Caddy as his idiot brother, who, held in a deliberately absurd Pavlovian stimulus-response bondage, follows the golfers' shouts of "Caddie". Faulkner uses the technique of time-fragmentation again, but with such an increase in complexity, that the time-shifts of Ben's consciousness are simple and mechanical by contrast. As Volpe's table for this section indicates,¹ there are some two hundred shifts in Quentin's section, as opposed to the ninety nine in Benjy's, while the number of basic scenes is halved. Faulkner's handling of time is clearly used as a means of characterization : as one understands more about the workings of Quentin's obsessed mind, one begins to understand the reason for the different ratio of scenes to time-shifts.

The typographical clues to the changes in time within this section are less easily reduced to a system, for they are employed to depict the ebb and flow of a highly articulate and sensitive - yet thoroughly obsessed - consciousness, and at the same time to suggest something of its richness. At its simplest, Faulkner's task is to present direct speech which has been spoken at different moments, often distant in time from each other; furthermore, the snatches of direct speech are contained within the monologue of one character, a monologue which has to be flexible enough to suggest the operation of that character's consciousness at levels ranging from the threshold of speech, through

¹ A Reader's Guide, p. 365, and pp. 373 - 377.

scenes which recur because of their particularly strong emotional value for the narrator, to depths of consciousness which can only be rendered in terms of symbols. And, finally, if Faulkner is to succeed in saying anything, he has to make this tremendous range intelligible to the reader.

Faulkner uses conventional punctuation for speech and action taking place in the narrated present, June Second, 1910. This is indicated by the opening sentence :

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch.¹

In the very next sentence, however, although a quotation is involved, inverted commas are omitted :

It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire ...

The omission indicates that his father's words are by now part of Quentin's consciousness. No other device is necessary; the sequence "... the watch. It was Grandfather's ... Father gave it to me ..." is perfectly logical, and obviously on a fairly highly ordered level of consciousness.

In the next paragraph, the omission of inverted commas is combined with the rhetorical figure of anacoluthon² to suggest a more private, elliptical form of association, though the dislocation is not violent enough to suggest more than the upper layers of consciousness :

... You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear. Like Father said down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking,

¹ S&F, p. 93.

² I am much indebted in my approach to Faulkner's techniques to Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), *passim*. Also to his "The Form and Function of Stream of Consciousness in William Faulkner's 'The Sound and the Fury'", UKCR, XIX (Autumn, 1952), 34 - 40.

like. And the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister. ¹

Not until the fifth paragraph does Faulkner introduce italics, which erupt into the conventionally punctuated flow of Quentin's thoughts with the force of something thrust up from beyond the threshold of consciousness :

If it had been cloudy I could have looked at the window, thinking what he said about idle habits. Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn't it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. ²

Here, as in Benjy's section, the italics indicate a time-shift to scraps of scenes which have taken place in the past. But in Quentin's section, as distinct from Benjy's, because some of the fragments are so short, the italics seem to carry an additional force derived from their more conventional use for emphasis.

Italicised fragments are also used in this section as catalysts which precipitate long fragments of remembered scenes. In addition, Faulkner uses italics to create an effect of time-and-space-montage, of two scenes happening simultaneously, one in the past counterpointed with one in the narrated present. As the scenes are always thematically related, Faulkner achieves an ironic effect of great power, usually (and this is itself significant) at the expense of the present :

"I adore Canada," Miss Daingerfield said. "I think it's marvellous."

"Did you ever drink perfume?" Spoade said. with one hand he could lift her to his shoulder and run with her running Running

"No," Shreve said. running the beast with two backs and she blurred in the winking oars running the swine of Euboeus running coupled within how many Caddy

¹ S&F, p. 94.

² Op.cit., pp. 94 - 95.

"Neither did I," Spode said. I don't know too many there was something terrible in me terrible in me Father I have committed Have you ever done that We didn't we didn't do that did we do that

"and Gerald's grandfather always picked his own mint before breakfast, while the dew was still on it." ¹

The final typographical level is the absence of all punctuation - as in the excerpt above - for scenes in the past (whether italicised or not) of some length. Direct speech is set out conventionally, with a new line for each change of speaker, but punctuation is omitted. At such a point, the reader feels swept away in an unchecked torrent of consciousness which is no longer held by rational, ordering restraints :

... renewed themselves of their own movement I stood on the bank
I could smell the honeysuckle on the water gap the air seemed to
drizzle with honeysuckle and with the rasping of crickets a
substance you could feel on the flesh

is Benjy still crying
I don't know yes I dont know
poor Benjy
I sat down on the bank the grass was damp a little then I
found my shoes wet
get out of that water are you crazy ²

Interesting typography is not enough, however; the reader quite rightly demands structural clues within the text. The section is designed to create the illusion of a unstructured flow of consciousness, but is in fact built on the simple divisions of the hours of the day from "between seven and eight o'clock" when Quentin wakes, to an evening hour (probably between six and seven o'clock) when the chimes from the Harvard tower mark off the three-quarters before the hour which Quentin has chosen for his suicide. The narrated present advances more clearly and noticeably in this section than in Ben's, and this is appropriate, because a pre-determined limit to time has been set by the narrator. At the same time, the reading pace becomes slower and slower

¹ S&F, p. 184.

² Op.cit., p. 186.

as more and more of Quentin's past rises into the present, gradually filling it, until at the time when he is actually fighting Gerald Bland (as the reader only learns subsequently) it is his attempted duel with Dalton Ames which fills his consciousness.

The clues to the passing of time are both direct and indirect. The most obvious direct clue is the chiming of the Harvard clock when Quentin is within hearing distance. In the final part of his section, the chiming of the quarter-hours helps to create a sense of mounting urgency, of time running out, similar to the effect which Marlowe achieves in Faustus's last soliloquy. The indirect clues are more numerous, and include Quentin's references to his shadow (though this is not its only significance), his avoiding of steeples, and his awareness of the changing quality of the light. The fact that Quentin avoids mentioning the hour, and yet is surrounded by indirect indications of the passage of time, is part of the sad irony of his attempt to flee reality. In the following passage, direct and indirect clues are typically intermingled, giving the reader an indication of time, while maintaining the presentation of consciousness :

I could hear my watch whenever the car stopped, but not often they were already eating Who would play a Eating the business of eating inside of you space too space and time confused Stomach saying noon brain saying eat o'clock All right I wonder what time it is what of it. People were getting out. The trolley didn't stop so often now, emptied by eating. ¹

Around the marked progression of clock time, the expansions and contractions of Quentin's inner time gather. Yet even here the reader is not left unaided. Because Quentin's consciousness is an obsessed consciousness, its basic contents are severely limited, however dilated and distorted they may be. This is partly what is responsible for the halving of the number of basic scenes, and the doubling of the number

¹ S&F, p. 129.

of time-shifts. In Ben's section, one feels at the mercy of the randomness of association which produces a change in scene-fragment: in Quentin's, one can feel the forces of association and significance accumulating until a shift to a more private level of consciousness is precipitated.

The process is illustrated in the second passage on page 211 above. Quentin begins by saying: "If it had been cloudy [no shadow to fall on the sash and the curtains to remind him of the time] I could have looked at the window, thinking what he [his father] said about idle habits." Then the word "thinking" is repeated, but introduces a change in the direction of his thoughts, though on the same level of consciousness: "Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this." The word "them" is important: the fact that it has no antecedent raises a question in the reader's mind, which is indirectly answered by the chain of association which the same word triggers in Quentin's mind. In fact, what follows contains the cryptic essence of one of Quentin's major obsessions. The question "Why shouldn't it?", which appears to be a straightforward reference to the continued state of the weather, could, on a second reading, be taken with a difference in tone which might imply, somewhat sardonically, "Why shouldn't it be nice for them down at New London?" If, leaping ahead for a moment, we assume that "them" refers to Caddy and her husband, the implication then becomes that Quentin has cause both to know and to hope that it will not be "nice" for Caddy and Herbert. As an elliptical answer to his own question, Quentin then thinks of the commonplace phrase for June, "The month of brides". The word "bride" then triggers the snatch of a traditional wedding hymn (perhaps - for it recurs - it was used at Caddy's wedding): "the voice that breathed". The associations have now become so strong that Quentin's mind jumps back to the wedding, as

the italics indicate : "She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent". "Scent" naturally suggests a cause - "Roses"; but the word is repeated to suggest that it holds a special significance for Quentin. And, in fact, after a remembered fragment of the wedding invitation, the type face changes again, the word is taken over on to a more deliberative level, and Quentin proceeds to gloss it to himself : "Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed." The words "not virgins" then trigger the sentence : "I said I have committed incest, Father I said." The typography is crucial here: in the immediate context, italics would indicate information in the public domain, and, therefore, shared - like Caddy's running out of the mirror, or the wedding announcement. But the type does not change; this sentence remains in Quentin's consciousness: he has not, as the reader learns in the course of the section, committed incest, and his father, as the reader learns towards the very end, is aware of this, as well as guessing Quentin's reason for wanting such a statement to appear true. How such a state of mind has come to exist in Quentin is the principal question this section undertakes to solve - through a dramatisation of the processes of his mind.

Because Faulkner has chosen the objectivity of the dramatic method, there are going to be no easy answers : the section is both text and gloss, its parts mutually interpretative. The most one can do is to outline the major themes and their inter-relationships.

By the end of the paragraph which has just been discussed, all the important themes of Quentin's section have been stated. Phrased bluntly, Quentin's preoccupations are time, sex, and death. A discussion of any one of them invariably leads one on to the other two, but as the structure of the section so clearly depends on leaps in time, it might be as well to begin with the theme of time.

In the opening paragraph of the section, Quentin's father's gesture in giving him his grandfather's watch "not that you may

remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it", appears to be a fairly conventional - if somewhat sardonic - wish for moments of happiness for Quentin which would give him the sense of "time standing still". The operations of Quentin's mind have been sufficiently discussed, however, to indicate that, as Quentin's relationship to the passage of time is hardly conventional, so his ways of escaping it are similarly idiosyncratic. Another aspect of the gift is, of course, the symbolic handing over of an heirloom, a giving of the burden of responsibility for the family to Quentin. It is this burden he tries to bear by defending Caddy's good name, even when it becomes clear that that name is only a sham, and, moreover, that Caddy herself is totally indifferent to any notions of respectability.¹

Mr. Compson may very well be right when he asserts that time is "dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels", but it is nevertheless clear from The Sound and the Fury as a whole, that it is only in a world which is ordered (though not dominated) by clock time - arbitrary and mechanical though it is - that individuals can break out of the solipsistic privacy of their independent mind time - however rich that may be - and share their experiences in a meaningful way. As one reads Quentin's section, it becomes clear that it is precisely the world of objective, shared experience ordered by clock time that Quentin wishes to escape, because that world holds certain indisputable facts which Quentin will not admit.

¹ An interesting contrast with Caddy's attitude is provided by Narcissa Sartoris (née Benbow) in the short story, "There Was a Queen" [Collected Short Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 727-744.], who, in order to preserve her "good name", is prepared to sleep with the man who is threatening to publish the letters he wrote to her, and thus preserve an abstraction at the cost of the reality. This shows marked similarities, however, with Quentin's attitude.

The fact which causes Quentin the most anguish and which, therefore, he seeks most earnestly to avoid, is Caddy's promiscuity. Part of his grief, of course, is a normal adolescent boy's disturbance at the development of sexual self-consciousness and at Caddy's sexual maturity; but partly, too, it is the grief experienced by other Faulkner heroes as they undergo a hard initiation into the nature of women.¹ In some ways, Quentin's reactions resemble those of Holden Caulfield in The Catcher in the Rye;² but there is no indication that Quentin grows out of this state, as Holden at least shows signs of doing; in this respect, as in so many others, Quentin is trapped. Furthermore, the grief he feels for Caddy is not only grief for her as an individual, but for her in her symbolic role. Faulkner aptly describes Quentin in the Appendix³ as one who :

... loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead

With the word "temporarily" Faulkner emphasises anew the element of mutability which Quentin finds so insupportable in "the loud world" of clock time. Quentin quixotically attempts to defend not only Caddy's

¹ In Faulkner's work one often finds that a man's ability to deal with reality is intimately connected with his ability to deal with women. Many of Faulkner's heroes have to learn to accept, like Joe Christmas of Light in August, that

... the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled [was] doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victim of periodic filth... (LIA, p. 161.)

The smooth and superior shape, the urn, because human, is cracked; the purity of art is not found in life. Faulkner's male heroes have to learn that to be human is to be at once more warm and alive than an urn, and at the same time to be less pure. It is a paradox which they have to accept, which will not yield to rationalization. The suppression of either term of the paradox (as in Quentin's case) leads to a distortion, similar to that suffered by Melville's Captain Ahab when he projected "all subtle demonisms of life and thought" on Moby Dick's hump. In The Sound and the Fury, that distortion is mirrored in the very substance of the writing.

² J.D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951).

³ Malcolm Cowley, ed., op.cit., p. 743.

(non-existent) honour by challenging one of her lovers to a duel, but will fight anyone who casts a slur on any woman's good name. In this way, he confusedly attempts to halt the decay of the family's honour and good name, and it is when he realises, not only that this is impossible, but that it no longer matters either to himself or to anybody else (for clock time has been at its proverbial annealing work), that he gives up the task by committing suicide.

Faulkner devises for Quentin's consciousness a private symbolism for the virginity-Caddy-woman theme. In the fifth paragraph of his section (see p.211 above) this is represented by roses, "Cunning and serene", where the flowers embody the qualities which Quentin cannot tolerate. Elsewhere in the section, honeysuckle and wistaria are made to carry the same connotations. By this private symbolism, Faulkner manages to sustain his representation of "the actual texture of consciousness" while contriving "to distill some meaning from it for the reader".¹

In his frantic attempt to avoid admitting the fact that Caddy is corrupt, Quentin decides that only the deliberate fabrication of an event will meet his need. To this end, he tries not only to escape clock time, but to put back the clock, to order clock time according to what is acceptable to his consciousness, by substituting what he wishes to have happened (committing incest) for what really did happen (Caddy's promiscuity). Thus he invents the story of having committed incest with Caddy, hoping thereby to preserve Caddy for himself, and the family name from dishonour :

... If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames²

¹ Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness, p.63.

² S&F, pp. 97 - 98.

Incest, Quentin hopes, would instantly isolate Caddy and himself in a private, permanent hell. In the course of the section, it gradually becomes clear that, ultimately, Quentin wishes to escape clock time all together. Clock time is inevitably associated with change, mutability: Quentin wishes to be locked in one moment which has never been, except in his imagination; he wishes to be held forever above the flux.

His father, however, does not believe Quentin: the wedding goes forward, Quentin returns to Harvard, and presumably at some time before June Second, decides that the only other way to escape an intolerable reality is to destroy himself. The decision has apparently been taken before the section opens, and it is this that gives Quentin's monologue the peculiar effect of truncation - futurelessness - which M. Sartre has described so well :

... Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in a convertible looking back. At every moment shadows emerge on his right, and on his left flickering and quavering points of light, which become trees, men, and cars only when they are seen in perspective. The past here gains a surrealist quality; its outline is hard, clear and immutable. The indefinable and elusive present is helpless before it; it is full of holes through which past things, fixed, motionless and silent, invade it.¹

One could not hope for a better over-all impression of Quentin's sense of time. M. Sartre is a formidable opponent, but one must take issue with him in his attribution of the time-sense within one section of the novel to that of the author everywhere.²

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Time in Faulkner : The Sound and the Fury", trans. by Martine Darmon, first publ. in La Nouvelle Revue Française, June and July, 1939. Repr. in TDC, pp. 225 - 232.

² Cf. criticism of Sartre's article in:
 (a) Henry J. Underwood, Jr., "Sartre on The Sound and the Fury : Some Errors," MFS, XII (Winter, 1966-1967), 479 - 481;
 (b) Adams, Myth and Motion, pp. 132 - 133:

"These interpretations [Sartre's and Malraux's] deserve respect both for their intrinsic intelligence and because they supported some of the earliest authoritative recognitions of Faulkner's greatness; nevertheless their conclusions are completely wrong. They confuse Faulkner's means with his ends; they assume that the arrest of motion is his final purpose and not, as Faulkner himself in later interviews insisted, a technique or tool for achieving a diametrically opposite result."

It is more helpful to treat the time-sense in this section as a deliberate device of the author's, a means of characterization, from which Faulkner remains ultimately detached, free to shape the rest of the book according to whatever time-sense will prove most useful for his purposes.

In the last pages of Quentin's section, Faulkner creates a sense of acceleration, of time running out, by means of short, italicised fragments devoid of punctuation. In the following extract, Quentin has returned to his Harvard room, and is going down the corridor to get a glass of water; this is overlapped by the memory of a similar occasion when he was at home :

... yet the eyes unseeing clenched like teeth not disbelieving
doubting even the absence of pain shin ankle knee the lung
invisible flowering of the stair-railing where a misstep in the
darkness filled with sleeping Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury
door I am not afraid only Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury getting
so far ahead asleep I will sleep fast when I door Door door
It was empty too¹

The fact that, in this remembered fragment, Quentin uses Benjy's original name, Maury, puts the date of this occasion well back into Quentin's childhood.² By this means, Faulkner is able to suggest that Quentin's progress towards death is also a regression, or re-living, of his childhood. He is now living his life backwards.

The culmination of the accelerating pace, and of the section as a whole, comes in the long penultimate paragraph. Clock time is virtually suspended, for the whole passage is framed by the striking of the first and the last notes of the three-quarter chimes. In this way, the discrepancy between Quentin's mind time, filled with his own thoughts and preoccupations, and the few moments which the clock's chimes take to sound, is underlined: "The three-quarters began.

¹ S&F, pp. 215 - 216.

² Volpe, op.cit., p. 353, dates Ben's name-change as Nov., 1900, which would make Quentin no older than eight or nine, and possibly much younger.

The first note sounded..."¹ Without a change in type - the implication being that Quentin has raised what follows to a uniform level of consciousness - Quentin moves from describing the dying away of the first note to expressing his fundamental wish, which is, after all, for a cessation of temporal process :

... measured and tranquil, serenely peremptory, emptying the unhurried silence for the next one and that's it if people could only change one another for ever that way merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly out along the cool eternal dark²

It is in this long paragraph that all Quentin's obsessions are recapitulated and, at the same time explained. Quentin's reveries move into a recalled dialogue with his father - unpunctuated to indicate a sense of simultaneity - which is the sequel to Quentin's earlier claims of "Father I have committed incest". Not only do Mr. Compson's remarks throw into focus Quentin's attitude to time :

... you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead....³

but they also suggest why Quentin is committing suicide :

... no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps ... and i [Quentin] temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was⁴

Time, as Mr. Compson remarks earlier, is Quentin's misfortune. In retreat from clock time because he cannot face the fact of Caddy's corruption which is involved with this external order, Quentin tries to live by mind time, and becomes subject to the inescapable pattern of pain which his memories form. He cannot live in the past without

¹ S&F, p. 219.

² Loc.cit.

³ Op.cit., p. 220.

⁴ Op.cit., pp. 221 - 222.

being betrayed into grief by associations, memories or private symbols which do nothing but intensify his pain; in the mean time, the present slips ever further from him, and, we are led to infer, he is forced to become aware that even the grief he feels for Caddy is only "temporary". Having tried to get out of time by inventing a form of damnation, and having failed, unable to live in the "loud world" of change and the family's decay, Quentin chooses suicide as the only remaining way out of time.

Quentin's section is the most difficult to read of any of the four in the book, for, although the span of the narrated present is as relatively short as in the other sections (just under twelve hours), the progress of this present is interrupted, and, at times, suspended entirely, by the private associations with other scenes which events in the present have for Quentin. Thus the reader has the impression of having lived through a much longer period, because almost every moment has been filled with significance. Although this significance begins by being completely private, it becomes increasingly shareable as the day advances and Quentin's mind continues to spiral round and round the same events, recalling more and more of each separate scene. In this way, the reader is able to enter increasingly into the workings of Quentin's consciousness, until, as has been suggested above, at the point where existence has become most unbearable for Quentin, the reader has reached maximum understanding. Ultimately, then, Faulkner's objective in abandoning a conventional time-scheme is to dramatize the workings of an individual consciousness, and thereby to heighten the reader's awareness of what it is to think and feel. Joseph Warren Beach has best summed it up :¹

... In history we feel that we can never have too much information. Our object is to know. In fiction, our object is to feel and appreciate, and what counts is not the number of facts but the degree to which we have been made to live with them. ¹

¹ The Twentieth-Century Novel, p. 188.

c. April Sixth, 1928 : No Time to Make Any

Jason's section poses no problem of unity. In the first place, it is more obviously prepared for in both Ben's and Quentin's sections. In one of the early scene-fragments in Ben's section, the child Jason is seen as a cry-baby and a tattle-tale. Furthermore, Versh remarks that "Jason going to be rich man ... He holding his money all the time."¹ In Quentin's section, Mrs. Compson praises Jason in a conversation with Herbert, which is then interrupted by something Quentin also recalls about his brother :

... Jason will make a splendid banker he is the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me for that he takes after my people the others are all Compson Jason furnished the flour. They made kites on the back porch and sold them for a nickel a piece, he and the Patterson boy. Jason was treasurer.²

And, in another scene, Quentin remembers :

... Jason ran on, his hands in his pockets fell down and lay there like a trussed fowl until Versh set him up.³

In this way, the reader has a sense that he has watched Jason growing up, and is consequently somewhat prepared for Jason's preoccupation with money, which is as much the prime mover of his thoughts and actions as the memories of Caddy which trigger Quentin's mental acrobatics.

Secondly, Jason's section fits the chronological pattern of Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and is also the Good Friday of the three-day Easter pattern. However, there is no crucifixion, but only an almost unbearable sense of self-righteous self-justification to the general effect of "Nobody knows how I suffer". In this respect, as in so many others, Jason is his mother's son. She has the gift of well-articulated long-suffering developed, through practice, to the pitch of art.

¹ S&F, p. 43.

² Op.cit., p. 116.

³ Op.cit., p. 124.

On the level of the present action, Jason's section provides the background for the action which was faintly glimpsed in Ben's section, and which finds its climax in the final section, when Miss Quentin's elopement is discovered. Jason's attitude to Miss Quentin is revealed in the brief opening sentence : "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say."¹ in which Jason reveals at once his intense hatred for his niece (who, through being born, had caused the separation between Caddy and her husband, which, in turn, had caused Herbert to renege on his promise of a job for Jason), his penchant for glib, sardonic generalisations, his general attitude to women, and his characteristic way of expressing himself. Most important of all, however, this sentence reveals Jason's attitude to time. The pattern "Once ... always" reveals an attitude which excludes growth or change; there is no future, because one moment in the past ("once") is taken as the sum of all subsequent moments ("always"). Jason shares this death-dealing attitude to time with his mother, of whom Quentin thinks : "Done in Mother's mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned".²

There are no italics, no typographical peculiarities, in Jason's section, although the words "what I say" and the pervasive "I says", used without inverted commas, indicate that all direct speech in the passage is reported within an interior monologue. There are no flash-backs, no seemingly illogical precipitate leaps from fragment to fragment, no scenes overlapped. There are a few shifts to past scenes, but these scenes are made to seem present by the recurrent use of

¹ Op.cit., p. 223.

² Op.cit., pp. 125 - 126.

In his attitude to women, Jason is as out of touch with reality as Quentin, except that where Quentin regards all women as things enskied and sainted, Jason splits the paradox the other way, and lives the worse with the other half.

"I says". The past is thus forced on to the same level of the "flat" present, and, ironically, instead of the present being enriched by the past, the "enrichment" is merely technical, because the past reveals the same meanness of Jason's character, and, thus, if anything, heightens the aridity of his monologue :

... then you can send Ben to the Navy I says or to the Cavalry anyway, they use geldings in the cavalry. Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says that's right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it's not that I have any objection to having it here ... ¹

In Ben's section the shifts in time served to juxtapose scene-fragments from the Compsons' past and present which were thematically related; in Quentin's section the rhetoric, the elliptical, symbolistic, poetic fragments combined to create an impression of "an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing";² in both there was a sense of richness, of depth, of resonance. In Jason's section (in the Appendix Faulkner called Jason "the first sane Compson since Culloeden"³), the reader is not allowed to become much involved in any scenes themselves, because the egotistically banal "I says" is present all the time, interpreting, judging, arguing, rationalizing, slapping his generalizations on everything and everyone. Jason's monologue, as opposed to Quentin's, all takes place on a uniform, fairly highly organised level of consciousness. Ironically, however, the reader is left wondering whether Quentin's monologue, for all its disorder, does not reveal a character superior in every human quality. Repeatedly, in Jason's section, one receives the impression of a frantic gabble sustained in order to keep the speaker from cracking under the strain of so much hate :

¹ S&F, p. 243.

² T.S. Eliot, "Preludes;" Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 25.

³ Malcolm Cowley, op.cit., p. 750.

... I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that can't even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a panful of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her.¹

Here is sound and fury born of hate and frustration, and if this is "sanity", one can be forgiven for preferring the idiocy of Ben or the tortured obsessional consciousness of Quentin to Jason's self-regarding irrationality devoid of all generous responses either to environment or other people.

Jason's section is as carefully structured as the two earlier ones; it begins before breakfast, and ends with Jason going up the stairs to bed. The reader senses that the reading time is tremendously speeded up in comparison with the other two sections; the flattening out of the time-dimensions is largely responsible for this. Just as one feels that all Jason's attitudes are superficial - the commonplaces of an uneducated and embittered mind - so the lack of temporal complexity technically underscores this aspect of his character, while providing a vivid and immediate contrast with Quentin's section. The reader is meant to sense the mental poverty, the aridity, of Jason's section, and perhaps the vivid contrast is the best reason for placing this section after Quentin's in the arrangement of the book.

As Jason's mind is not the sort to indulge in the kind of metaphysical speculation on time which preoccupies Quentin, the reader must try to infer Jason's attitude to time. Despite the fact that the store is exceptionally busy, Jason insists - with a characteristic lack of co-operation - on taking his lunch-hour, during which time he searches for a blank cheque which his mother (who refuses to take the money Caddy sends for her daughter's maintenance) can burn, while he secretly cashes the real cheque and hoards the money; he next goes to the

¹ S&F, p. 223.

telegraph office to check on the stock market, then goes home for dinner, and then back to the telegraph office, before he returns to the store, where he tells his employer that he had to go to the dentist. He holds Earl to the letter of their agreement about an hour for lunch, although, as one learns, Earl only continues to employ Jason as a kindness to Mrs. Compson. Time means money to Jason, and, because he is trying to control three or four ventures at once - his shares, his job, Caddy's cheques, and his niece's behaviour - he is constantly being frustrated by one getting out of hand while he is attending to two others. His day is therefore filled with a futile chasing hither and thither, success eluding him at every turn. In an imaginary conversation with his niece, Jason ironically provides the best comment on his attitude :

... and she'll say, I've got to have it I've just got to and I'll say that's too bad you'll have to try somebody else, I haven't got any money; I've been too busy to make any. ¹

As one might be led to expect, Jason's strutting and fretting is as futile as Ben's moans or Quentin's verbal pyrotechnics. Jason is as much trapped outside himself, cut off from any springs of emotion which would heal and humanise him, as Quentin and Ben are trapped within themselves. Jason's words, for all their vituperative sting, ultimately have no effect : Dilsey continues in her own way, Earl continues to employ him, and Miss Quentin (whom he can and does hurt) flees the house, taking his private cache with her. The circular, trapped nature of Jason's condition is well illustrated in the final paragraph, where, thinking about Ben (the "Great American Gelding"), Jason remarks :

... Well, like I say they never started soon enough with their cutting, and they quit too quick. I know at least two more that needed something like that, and one of them not over a mile away, either. But then I don't reckon even that would do any good. Like I say once a bitch always a bitch. ²

¹ S&F, p. 303.

² Op.cit., p. 329.

By including the opening sentence of Jason's monologue in the last paragraph as well, Faulkner suggests that the whole story is about to begin all over again. The day has advanced to its close, Miss Quentin has found the show-man with whom she will run away on the following evening, but Jason is left mouthing the clichés with which he began the day. And if he were to be asked why he hadn't got anywhere, he would probably answer that he had been too busy looking after other folks to get anywhere himself. And he would probably be right - though not, perhaps, in the way he intended.

d. April Eighth, 1928 : Time and Eternity

The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the north-east which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust that, when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, needled laterally into her flesh, precipitating not so much a moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil. ¹

This is the only opening sentence in the book's four sections which does not contain the pronoun "I". We are suddenly in a world of third person narration, of objectively ordered time. Perhaps never before in fiction has it either been more welcome or more profoundly related to the meaning of the book as a whole. The reader begins to see meaning emerge as a function of structure; as G.M. Walker says :

... Entering in the first three sections, the minds of the three brothers, we become successively entrapped in the three subjectivities which are themselves trapped; now we enter for the first time a world of objective reality. ²

Ben, Quentin, and Jason are trapped within the opaque spheres of private reality, similar to that to which T.S. Eliot draws attention

¹ S&F, p. 330.

² G. Marshall Walker, "William Faulkner and the Deep South", Forum (Rhodes University), I (Nov., 1965), 23.

in a note to The Waste Land.¹ The world in the fourth section is objectively ordered, and one must avoid the confusion which is caused by referring to it as "Dilsey's section". One critic² even goes so far as to say that our vision in this section is "provided through Dilsey's reflecting angle of vision...." That is precisely what it is not. Dilsey is seen as one figure among many others. The scene makes a direct impact on the reader without the distortion of any one private preoccupation. Dilsey is implicitly part of a larger whole.

On the other hand, it is just as dangerous to confuse style and theme as Irving Howe does.³ He sees the book in terms of a "movement from a claustrophobic private world to a sterile public world, from the subjective heart of Compson life to a cold record of its death ...". And he feels that the style in the last section "signifies distance and revulsion ...". This charge seems somewhat similar to that brought against Joyce at one time - an impersonal style equals an impersonal, cold writer. But as in Joyce, when read sympathetically, the very absence of the personality of the creator is a sign of his passionate and compassionate commitment to his subject, so Faulkner's objectivity in this section allows him to create a scene which dramatizes the affirmations he was later to make explicit in his Nobel Speech.

Faulkner's avowed intentions in this fourth section were characteristically simple : "I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman."⁴ These words might

¹ T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land", op.cit., p. 86.

² Lawrence Thompson, "Mirror Analogues in The Sound and the Fury," English Institute Essays 1952 ed. Alan S. Downer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 105.

³ William Faulkner : A Critical Study, p. 161.

⁴ Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 130.

be interpreted to mean that Faulkner had surrendered his objectivity, that he was succumbing to the temptation of authorial intrusion, whereas he has simply surrendered the objectivity of dramatizing three separate consciousnesses for the objectivity of third-person narration, a point of view which provides the reader with a panoramic vision of what he might have but partially glimpsed through the three dramatized subjectivities. The narrated time is roughly as long as in the other sections - a span of between ten and twelve hours - but the narrating time is much faster than in any of the other sections, and this emphasises the panoramic quality of the point of view. The ordering hand of the narrator guides the reader firmly and steadily through the day.

Although, as can be seen, the events of Eighth April, 1928 are not presented from Dilsey's angle of vision in the sense which would apply to the other three sections, Thompson¹ is quite correct to emphasise Dilsey's presence in the last section - an emphasis which begins with a mention of her in the first sentence. She is already familiar to the reader from the other sections: the same Dilsey who provides a birthday cake for Ben out of her own money (having just shaken off Jason, the reader is in a position to understand why Dilsey would not have asked him for the money); the Dilsey who comforts Caddy, and, subsequently, her daughter; who resists Jason, and tries to sustain Mrs. Compson. What this section does provide that is new is an opportunity to learn Dilsey's time-sense. And here one is aware of a paradox, for Dilsey can act lovingly and creatively in the present, cannot be hurried - "'I can't do but one thing at a time,'"² - can interpret the one-handed, mis-chiming kitchen clock (of which the

¹ Lawrance Thompson, loc.cit.

² S&F, p. 338.

³ Op.cit., p. 355.

narrator says "It might have been the dry pulse of the decaying house itself ..."),¹ while at the same time, through an ability to lose herself through faith in something outside herself, Dilsey can transcend time, can rise to a vision of "de first an de last", the timeless, the still point, which gives her a point of vantage from which she can survey and accept the decline of the entire Compson family, while still toiling unflaggingly to keep it together. Margaret Church,² incorporating something Carvel Collins³ had written, speaks of love - "love in its largest sense which demands both a sense of time and the ability to transcend it..." - and it is love, in this sense, which Dilsey abundantly possesses.

In Dilsey, with her paradoxical sense of time, Faulkner embodies the virtue of endurance which he was later to praise more explicitly.⁴ Indeed, Faulkner's only comment on Dilsey in the Appendix is "They endured". It has been suggested that Faulkner's idea of endurance is a Stoic one, that men must simply put up with things as they are. However, if Dilsey serves as the outstanding example of Faulkner's endurance in action, it is clear that endurance for her does not merely mean putting up with things, for she not only refrains from reacting, but also acts in a positive way, which suggests something closer to traditional Christian patience as John Danby discusses it in an essay on King Lear. In the same essay, Danby employs a quotation which points the contrast between Dilsey and Quentin and Jason : "The ungodly

¹ S&F, p. 355.

² Time and Reality, p. 234.

³ Carvel Collins, "The Interior Monologues of The Sound and the Fury," in English Institute Essays, 1952, pp. 29 - 56.

⁴ Cf. "Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1950," Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters by William Faulkner, ed. by James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 119 - 121.

do not benefit from adversity. On the contrary, they 'rave and rage', fall into despair ... commit suicide."¹ And in St. Francis's Canticle of the Sun, which, as Volpe indicates,² provides a source for Quentin's phrase "little sister death", the word "endure" is used in the following context :

Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for his love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peacably shall endure, for thou, O most Highest, shall give them a crown!

Dilsey's capacity for endurance, however, is not only related to her faith in a Being outside herself, but also to her active participation in what is also larger than herself - the human community. The Compson brothers are all isolated from one another; they do not even have that fundamental community, the family, to which to belong, and the significance of their hermetic sections is precisely that there shall be no communication, no dialogue, no "communion", as Joyce would have called it. They are trapped - for a variety of reasons - within the opacity of total self-absorption. The Sound and the Fury shares with other Southern novels of this century the notion that the ability to transcend self, to enter into a sharing with others, is one of the Negro's great human qualities.³

Despite every imaginable obstacle put in her path by Mrs. Compson, Jason, and Luster, Dilsey manages to get ready for church. She takes Ben with her to the Negro church, which is described as follows :

The road rose again, to a scene like a painted back-drop. Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the

¹ John F. Danby, Elizabethan and Jacobean Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 117.

² A Reader's Guide, p. 98.

³ Cf. what Brad Tolliver says in Robert Penn Warren's novel Flood (London: Collins, 1965), p. 172.

whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth, against the windy sunlight of space and April and a mid-morning filled with bells. ¹

Here the language seems to take on the panoramic quality of the narrator's point of view. The repeated use of the adjective "painted", coupled with "ultimate edge", removes the church and the scene into a world of timelessness, or rather it seems to be something immune to time, against which details of time and space - "the windy sunlight ... April and a mid-morning filled with bells" - seem to flit.

After this first impression, the Negro church is depicted in all its realistic detail, including the Christmas bell. The reader is not allowed to escape a sense of the preposterousness of the surroundings and of the monkey-like preacher, but gradually one's prejudice, like Frony's ("'en dey brung dat all de way fum St. Louis?"), gives way to a sense of the man's tremendous power :

He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: "Yes, Jesus!" ²

The preacher loses himself, becomes refined out of existence, submerged in the community. The sound and fury of words, words, words are stilled in this wordless community - "in chanting measures beyond the need for words".

The preacher then takes the congregation through a brief but succinct resumé of the life and death of Christ, and the congregation

¹ S&F, p. 364.

² Op.cit., pp. 367 - 368.

experience the "annealment and the blood of the remembered Lamb". Here the past (Christ's death) is seen in a fruitful relationship to the present as a result of the transcendence of the limitations imposed by time and individual selves. This is Faulkner's version of what T.S. Eliot calls the "Incarnation" in Four Quartets : it is the impossible, paradoxical union of the spheres of time and eternity. In the congregation's total and willing suspension of disbelief, the life of Christ ceases to be "past" in an historical sense, tenses cease to exist, and the Resurrection becomes NOW.

Faulkner's placing of the hope of resurrection among a Negro community, where it has drawn responsible comment, has generally laid him open to charges of primitivism, of exalting the Negro as a noble savage. In remarking on this, one must bear in mind that whatever they may be to his critics, Negroes to Faulkner do not constitute a category: the qualities which Dilsey embodies are human before they are Negro. Moreover, few of the other Negroes in the book partake of her fineness. Dilsey sees plainly that Luster, her own son, has "got jes es much Compson devilment in [him] as any of em",¹ evincing, quite incidentally, her assumption that black and white are the same family. The name "Compson" comes to stand for a response to life. As Jason says to his mother (a change in point of view has not altered Jason one jot) : "'You never resurrected Christ did you?'"² But perhaps the best, the final comment on the role of the Negro in the book, and the final justification for the sections being in the order they are, and not any other, is a remark Quentin makes about Negroes :

¹ S&F,

² Op.cit., p. 348.

They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope.¹

The function of the final section, then, is to put the first three sections in perspective : the author ultimately abandons stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue in favour of omniscient, third-person narration. Followed to its conclusion, the book may be seen as a critique of the intense privacy of vision which stream-of-consciousness alone provides. It is also a critique of those who would exalt mind-time at the expense of clock-time and the limits it imposes on any individual's experiences. The decay of the Compson family is not only related to their chaotic individual senses of time, but is made to emerge through the technique which simultaneously illumines those senses. It is clear that, just as the first three sections need a fourth, objective section to which they can be related, so, for Faulkner, the living, functioning, humane community depends upon a public sense of order, rather than a private sense of disorder. The reader can now perceive that Ben's section is only apparently the furthest from reality, for the second and third sections are solipsistic variations on the themes stated in the first, while the fourth provides the vantage point from which the characters may be reviewed and judged. Idiosyncratic, personal time schemes give way to an impersonal ordering; imbecility, suicidal narcissism, and desperate self-righteousness are finally compelled to stand comparison with a faith and serenity which subtends and sustains them all.

However, to end the book with the Negro Easter service would seriously disturb its balance; the sound and the fury remain, a constant challenge to those who can endure them. The ending of the book is more ambiguous: perhaps the closing words indicate serenity

¹ S&F, p. 211.

after strife, perhaps only the calm brought to an idiot by pandering to his obsessive desire for an undisturbed surface orderliness :

Ben's voice roared. Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place.¹

¹ S&F, p. 401.

CHAPTER SIX

IF IT AIN'T COMPLICATED UP ENOUGH, IT AIN'T RIGHT:¹

FAULKNER'S TONE

It might seem strange to have reserved to the final chapter a discussion of so inclusive an aspect of fictional technique as the writer's attitudes to his reader and his created world. One might argue that such issues determine the selection and handling of the other fictional techniques; and, if one were writing from the artist's point of view, this would be indisputable. In the act of creation, without a doubt, conception precedes and determines technique.² But the critic who would appreciate a writer's art is in a less privileged position: he has no immediate knowledge of what was present in the writer's mind at the moment of creation; he has no instruments for retaining or measuring the fleeting incandescence of the Shelleyan coal. His tools - if he would avoid the pitfalls of the intentional fallacy³ must, to a very large extent, be empirical and deductive, designed to produce interpretations demonstrably derived from the writer's work, rather than from speculations about the contents or workings of the writer's mind.⁴ Tone, therefore, though an a priori aspect in the act of

¹ The Town, Ch. 18: "He's a lawyer, and to a lawyer, if it ain't complicated it don't matter whether it works or not because if it ain't complicated up enough it ain't right and so even if it works, you don't believe it."

² Cf. Warren Beck, "Conception and Technique," College English, IX (March, 1950), 303 - 317.

³ Cf. W.K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," in his The Verbal Icon, The Noonday Press (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1964), pp. 3-18.

⁴ This is not to dispute the value, to literary criticism, of such works as John Livingstone Lowes's The Road to Xanadu. I am simply seeking to clarify the orientation of the present study.

creation, is more properly treated as an a posteriori aspect in the act of appreciation.

Tone is an encyclopaedic aspect of narrative technique, and not a separate or a separable structural device. In the work of art, however, it is manifested through the sum of structural details. Although it is possible to establish from individual tonal signals the immediate tonal position at any particular moment in one's reading, the tone is in fact shifting, evolving all the time, accompanying the reading experience. Only at the end of a work, after the dropping into place of the very last syllable (consider the importance of the last five words of The Sound and the Fury : "... each in its ordered place.") can one begin to establish a tonal line - the path traced by a point that moves from the first word to the last. In such an attempt to stand back and survey the whole, each separable aspect may contribute its share of information, so that one's approach to tone will be based on a review of the multifarious individual signals transmitted directly or indirectly through such aspects as characterization, or the handling of space, point of view, or time.

In Light in August, despite the presence of an omniscient narrator, the disposition of the narrative phases into the conventional arrangement by chapter, and the apparent lack of great technical detachment on Faulkner's part, there are many devices at work to prevent any undesirable oversimplification of theme. There is the pervasive "perhaps" frame, which seems to signify that complete knowledge is ultimately unattainable. There is the way in which the narrator deliberately limits his omniscience by entering the point of view of various characters, and then refraining from Olympian comments on their reliability, to which is added the inclusion of persuasive devil's advocates such as Gavin Stevens. The absence of omniscient

sanctions makes the reader go to work for his meaning. This is most obvious in the presentation of Christmas, where the character's first introduction places him in a most unfavourable light, and it is up to the reader, by attending to the details of Christmas's flash-back biography, to purge himself of his initial prejudice. Moreover, the narrator's ultimate refusal to commit himself to the Black-White polarity in characterizing Christmas compels the reader to accept the paradoxical fusion which makes him a man, rather than a Black or a White. This deliberate keeping the reader in the dark by the selected release of details as the narrator sees fit, instead of according to the demands of logic or conventional chronology, indicates a certain detachment on Faulkner's part. His control of his material is further indicated in the distancing effected by the leap to the point of view of the furniture-dealer for the narration of the final chapter. In Faulkner's handling of space in the novel, he shows the ability to move from registering Christmas's whiff of field peas in Joanna Burden's kitchen to Byron's panoramic view of Jefferson and environs from a ridge. In such ways, Faulkner avoids any obvious, easily articulated involvement with his material, despite the more conventional mode of the novel's narration.

Characterization in Absalom, Absalom! is several degrees more indirect than in Light in August, because it is largely performed from "within" the book by narrators who are themselves characters. The first complications arise when the reader realizes that the four principal character-narrators are, in turn, characterizing Thomas Sutpen in terms of the conventions which govern the literary kind each has selected as the shaping principle of his or her narration. Characterization and point of view are further complicated, however, by the addition of a third-person narrator, who, in his turn, characterizes the four character-narrators. Although he appears to

know (or perhaps chooses to reveal) little about Sutpen, his descriptions of Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin and Shreve - and, in particular, their spatial settings - reveal indirectly something of their natures, and by implying their limitations as characters, suggest something of their unreliability as narrators, which, in turn, reveals the limited reliability of the genres in which they cast their tales. In this way, the third-person narrator himself impels what might have been a fairly direct method of narration several removes closer to indirectness.

The presentation of space reveals a similar mixture of directness and indirectness, with the latter predominating. The four principal I-narrators tend to arrange spatial details according to the conventions which govern their chosen genre. This acts as a distancing device, making the space of the novel seem doubly literary and "artificial", and this heightens the reader's sense of the book as a vast collective conjecture. The third-person narrator remains so reticent that, in this novel where the space of Sutpen's design is one of the central structural motifs, it is also one of the most difficult to formulate satisfactorily. Nevertheless, despite the mass of spatial details, which seem to defy one's powers of retention, it is possible, on a subsequent reading, to perceive that the details are distributed in such a way that there is an interpretative direction. Here too, however, the general pattern of deliberately withheld meaning is discernible, because one learns the details of Sutpen's second attempt to implement his design and its consequences several chapters before one begins to glean details of his first attempt, or learns what prompted him in the first instance. Only near the end of the book can the reader about-face and see the grim cycle of Sutpen's violation of the planter's threshold and its rites of passage, the damaging effect it has on him, his attempts to create a similar "hallowed" space,

which, because it is conceived according to the very limits which initially damaged him, inflicts damage in its turn to the extent of destroying his family. In one sense, one might almost say that the book would exhibit more logic if one were able to read it backwards.

When one turns to the two novels where indirect methods predominate, one is faced, in the first instance, with Faulkner's extensive use of stream of consciousness techniques - techniques the very essence of which is indirectness, ellipsis. All the other aspects of his technique in these books both partake of, and contribute to, this elliptical essence. In As I Lay Dying, the disposition of narrative phases by characters rather than by chapters suggests the structural importance of point of view. The absence of any form of omniscient narrator does away with any notion of a conventional chronology, and means that the handling of characterization and space will be accomplished through indirect methods alone. Characters and spatial details are not only indirectly but fragmentarily revealed (moreover, spatial details often contribute significantly to indirect characterization), so that the characters and the spatial setting really only take coherent shape in the reader's mind. The contours revealed are more those of the narrator-characters' minds; the disconnected geographical space tends to become thematic space, as, for instance, in Darl's treatment of the river as an image of time - "an irrevocable quality."¹

The extreme simplicity of language of the opening sections of the book, combined with a scrupulous attention to detail, serves to disguise the epic complexity of interests which are revealed in the book's unfolding. The fragmentation of point of view into fifteen

¹ AILD, p. 139.

different narrator-characters, each with his or her private obsessions and limitations, each using an ideal inner voice in interior monologue, and the opacity of their Mississippi hill-dialect in their direct speech, means that most of the information the reader gains has to be won - by his own efforts - out of misinformation. In the dramatization of Darl's consciousness, not even the visionary level is excluded from the book's scope. By ignoring such usual structural elements as "story interest" and the linear development of plot, Faulkner seems bent on insisting, by means of the structure he does create, that only a multiplicity of view-points will reveal anything close to the reality of the situation. If, in one sense, by so doing, Faulkner might be said to carry the book's illusion of life closer to a reflection of the element of relativity in life itself, it nevertheless remains clear that the book has a form which is composed of deliberately selected details, and therefore offers - for all its unconventionality - an "artificial" clarification of life. In his life situation, the reader is never offered privileged glimpses into the consciousnesses of fifteen different people in order to gain a composite perspective on a single event. But, in As I Lay Dying, the structural embodiment of stream of consciousness techniques is not the end, but the means, subserving the book's ultimate mode of existence as a grotesque structure. The fragmentation of point of view, of characterization and spatial treatment, the disruption of chronology are all employed as distancing devices designed to alienate the reader - in the very act of reading - from the hostile world of the book. With all his conventional expectations set at naught, the reader is in a position to experience to the full the helplessness and the horror inspired by the sense of abysmal ominousness lurking in and behind and, at the same time, estranging, the world of the novel. Nevertheless, the reader who is courageous enough to embark

on this threatening voyage, experiences at the end of the novel that secret liberation which comes from the challenge offered to the dark powers by the subduing might of the book's structural arc.¹

In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner has added difficulties to the essential obliquity of stream of consciousness techniques by adapting them to the presentation of the three character-narrators to whom he leaves the telling of the first three sections. Having decided to have his tale of sound and fury literally told by an idiot in the first instance, Faulkner resorts to circumlocution and anarchic chronology as self-imposed limits within which he sets out to discover just how much so severely limited a point of view is capable of disclosing. On a first reading, one feels that Ben's section tells one almost nothing, but when it is considered in relation to the other sections, and re-read with that relationship in mind, one discovers that Ben's inability to make temporal distinctions and the apparent fragmentariness of his section conceals from the impatient or unwary reader a wholeness of vision which contains in embryonic form the book's totality.

In Quentin's section, Faulkner strains the vehicle of his technique in other directions, this time attempting to scale the heights and plumb the depths of a highly articulate, exquisitely sensitive, but hopelessly obsessed consciousness. He invents a private symbolism for Quentin, which, combined with elliptical allusions and grammatical and chronological fragmentation, is the technical means by which Quentin's impressions of his family and his way of registering them are simultaneously conveyed. By contrast, Jason's section seems simple until one realizes that the narrator is constantly obtruding himself between the reader and his tale, and one suspects

¹ Cf. Kayser, The Grottesque, pp. 185 - 188.

that perhaps the most unreliable narrator is he who, equipped with consciousness and rationality, employs them deliberately to distort his narrative to exhibit himself as the family's victim, scape-goat and martyr. The omniscient narrator of the fourth section brings clarity, impersonality, and order to the Compson chronicle, but, ironically, is only omniscient for his one given day. Although one is grateful for the perspectives so provided, and for the assistance in placing both characters and spatial details, one is nevertheless very much aware that there is far more to the Compson story than this narrator is capable of revealing, because one has already "lived through" the rich complexity of the Compsons-in-process as revealed by the first three monologues. The reader, consequently, reaches the end of the book aware of the special inadequacies and excellences of the contrasted techniques. From the point of view of the final section, the interior monologue is shown to be a limited, essentially solipsistic technique, incapable of providing any objective, panoramic vision. From the point of view of any one of the first three sections, the fourth is shown to be just as restricted - by those very qualities of panorama and objectivity - from providing the depth and complexity of an individual consciousness revealed in the act of apprehending.

Frequent reference has been made, both above and in the preceding chapters, to the re-reading of, or return to, a section of one of the novels - or the whole novel. Such reference is a superficial indication of the complexity which has been described in detail in earlier chapters, and summarized briefly above. Complexity appears to be of the essence of the works studied, and is demonstrable in the handling of all four aspects of narrative technique with which this study has attempted to deal. All four aspects are employed to block, prevent, or postpone the reader's total comprehension, and make for a complicated presentation of particulars which are arranged in such a way that

the reader is prevented from applying his usual categories for the classification of information. Consequently, one asserts that that "meaning" - the sense of where one is, where one has been, and where one is going - which one likes to feel is available at every moment during the reading experience, has been deliberately withheld. The result of this withholding is the creation of an arc of tension in the structure of the novel which binds beginning, middle, and end into an unconventional and more intense inter-dependency, while the mental exploration of this structure creates in the reader's mind a different kind of suspense, which is concerned not so much with the "whodunnit" fact-oriented suspense of the detective-story convention, but rather is concerned with a probing, a searching, a sifting of fact from fiction (both of which are proffered) in an attempt to discover the deeper levels of motivation. Moreover, in Faulkner's works, motivation may well include the conditioning exerted by history, social roles, and geographical location, in addition to the quirks of individual psyches.

Indeed, one might be tempted, in view of Faulkner's interest in the type, manifested in Sanctuary and Intruder in the Dust, to use the detective story as an analogy for the aims of Faulkner's narrative technique in general,¹ were it not that both the modern detective story and Faulkner's narrative technique would appear to have a common formal ancestor in the rudimentary fictional form known as the riddle.² Although, perhaps, something of the clear either/or situation has disappeared in Faulkner's novels, for the reader always gleans something from the novels, it is quite clear that Faulkner chooses for himself the role of the one who enigmatizes something (the role of the criminal

¹ Cf. Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 6.

² Cf. André Jolles, Einfache Formen (2nd. ed.; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1958.)

in the detective story), and allots the reader the role of the one who is asked or compelled to unriddle it again (the detective's part). The life-death tension of the primordial riddle becomes, in Faulkner's work, the tension between chaos and order. The reader comes to a literary work expecting (not unreasonably) some clarification of life. Faulkner presents him with an image of life which appears to be more disordered than the multitude of the reader's own raw impressions. The world of Faulkner's novels is a world enigmatized; what one might call the Faulknerian suspense arises from the gap between the reader's expectation of a full unriddling provided, as it were, as a bonus for reading the work, and the overpowering sense, while one is reading a Faulkner novel, that his handling of such matters as characterization, space, point of view and time, renders a full unriddling impossible. However, where detective stories - for all their "realism" of presentation of a photographic kind - depart from verisimilitude in their extensive use of the conventional "solution", Faulkner presents a fictional enigmatized world which does not yield either a single or a completely satisfactory solution to the unriddling reader, because he wishes to suggest by the very shape of his books that enigma lurks at the heart of the outer reality which he seeks to reflect. It would appear that, for Faulkner, anything which seeks to reflect outer reality fictionally, and which is not formally posed as a riddle, is simply not complex enough to serve as an acceptable image of that reality.

Where so many aspects of narrative technique are employed as distancing and enigmatizing devices, the problem of identification is immense. As a sensitive reader will usually try to identify his point of view with that of a sympathetic author, authorial distance determines to a very high degree the reader's distance from the presented fictional world. The reader of a Faulkner novel, however,

begins a first reading of the book at the furthest possible remove from the writer's stance. Faulkner's narrative technique abandons, inverts, or ignores the conventional identification signals. The structure is centrifugal, rather than centripetal. Because Faulkner - in the four novels under review, at least - concentrates so much on individuals and their apprehension of their world, very little immediate identification is possible. Only by surrendering to the special terms which each novel seems to dictate as it unfolds, can the reader begin the unriddling process. If one persists, one begins to perceive a world in the process of unfolding - as in the characterization of Joe Christmas. But this unfolding does not proceed in a straight line, as the doubly ironic disparities between Ben's and Jason's perceptions would confirm. Where Conrad employed Marlow in Heart of Darkness as a device for filtering Kurtz's story to the reader, Faulkner tends to present the reader with works which have something of the chaotic contours of unmediated experience, and attempts to make the reader himself into the sensitive, suffering, all-perceptive observer, who, in going to work for his meaning, creates that fourteenth image of the blackbird, which Faulkner seemed to recognise as an essential part of the novel itself. Authorial sympathy in Faulkner's works is not expressed through intrusions into the works, which reveal nothing so much as superb artistic detachment and control; rather is it to be found in the very texture of the presentation itself. Deliberately withheld meaning results in deliberately withheld judgment - both for and against - and it is through the organising principle of presenting characters and events tentatively, that Faulkner reveals that he does not wish to stamp people with a label from outside, but rather seeks the fictional techniques which will allow them to unfold from within.

Faulkner's handling of narrative technique in the creation of the structures which have been outlined in preceding chapters may be

seen to represent an attempt on his part to make his novels more complete microcosms of the world which he seeks to reflect. The motivation for such an attempt is, undoubtedly, a highly complex matter, but one reason, at least, is not far to seek: the nature of the South as Faulkner must have observed it. The South, in so far as it is a region having a distinct culture of its own, seems to "isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope",¹ for in its inhabitants are to be found embodied in extreme forms those categorical habits of thinking, that false pride in class, caste, and race, those rigid two-value oriented moralities, which bedevil the world of man at large. Thematically, these attitudes are reflected in Faulkner's novels in the plus-minus moralities of Addie Bundren and Thomas Sutpen, the two-dimensional "once ... always" frame of Jason Compson's mind, and the compulsion of so many of the characters in Light in August to categorise the enigmatic Joe Christmas, as well as in the literal and metaphorical castration and destruction of man which results from such attitudes. Structurally, the novels are designed to ensure that there will be no easy grasping of the fictional world. This serves the dual function of re-educating the reader by forcing him to abandon his familiar modes of apprehension, and of providing an implicit criticism of such characters by juxtaposing them with means of presentation designed to undercut their categorising. From the structure of his novels, from his way of handling crucial aspects of his narrative technique, one may deduce his fundamental antipathy to such categories as "the Negro", or "the poor white", which, in the habitual efficiency-oriented thought-patterns of the present Western world, one tends to use for brevity and convenience. Faulkner's extensive use of such dramatic modes of

¹ S&F, p. 211.

presentation as his stream of consciousness techniques focuses attention on the individual, rather than the category, and serves to illuminate the depths, conflicts, and complexities - even, at times, the very texture - of the inner life.

A second, less localised, reason for the characteristic shape of Faulkner's novels now suggests itself. Reference has been made in earlier chapters to the tendency of such novels as As I Lay Dying and Absalom, Absalom! to approach, in the "illusion of life" which they create, several degrees closer to life itself. What is meant by such a statement could be expressed in the phrase 'cognitive verisimilitude'. Not only does Faulkner present selected elements from his Southern world so as to highlight "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed",¹ but in the very way in which he presents these elements, he seeks to mirror the modes of apprehension by which all men attempt to grapple with their "real" world. The novel which functions within the traditions of nineteenth-century fiction, in which everything is pre-ordered, pre-digested, is governed by conventions singularly unlike "real" modes of apprehension. In the four Faulkner novels which have been examined above, one can observe how, to an unusually large extent, Faulkner has flouted or abandoned such conventions in an earnest seeking after new conventions which will involve the reader more completely in the shaping of the novel.

The search for new conventions may be seen in the unitary construction of the single sentence as well as in the larger structural aspects of the novels. Such devices as syntactical ambiguity, time alternation, delayed modification, suspension and enclosure, and

¹ William Faulkner, "Address Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature," Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, ed. by James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 120.

dramatic periodicity,¹ all contribute to the creation of sentence patterns which are characteristically Faulknerian. The normal tendency of language is additive, advancing temporally in a linear fashion in the shaping of statements. The tendency of Faulkner's works, however, is counter to the formulation of anything as definite as a statement; but, being forced to use the medium of statement if he is to write fiction at all, Faulkner is compelled to break that medium up, and to re-arrange it according to the conventions which match his purposes more closely. This leads his novels, as certain critics have suggested,² via the suspension of "elapsed and yet-elapsing time",³ to approach a dimension in which their component parts should, ideally, be perceived in a spatial, rather than a temporal, context. The way in which Benjy Compson's mind works might, with certain limitations, be taken as an analogy of the characteristic design of each of these four novels as a whole. In each, the reader is confronted with multiple signals which should, ideally, be flashed simultaneously, not perceived sequentially. Again, as in Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner's use of a plurality of literary genres and types seems to call in question the validity of any one genre, so the whole tendency of his narrative technique might be seen to call in question the validity of literature as statement. As M. Coindreau has pointed out,⁴ one of the most

¹ Cf. Robert H. Zoellner, "Faulkner's Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom!" American Literature, XXX (Jan. 1959), p. 490.

² E.g. Ida Fasel, "Spatial Form and Spatial Time," Western Humanities Review, XVI (1962), 223-234; Karl E. Zink, "William Faulkner: Form as Experience," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (July, 1954), 384-403.

³ AA, p. 22.

⁴ Maurice Edgar Coindreau, Aperçus de Littérature Américaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p.130: "Les mots, n'ayant qu'une valeur relative, ne sauraient nous faire pénétrer jusqu'à la connaissance profonde des choses. Seule l'intuition peut nous rendre ce service. Or ce sens de mystérieuse divination est particulièrement aigu chez les êtres dont le cerveau n'émet difficilement que des pensées rudimentaires, les Lena Grove, les Byron Bunch."

important functions of the idiots in Faulkner's work is, by being non-verbal themselves and yet in touch with a kind of reality, to point up the limited ability of words to take us to the deepest knowledge of things. Only intuition can render us this service, writes Coindreau, and this sense of "mystérieuse divination" is particularly acute in beings whose brains have difficulty in expressing the most rudimentary thoughts. Words formed into statements, Faulkner seems to suggest, appeal primarily, if not exclusively, to the reason. This is most obvious in the novel, in which, traditionally, there is a much more extensive use of referential language than in poetry or drama. Consequently, in designing his novels so that their very shape is anti-statement, Faulkner has produced structures designed to call the reader's intuition into play, and so, to bring the more fully "the whole soul of man into activity"¹ in the act of reading.

Regarding man as "the sum of his past",² Faulkner takes a significant moment in a character's life, because in it he sees the concentrated sum of a certain past which he then tries to reconstruct fictionally. The 'significant moment' (which may or may not be placed first in the telling) serves as the starting point from which Faulkner develops his fictional action. His use of the word "sum" is important, as it suggests complexity - a multitude of single aspects - and, at the same time, concentration. Faulkner, as an artist, wants to "arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means",³ which seems to suggest that moments of life are not only too complex to be easily grasped (because each is a sum), but also that they move too fast to be recognised. In his aims as an artist, then, there are two interrelated aspects :

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge Biographia Literaria Ch. XIV.

² FIU, p. 84.

³ Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 139.

Faulkner wishes to arrest motion in order to select a significant moment; having selected it, he then attempts to reconstruct its past so as to present it as a complex sum of many items. The technique of deliberately withheld meaning, designed to keep the form in motion, determining, as has been shown, the handling of characterization, space, point of view, and time, forces the reader to look more deeply and more carefully at the multifarious particulars presented in the fiction, and compels him actively to engage in unfolding and reconstructing this concentrated sum, before he can proceed to the level of understanding.

What, then, can one say of the relationship of such an author to his fictional world? His critics have found his works, by turns, comic, satiric, tragic. His time sense incorporates elements of both Bergson's and Proust's theories. His novels show an intense affection for the details of the lives he presents : the reader is deluged with a mass of genealogical, sociological, economic, and psychological particularities. At the same time, his rigorous control over these details, his release of significant items only as and when he sees fit, would argue a high degree of artistic detachment from his material.

Faulkner's tone, like the identity of his character Christmas, is ultimately enigmatic. Any statement which one attempts to make about it requires extensive qualification in order even to approach the complexities which lurk in every line. There is hardly a moment in any of the four novels discussed in which there is not present a fusion of a most skilful artistic control and a warm and intimate empathy. In the final analysis, Faulkner's tone would appear to partake of that enigmatic paradox which his works seem to suggest he finds at the very heart of life.

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