**Putting Ghosts to Rest: William Faulkner's
Fiction Engages the Mind and Myths of the South**

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Abstract

To understand William Faulkner one must first understand the Southern Mind. Examining the Southern conception of history/culture/traditions opens the door to the issues and concerns that Faulkner himself encountered and engaged both personally and as a writer during his life. Because the South informed Faulkner, it also informed his writing; yet Faulkner used his imagination, his adept listening and telling skills to engage the Southern mind not as a passive member of the society but as a critical being actively pursuing resolution and understanding of his own heritage and his country's past.

His approach to these issues manifest themselves initially as a triangle of terms (Land-Indians-Slavery) within which Faulkner found the concerns and themes of his fiction. From this position Faulkner tracked a Genesis of the South through which the curse of the past perpetuated itself in a ripple effect of repercussions. Faulkner's characters inherit this curse, these repercussions, and must, as witnesses to the tale, strive to endure, engage, and face the consequences of both being born and raised in the South.

Through his fiction, Faulkner points to his own crisis of legitimation and the burden of engaging the mind and the myths of the South.

Abbreviations

AB: *Absalom, Absalom!*

GDM: *Go Down, Moses*

INT: *Intruder in the Dust*

SF: *The Sound and the Fury*

UNVAN: *The Unvanquished*

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His work as a teacher in my life is manifested here.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Tim Monteith:
who took me to the South
who supported me in academia
who I otherwise owe all other success.

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Introduction

“‘You can’t understand it. You would have to be born there’” (AB 361).

Two students sitting in a cold room in New England construct a story about the past and about the South. One is the witness, the inheritor of the story and, like Coleridge’s ancient mariner, seems destined to wander the world and tell his tale. The other is an outsider, a Canadian, who listens and adds and tries in what seems a vain attempt to understand what this tragic epic is about. At the conclusion of the tale, Quentin Compson insists that to unlock the mysteries of the South and understand its past and its people, its damnation and its epic, one must be from there, born and percolated there: a first hand witness. This effectively leaves the rest of the world locked out. I had traveled a long way with William Faulkner through his novels (and like Shreve I had tried to understand the epic, piece together the novels which all seemed to gather and form one great story and one great catalogue of the Southern epic) and this attempt brought me physically all the way to Mississippi and Faulkner’s home at Rowan Oak. It seemed fitting, then, being a Canadian ‘outsider’ in the deep South, that after walking up the long driveway flanked with trees that framed the front door of Faulkner’s old home, the site of his own witnessing in the South, I found that the door to the place was locked, the house closed for renovations until the spring. Like Shreve I had hoped to learn a little more about the South, to understand it as a homogeneous place, an autonomous division of the melting pot which is the United States; and like Shreve I was still locked out. Apparently simply visiting the place was not the key to the epic.

As I began to leave the grounds of Rowan Oak, in no small way disappointed, it struck me how difficult a thing it was to understand Faulkner and the mythic

Yoknapatawpha. What was at the root of Faulkner's universe, his South? I had tried to peer through the glass in the front door of his house but everything was gray and indecipherable inside. Was this the closest I could get as an outsider to understanding Faulkner's Southern epic? Was I forever to be looking in and never able to discern one shape from another? Faulkner wrote about another place, another time, and I was unable to be the witness, doomed to be the outsider, left to understand the South only as a great theatre or stage. If I could not be born in the South, if I was not a witness first hand of the deep South in 1920 and 1865 and time immemorial (even time composite) then the only way into Faulkner's universe was to understand the root of Faulkner's South, a root which is based on the reality of the Southern Mind. If I could understand that much I would be better off than Shreve (that intimate outsider). If I could understand that much then maybe I could understand Faulkner's own mind in the South as well.

This was the way I was to approach the front door of Rowan Oak and be admitted inside, not as a tourist, but as a witness from another place, an outsider inside. This was the way to approach Faulkner's epic, the result of his imagination and his watching and listening, the marriage of the Southern Mind with Faulkner's Mind to create the novels and stories which formed the imaginative Mind. If one could not be Southern, one could at least try to understand completely and unequivocally what it meant to be Southern, witness, inheritor of the past and carrier of the tale. Into this mind is where I decided to go.

Chapter One: Faulkner's Soil

And The Living Memory of the South

“And soon we shall go out of the house and go into
the convulsion of the world, out of history
into history and the awful responsibility
of time.”

-Robert Penn Warren
(*All the King's Men*)

There is such a thing as a (white) Southern myth. The Southern ideology, or what W. J. Cash entitles *The Mind of the South*, is important in understanding Faulkner's characters and, in many ways, Faulkner himself. The South is the soil to Faulkner's seed in which his roots reach out and twine amongst themselves. These roots clarify specific aspects of his characters and themes, but complicate them as well. It is useful, then, to look at this setting in looking at Faulkner; particularly the form it took by about 1920 when, consciously and imaginatively, Faulkner began to publish his fiction and to engage its themes and preoccupations.

Yet, we cannot just deal with it in the 1920 form alone. The mind of the South is made up of more than simply a backward glance of nostalgia, it is an exercise in living memory, in a past still alive informing the present. Faulkner's roots went deep into the memories and the myths that the mind of the South constructed for itself – that became not just what it believed but what it was.

The myth of the Old South may be misleading historically, but not ideologically. To argue, as Faulkner and many of his contemporaries did, that the Old South before the Civil War represented an aristocratic society of large plantations with white columns, of gentlemanly conduct including the moral codes of chivalry which go along with that

conduct, was to put forward a case not based in fact. The historical facts are important because they indicate distinctions within the myths, additions to that Southern mind-set and how it took over British aristocratic codes and revised them with their own particular ingredients. I will be using Cash's *The Mind of the South* as a major reference for this thesis, but as C. Vann Woodward notes in his introduction to *The Burden of Southern History*, it is impossible – dangerous even – to attempt the study of the South as one mind, one geography, one people. Woodward suggests that many critics have tried to define the region in all-encompassing and therefore generalized terms and I think he is right. I would like, as an extension of Cash, to bring in other views of the Southern mind. I have no interest in critiquing or demythologizing these myths from a non-Southern perspective. They are what they are in their own context. From my point of view these myths can be compared to the historical 'truth', (so far as this can be understood absolutely) but only in an effort to understand why that mind developed as it did. I am interested in how the memory of the Southerner defined his mind and his relationship to his past as part of the general human tendency to create ideals, ideas and identity from that past. From this angle it becomes possible to understand some of the tensions, sources, and root causes of why the white Southerner generated through time a way of looking at and being in the world that, although not based on historical fact, did still represent the real in the mind of the South in 1920.

What preceded this constructed New South? We can begin with Cash's Old South: a backwoods frontiersman who starts out in the South amongst the emerging plantations of the time. Thus the special ingredient of the backwoods lifestyle is instrumental to the myth of the Southern gentleman. The Old South was not an

aristocratic society but one of the frontier: "The basic Southerner, or, rather more exactly, as the core about which most Southerners of whatever degree were likely to be built, an exceedingly simple fellow – [was] a backcountry pioneer farmer or the immediate descendant of such a farmer" (Cash 29). This being the case, even when the plantations began to be raised and as a result started to change the social and economical status of these farmers, "The backcountry heritage often showed through" (Cash 40). These were hard men, accustomed to a hard life, not the refined gentleman of the Old South but the farmer who, through luck and stubborn tenacity, made frontier land into one with plantations. Yet, even those men who had been industrious enough to elevate their status were limited in number as compared to the entire Southern population.

For the most part the white Southern population was comprised of what Cash refers to as 'crackers': rather poor and disinclined to labour, they were uneducated and simple, rustic and hard drinking, swearing and more inclined to leisure than to anything else. The mild weather and the rich land made the masses of white farmers so. Such favourable weather in the South makes shelter and clothing less of a necessity than in say, New England, where the winters are harsh and dangerous. The land provides opportunities for sustenance and thus the need to sell crops for profit is not demanding. Many farmers of this time simply needed to grow as much as they needed to eat, and did not necessarily require income at any particular time. Add to this the fact that this was a new country, a place to which many fled so that they might escape the stagnant social constraints of Europe and "Thus, there was the unaccustomed freedom of the new country, the glad relief of escape from the European strait-jacket, the vague sense of bright, unlimited vistas opening upon the future" (Cash 46). With this in mind, one might

imagine the exultant freedom of the farmers of this time. Moreover, as Cash argues, “The frontier had loosened [the Southerner’s] bonds” (Cash 31). The bonds of class, law and even community were all but erased from the Southern white at this time. Because everyone was basically a farmer, those who were advancing did not really look down upon those who were not because they were in reality all of the same stock. Furthermore, the Southern innocence of class was also a result of the Negro slave, whose status kept even the lowliest of farmer or ‘cracker’ still socially elevated. The poor Southern ‘cracker’ was always white. The need for law and community, for city centres and concern toward politics were undeveloped in a wild, young frontier; in fact, these aspects were even distrusted. Thus in this environment a Southern ideology began to form itself into what Cash calls “The tendency toward unreality, toward romanticism, and, in intimate relation with that, toward hedonism” (Cash 44). As such, the individualism of these men was, in a large way, to form who they were, how they viewed themselves, and it would later inform the myth of the Old South in several important ways. There was the sense, historically true of this time period, that the land of opportunity existed in America. The American Dream was alive and well in the South where every farmer, whether he thought of progress for himself or not, truly believed that he was in a land of plenty and ease.

And so it is, in many ways, true that “of all these fictions, the most inevitable and obviously indicated was just that one which we know today as the legend of the Old South – the legend of which the backbone is, of course, precisely the assumption that every planter was in the most rigid sense of the word a gentleman” (Cash 61). This is

indeed the legend, but also contains grains of truth for even the lowliest of farmers did conform and subscribe to the aristocratic ideology of the plantation owners:

Seeing always from within the frame of Southern unity, the common white, as a matter of course, gave eager credence to and took pride in the legend of aristocracy which was so valuable to the defence of the land. He went farther, in fact, and, by an easy psychological process which is in evidence wherever men group themselves about captains, pretty completely assimilated his own ego to the latter's – felt his planter neighbour's new splendour as being in some fashion his also. (Cash 67)

This indicates one of the sources of the Old Southern myth, and shows that it is not entirely based upon legend. The mind of the South, as desire, did indeed tend toward aristocratic forms. Despite the small number of white Southerners who were plantation owners, (“in 1850 about 100,000 big planters out of a total white population of over eight million”), and who most closely and truthfully resembled the aristocrat, in wealth at least, it remained the case that:

The planters set the tone of Southern society, not only because of their place in Southern economy but also because the small-scale yeoman farmers whose land adjoined theirs dreamed of becoming planters too and took the manners and the politics of the group they hoped to enter. (Stewart 98)

This was the reality of the Old South. The origins of the Southern aristocrat were rooted in the backwoods and that special ingredient (the backwoodsman) added, or perhaps

more aptly, transformed the English definition of the aristocrat to that of the Southern aristocrat. As Cash points out:

The whole difference can be summed up in this: that, though he galloped to hounds in pursuit of the fox precisely as the squire did, it was for quite other reasons. It was not that hoary and sophisticated class tradition dictated it as proper sport for a gentleman. It was not even, in the first place, that he knew that English squires so behaved, and hungered to identify himself with them by imitation, though this of course was to play a great part in confirming and fixing the pattern. It was simply and primarily for the same reason that, in his youth and often into late manhood, he ran spontaneous and unpremeditated foot-races, wrestled, drank Gargantuan quantities of raw whiskey, let off wild yells, and hunted the possum: - because the thing was already in his mores when he emerged from the backwoods, because on the frontier it was the obvious thing to do. (Cash 30)

Although this aspect of the myth might have some core truth in it, there remained decisive contradictions between the realities of the Old South and the fictions.

One of the most overwhelming of these contradictions has already been mentioned: the white masses, mainly farmers, were able to subsist on what the land had to yield – the Old South was a land of plenty. In truth, as in most societies, these masses were also the poor with a standard of life which contradicted the Southern Agrarians' utopian Old South:

The poor whites in the strict sense were merely the weakest elements of the old backcountry population, in whom these effects of the plantation had worked themselves out to the ultimate term – back to the red hills and the sandlands and the pine barrens and the swamps – to all the marginal lands of the South; those who, because of poorness of the soil on which they dwelt or the great inaccessibility of markets, were, as a group, most completely barred off from escape or economic and social advance. They were the people to whom the term cracker properly applied. (Cash 23)

So the ‘European strait-jacket’ from which so many of the settlers of the Old South had fled had, in effect, followed them. These constraints still haunt the South today, although to a far lesser degree. Living under extremely poor conditions, the reality of the Old South manifests itself most poignantly in James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1940) where he describes and details the squalid yet somehow pure lives of three sharecrop and tenant farmer families. For our purposes, Cash will suffice: “Saddled with such burdens, the majority of Southern farmers, whether sharecroppers or tenants or landowners, would remain in debt year in and year out, never getting far enough ahead to finance next year’s operations for themselves” (Cash 276). This was the reality of the economic constraints which most Southerners faced. This legend of subsistence points to some important aspects of the mind in the South: the willing acceptance on the part of many farmers to believe in the American Dream and the chance to move upward. As already indicated, the white majority looked upon the plantation owners as captains, but also they looked upon them as proof; proof of the opportunity and reality of the American rags to riches dream. During the settlement of the South the American Dream was still

likely, and surprisingly even stronger after the Civil War when the legend flourished by necessity. It is true that:

Men could and did sometimes surmount the odds against tenants and sharecroppers, escape from the spindle and loom, and make their way from the bottom to riches, or to such competence and position as was satisfactory to the less vaulting ambition. And so once more the fact was obscured, once more the illusion of free opportunity for all was accepted without definite question. (Cash 288)

Yet, these rare cases of success seemed only to fuel a perpetual cycle of hope which was in fact more damaging to the South than an acceptance of the realities would have been. For many, the Southern tenacity represented the source for Southern stagnancy.

In my previous reference to Agee's Great Depression text *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, I suggested that although the accounts of these farmer's lives were tragic and squalid, they were also elevated and idealized from a philosophical if not capitalist point of view. Even while Agee wanted to promote reform for the poor of the South, he still perpetuated the myth of the traditional agrarian. This was another extension of the cycle I suggested above. Because the farmer, even in destitution, was generally considered a more pure, simple and therefore a romantic and enlightened figure, the small farmer was idealized, given fetish status. He had a way of life which, if not a source of advancement and riches, was traditional and hence served as a reservoir of meaning for the South. These farmers were not only famous men in the South, they were also noble, great men. This was the way the South mythologized its Agrarian proletariat.

There were still more categorical similarities and contradictions within the realities and fictions of the Old South, the greatest of which was the concept of honour. The Southern honour code, closely tied with the code of chivalry, was another result of the South's belief that Southerners lived in "a self-contained and largely self-sufficient little world of [their] own" (Cash 32), creating "the dominant trait of [...] intense individualism" (Cash 31). The weakness of legal and political institutions and the resulting dependence on personal agency necessitated the development of an unspoken code which served as a means of maintaining society and law. In Cash's negative view, this "narrow and egotistic conception of honour fitted most easily into the Southern pattern and went furthest toward establishing itself fully" (Cash 74). But the fact remains that this nebulous construct of gentlemanly conduct did exist and served as foundation and fuel for the later myths of the Old South; informing particularly the generations during and following the Civil War.

Between the myths and the realities there were, inevitably, paradoxes. This is Holman: "Approach it however you will, you will find at the heart of the southern riddle a union of opposites, a condition of instability, a paradox" (Holman 1). Here Holman put his finger on one aspect of the riddle: the facts of subsistence and the belief in freedom: "The Old South had a preponderance of subsistence agriculture. The small yeoman farmer knew how to subsist splendidly on his land. Being economically independent, he could be free in his politics and other beliefs. The subsistence farmer was and is the freest man in America" (Karanikas 65). 'Yeoman' and subsistence, scratching for existence and being the 'freest man in America' is surely a union of opposite terms, but it remains true that a select few did break through the constraints of sharecropping and

tenant farming, did subsist. Many survived, a few thrived; hence myth and truth come together to make a paradox. Although ornamented, enhanced, and exaggerated, a chivalric code did exist in the Old South. Poor white, rich white, diluted, according to Cash, the traditional concept of class in the South: "The matter of the derivation of the poor white, indeed, goes further than I have yet said. Not only is it true that he sprang from the same general sources as the majority of the planters, but even that, in many cases, he sprang from identical sources – that he was related to them by ties of family" (Cash 26). Yet the slave system demanded very concise social categories; the rich white (aristocrat) quickly learned through time to hate the poor white (cracker); both hated the Negro but the poor white brought extra venom to his hatred. Whites as a class were divided and connected at the same time.

There was another twist in the issue of class distinction. All aristocrats were not the same aristocrats; there was the problem of origins. This is how Stewart wrote it:

There simply was not enough time to transform the rough, crude, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, hard-fighting frontiersmen, traders, rivermen, and farmers into aristocrats. It was from these that there emerged the strong, pushing, and ambitious men who made up the ruling class in most of the South in the period before the war. As Cash has observed, such men had the very qualities needed to transform a wilderness into the cotton kingdom over a few decades, but more time was needed to gentle them. (Stewart 98)

There were, then, aristocrats who combined an existing backwoods ideology with their best imitation of what they thought the genuine aristocrat was; thus the Southern version

of the aristocratic was a heterogeneous blend of two disparate classes. Riddles, paradoxes, contradictions, pretend, were all part of the mind set of the Old South, giving us an example of a society trying to define itself, trying to establish its own identity, basing some of that identity on myth, some on circumstance and some on sheer accident. The Old South was a marriage of myth and truth forming what would later be considered a utopia of origin which, in fact, it never was. To grasp this Old South of contradictions and make-believe is pivotal in understanding any aspect of the Southern mind at any point after the Civil War for it was always to this mythical construction that the post-1865 South would look for meaning, answers, and defence.

II

“Before the Civil War we had no history in the deepest and most inward sense” (Warren 3).

**- Robert Penn Warren
(*The Legacy of the Civil War*)**

The Civil War is widely accepted as a turning point in the history and ideology of the Southern States. The fighting and defeat of the Civil War fortified many of these sentiments. It also served as a catalyst for memory and nostalgia. Cash described the difference between the pre and the post Civil War South as follows:

It was the conflict with the Yankee which really created the concept of the South as something more than a matter of geography, as an object of patriotism, in the minds of the Southerners. Before the fateful engagement

opened, they had been patriots, but only to their local communes and to their various states. So little had they been aware of any common bond of affection and pride, indeed, that often the hallmark of their patriotism had been an implacable antagonism towards states which immediately adjoined their own (...) Nor was this feeling ever to die out. Merely, it would be rapidly balanced by rising loyalty to the new – conceived and greater entity – a loyalty that obviously had superior sanction in interest, and all the fierce vitality bred by resistance to open attack. (Cash 66)

The implications of such a war and such a defeat were and remain enormous; the result was an absolute shift in the conception of what ‘Southern’ meant:

Four years of fighting for the preservation of their world and their heritage, four years of measuring themselves against the Yankee in the intimate and searching contact of battle, had left these Southerners far more self-conscious than they had been before, far more aware of their differences and of the line which divided what was Southern from what was not. (Cash 104)

Strange that Cash should suggest the South’s fighting was an intentional means and attempt to preserve a heritage and a way of life when so many argue that the Old South had not yet formed such concepts; that it had, indeed, formed them during and after the Civil War itself – as Robert Penn Warren’s quotation at the beginning of this section points out. Warren also suggests that “The war claimed the Confederate states for the Union, but at the same time, paradoxically, it made them more Southern” (Warren 14).

Warren began his career as a member of the Southern Agrarian school before he became a New Critic and his sentimentality might betray him here, yet it remains certain that the South seems to have paradoxically (and therefore characteristically), *found itself* through the horrendous experience of the Civil War. As Warren further suggests, “in the moment of death the Confederacy entered upon its immortality” (Warren 15). Despite defeat in the war, the Confederate States found something that served as a cause and as Warren suggests, it immortalized their sense of identity and culture in the face of “the prevailing or American way” (ITMS introduction).

So it is not so strange that Cash suggests that the South was fighting for a way of life and heritage. He recognizes the role sentimentality plays in this construction but claims it is a natural result of defeat in war:

Of course the sentimentality waxed fat on the theme of the Confederate soldier and the cause for which he had fought and died. This soldier, I suggest, was in sober truth a proper subject for people’s pride. And men (Western men, at least) have everywhere and eternally sentimentalized the causes of their wars, and particularly the causes that were lost. (Cash 127)

Thus a way of life was etched out of the debris and waste of war, an identity based on a remembered (but not necessarily ‘factual’) time created, a backward glance to a South before the Civil War. This backward glance focused on the Old South as the only available time to which a Southerner could return, and he returned to it with inevitable exaggeration. Even more importantly, there were now the added experience and available myths of the Civil War as well, “The American Civil War also undeniably defined the South. The war created heroes, a mythology, a history, a nationality” (Frank

11). How did the Old South and the New South come together over the bodies of that war?

The Civil War brought opportunities for chivalry and honour to the lowest of men and so helped to spread and strengthen the ideal of those codes down the social scale. The gentleman aristocrat was no longer the elevated model that the masses imitated in the hope of someday becoming; the subsistence farmers who fought in the war and carried out courageous and heroic deeds became soldiers, heroes of valour, gentlemen through their actions. This quickly established a widely shared sense of military and moral sense of superiority in the South. The Confederate army genuinely believed that despite being outnumbered they would still prevail (soldier's letters read from correspondence during the Civil War in Ken Burns' PBS documentary indicate a common consensus from the South that any one Southerner was worth five Northern soldiers). Class distinctions, already tenuous and flimsy, were almost eradicated. The South felt the equalizing effect of the war, especially when defeat and deprivation was universal.

The war likewise enhanced the principles of individuality in the South. Government, especially the Federal government, became more hated, and Southern patriotism (nationalism really) and the need for absolute Southern agency were solidified. These factors contributed to the formation of the Southern mind during the Civil War, but what the South encountered and confronted after the war during Reconstruction proved more telling of the myth which would emerge as the South moved into the 20th Century.

The South, the Southerner, became normative prescriptive terms. S/he had to conform to the orthodox definition of what it meant to be 'Southern' in the first place (an

idea and an identity which had heretofore not been challenged or even recognized in many cases in the South). Cash caught the atmosphere:

Here, under pressure of what was felt to be a matter of life and death, was that old line between what was Southern and what was not, etched, as it were, in fire and carried through every department of life. Here were the ideas and loyalties of the apotheosized past fused into tightest coherence and endowed with all the binding emotional and intellectual power of any tribal complex of the Belgian Congo (...) In a word, here, explicitly defined in every great essential, defined in feeling down to the last detail, was what one must think and say and do. And one thought it, said it, did it, exactly as it was ordained or one stood in pressing peril of being cast out for a damned nigger-loving scoundrel in league with the enemy. (Cash 134)

The South became distinctly un-American in its defeat, and that fact permeates much of the Southern mind: "For Southern history, unlike American, includes large components of frustration, failure, and defeat" (Woodward 19). These components spurred the further elaboration of already existing myths. Suddenly the South sees itself situated below the rest of the country; its egotism and sense of honour (already rooted in the Southern identity at this time) made this fact very difficult to swallow: "one begins to understand that the legend was an act of compensation by a people who had suffered terribly in war and who, in defeat, had been forced to undergo humiliation" (Stewart 102). Reconstruction only served to make defeat more poignant and difficult to bear: "The war, reconstruction, and subsequent Republican and economic policies completed

and consolidated the political and economic conquest, leaving the South impoverished, politically impotent, a dependent colony of the North” (Conkin 85). This predicament demanded ideological and mythological defence mechanisms. Conkin’s description of the South as a colony of the North is interesting: this defeat in the South has been likened to the situation of Ireland under the rule of England (see Edmund Wilson’s *Patriotic Gore*). The Southern defeat was total, proven not only by the facts and numbers of the war (Shelby Foote is quoted as saying that the North fought the war with one hand tied behind its back) but also by the aftermath of the war and the subsequent intrusion of Northern industry and politics in the South. Military defeat was crushing enough, but for a people so independent, so set in their ways, and so intent on maintaining those traditional ways as a means of establishing meaning and identity for themselves, such cultural, economic and political subordination was unbearable, unthinkable. Strangely enough, as Warren has already said and as Cash corroborates:

This victory was, in fact, almost entirely illusionary. If this war had smashed the Southern world, it had left the essential Southern mind and will – the mind and will arising from, corresponding to, and requiring this world – entirely unshaken. Rather, after the manner of defensive wars in general and particularly those fought against all odds and with great stubbornness, it had operated enormously to fortify and confirm that mind and will. (Cash 103)

The war generated heroes and solidified the South despite its defeat, destruction and exploitation. The South managed to do this through what is commonly labelled ‘Southern tendency’: a characteristic which in this case allowed them to find refuge in the

past and to look backward to a simpler time and a better place, mythologized, but nonetheless available and attractive to the Southern mind, especially in adversity.

The South after the Civil War elevated its past and the experience of the Civil War to melodramatic and metaphysical proportions; the war became its epic; the Southern Agrarians became the heirs of this resentment.

Their South remained, in several senses, a conquered province. As young intellectuals, they had the strongest possible motive – their identity was at stake – to find redemptive values somewhere in their southern heritage, and to find all the darkness and evil among northerners who had caused southern poverty and then gloated over the ignorance and backwardness of southerners [...] the Agrarians reflected a type of aggressive southern nationalism that bears comparison to that exhibited by defeated or conquered people of Europe. (Conkin 172-173)

Being only two generations removed from the Civil War (generally known as ‘the echo generation’), the Southern Agrarians were intent upon reaffirming their identity, and they accomplished this by criticizing the progressiveness of the New South and by proposing a return to the utopian Old South. Anything industrial was cast as the root of all evil; anything evil was attributed to the North. Hence:

In a loose way, all recognized that the South, in part because of the Civil War defeat and subsequent economic exploitation by the North, had retained much of its simpler past, including the continued economic dominance of agriculture, decentralized forms of household production, orthodox Christianity, and several nonconsumptive, nonprogressive

values. It was, in this sense, not only not yet modern but still anti-modern.
(Conkin 170)

And anti-modern the Southern Agrarians were. The invasion of industrialism into the South after the Civil War represented a greater evil and threat to the Southern way of life than the war itself seemed to have been:

What this meant for one thing, naturally, was that here was a complete end for these people of that old wide leisure which the common male, at least, had customarily enjoyed in the South. But it meant also a complete end to the old constant contact with sunlight and vital air which had always to some extent balanced out the effect of bad diet and bad living conditions in general. (Cash 199)

Here again we meet the myth of the subsistence farmer. However, the pressures of modernity and the ever-growing industrial South were undermining what the South and its myth relied so heavily upon: romantic notions of farming and nature. In the face of this destruction the Southern Agrarians produced a manifesto in which they attempted to restore the past. The Southern Agrarians were determined to reattach, but also to justify the defeat their country had suffered:

The War Between the States reflected primarily a competition between two economic systems and ideals – on the one hand the independent yeomanry of farmers and small shopkeepers, on the other a commercial, financial, large manufacturing oligarchy which already dominated the Northeast. (Conkin 85)

Likewise, the Southern Agrarians:

Were disillusioned with democracy because of the rise of an industrial society and the defeat of the South in the Civil War. They referred to democracy in the North as a 'plutocracy' which travestied the ideals of the founding fathers. They said that the North had defeated the South only because it had more industries producing more and better arms. Thus, industrialism, along with science and technology, had long been an enemy of the traditional South. (Karanikas 7)

They were not successful in their attempts to convince the public (North or South) of their ideas. Many criticized them as Confederate sympathizers; others saw them as wishful thinkers and utopians of the most absurd kind. Despite these criticisms, the Southern Agrarians do illustrate important aspects of the Southern ideology and the process of its development; their writings reflect the myths in action. One can see many central characteristics of the Southern mind in their writings, not least the importance of defence mechanisms of fiction and myth for a South under threat.

This brings us back to the theme of memory in war and how it is a means by which the South sought to identify itself in the face of defeat and what Cash describes as an encroaching terror: "it must be said that terror was continually threatening to seize the ascendancy, that there was in their thought a huge vein of gloomy foreboding, which trembled constantly on the verge of despair" (Cash 131). From this position of despair, the South was in a prime situation to realign its conception of itself "and the only really satisfactory escape here, as in so many other instances, would be fiction" (Cash 86). The

Civil War reinforced the Southern tendency of looking back to its past in an effort to create one more suitable; more than simply suitable: perfect, singular, an incredibly strong past which justified both a romantic and a nostalgic look backwards – one which could serve as a foundation of meaning and identity in the face of terror. The nostalgia for the South before the Civil War was a defence mechanism in the face of historical defeat.

Defeat, then, but also a continued sense of hostility and a fervent distrust of the North contributed to the felt necessity of a return to the past. Notice the sense of despair and the ever-present fear of encroaching and invading enemies to the Southern tradition found in quotations such as: “the intrusion of false progress and prosperity emanating from the old enemy, the North, threatened to completely destroy the South’s traditional society” (Karanikas 4) and even more telling: “a menace to their Southern heritage” (Cash 297). The Southerner fought the Civil War because he considered his country invaded, but even at the end of the war that sense of invasion grew and became something of a complex. The only recourse the Southerner had left was in the past. But as Woodward and countless other critics who have written on the South constantly remind us, the past was not a historically true past, but one of constructed myth and meaning: “With the crumbling of so many defences in the present, the South has tended to substitute myths about the past” (Woodward 12). Most indicative of these mythical implications is the way in which the South dealt with the issue of slavery. This represented the heaviest burden the South would bear after the war, a burden which demanded some alleviation whether through cold and pragmatic reflection or simply through fiction.

Slavery has been a continuous weight upon the Southern mind, "Throughout the vast legendry, in all the nostalgic novels and movies, the songs and jokes, in every mention of 'Southern' lies the remembrance of how the South once fiercely fought for the right to buy and sell human beings" (Karanikas 59). Slavery was another example of how and why the South sought to create a defence of itself through fiction. It was not only the presence of Northern troops which made the South nervous; even after they left in 1877, there remained a history of trauma and resentment in their wake. Yet it remains the case that "The South could not and must not admit it of course" (Cash 83). In what sounds like a stubborn and blind refusal to accept the reality of the Southern position on slavery is a more important implication that suggests that the South truly could not admit the evil of its past and the source of its defeat. If they were to acknowledge this reality the rest of their Southern myths would have been shredded; such acknowledgement would have demanded a legitimization crisis of major proportions. What is of interest here is not the historical validity of slavery in the South; what stands out is the presence, the necessity even, of a Southern past, and therein a Southern defence against the uglier aspects of that past. The Southerner was plagued by questions about his fate, "born in a land that had undergone defeat in war, they had that special sense of the past possible only in people compelled to search the record of agony, humiliation, and loss asking, 'Why? Why did it happen to us? Wherein did we go wrong'" (Stewart 42)? It would be impossible to embrace the evils of the past, to stand up and concede that perhaps all the loss and humiliation was in some way a product of slavery and the evil it entailed, especially at this point in time in the South when the wounds were still so fresh, the injustice still so close. The South, and this was certainly the case for the Southern

Agrarians, would beautify and romanticize the peculiar institution of slavery. And of course “one result of this was that they usually kept right on giving lip service to the ancient tradition and forms” (Cash 331) and they kept on insisting that the myths were true. The Southern mind would only become more convinced of its mythic past, would fortify its position all the more desperately the more threatened that it felt:

Nothing was so likely to make Southerners of every region conform in all their public appearances and statements as the feeling that they were surrounded by hostile and accusing eyes and that nothing they could do or say would make any difference. From this actual unity and from the defensive rhetoric came much of the substance for the legend impelled by implacable disapproval and the Southerner's own deeply suppressed awareness that slavery was evil and the outsider's disapproval, malevolent and unreasonable as it might be, was partly justified. (Stewart 97)

Spurred on by feelings of inadequacy and humiliation, the South would revert continuously to the past and begin to believe, and this is perhaps the most essential and noteworthy aspect of the Southern mind, that the myth became truth. The Southerner after the Civil War and the following years up to and including 1920 probably believed in the ideological and political stances of the Old South more than the Southerners who lived during the pre-Civil War period did themselves. It became the reality for them, as true and valid as any history, as strongly and patriotically pursued as any country's heroic and exploited past could be. And “The legend took hold because it gave comfort amidst fearful uncertainties” (Stewart 102).

And so because “since the end of the war, the South has struggled with the issues that resulted from the history of slavery and emancipation” (Frank 12) the myth of the Old South grew and began to develop, began to plant itself in the minds of Southerners. With great confidence Cash can assert that “The South we encounter as we pass over into the 1900’s, so far from being one that sweeps into essential revolution, is really one which has reached a sort of temporary equilibrium upon its ancient foundation” (Cash 189). Of course that ancient foundation is the myth already discussed whose roots are based partly in some of the reality of the Old South and partly in the complete construction of the Southern mind, beginning before the Civil War, progressing through it, and meeting its pinnacle after the Southern defeat. One aspect remaining to be discussed in regards to the Southern mind is its reliance on the American Dream. The South arguably could be seen as one of the last places where the American Dream still took hold of the populace; however, it unfortunately resulted in perpetuating a cycle which was detrimental to the South and its people.

Because the Southern mind was inclined to romanticism, it allowed for the American Dream to flourish. What in fact was happening was that the South was deceiving itself into believing that the dark days of Reconstruction and exploitation were finally over, “Even in those years, as I have said elsewhere, it never quite lost its capacity to believe the thing it was most anxious to believe: that, come next year, cotton at last would begin to fetch always more handsome prices. And once prices had actually begun to improve a little, that romantic faith took fire anew” (Cash 278-279). After the Civil War the Southern way of life changed, and to the dismay of the Southern Agrarians, industrialization began to open opportunities for the South to progress and begin to

rebuild. These days were to see a slow decrease in the Southern distrust of outsiders for a short time, but somehow these times would also fuel the fire of the Southern will to perpetuate its past and the romantic ideology within it:

Here, obviously, was hope for the South, as such, in the points where it most required hope. Here was hope for every Southerner in that sentiment of the South which stood at the centre of his being. And here, contrariwise, was an end to that despair, that terror, that haunting vision of ineluctable defeat ahead, which in the black days of Reconstruction had crawled behind the most determined Southern assertion. Here, in a word, was triumph for the Southern will; and so here, finally and naturally, was an enormous renewal of confidence in the general Southern way. (Cash 206)

Through the program of progress and industrialization the South found the means by which it began to grow. Why the Southern myth took hold during these times of change is attributed to two factors. The first is seen in the ideas of the Southern Agrarians who through their writing illustrate how difficult a thing sweeping and dramatic change can be. The entire South was being altered, right down to the trees and fields being cleared from the landscape. Despite the urgent need for progress at this time, the Agrarians clung all the more tenaciously to the Old Southern tradition in an attempt to preserve what they perceived as what remained hallowed and good in their tradition and heritage. The second factor stems from one of the attributes which developed in the Old South itself, the Southern sense of individuality and superiority. These times allowed the South to see some progress, to feel some advancement, and with the complete and absolute abandon of romantic-hedonists (attended also by an unhealthy amount of optimism), the South

flung itself into the hope for a better and stronger country. As time would tell, not only the Agrarians would be left without a ground to stand upon, but also the American Dream would collapse “Left stranded, almost helpless, were the Agrarians and thus also the older American dreams of freedom and independence” (Conkin 173), because although behind progress and industrialization was the promised end of the Southern famine, this end would never be achieved. The South was supposed to become the land of plenty which it had purportedly, but never actually been: with two chickens in every pot and two cars in every garage. Yet the opportunity for the yeoman farmer to elevate his status was just as probable at this time as ever in the past. The implications of this failure also spread to the white Southerner’s sense of superiority, a superiority which he felt most pointedly:

Another was that the presence of the Negro and the long defensive fight against alien-infested Yankeedom had vastly intensified in Southerners generally a feeling, common in some degree to most peoples, that they represented a uniquely pure and superior race, not only against the Negro but as against all other communities of white men as well. (Cash 297-298)

Of course this conviction might be considered an extension of the defence mechanism the South was still, although at a slightly lesser degree at this time, maintaining. When the South still saw no land of plenty, when even the agency and social position of the white South began to be compromised, it turned not only again and with more fervour to the past, but also it embraced a sense of hatred and terror which had not been seen since Reconstruction and which fuelled in a large way the eventual mind of the South in 1920.

The time after the First World War saw the South undergoing again several changes – very painful changes indeed. The empowerment of the Negro in the South due in a large part to his role in the Great War was a continual source of terror and a great generator of hate for the white Southerner. No longer was the Negro under the rule of the white man, and no longer was he acquiescing to the white's superiority. Furthermore, the war did a great deal to rob the Southerner of his sense of meaning and of God. The traditional stoicism to the divine was now being replaced with a fatalistic, verging on atheistic, outlook on life. Within the universities, great thinkers were beginning to question the validity of the Old Southern myth and were no longer merely swallowing blindly the traditional values which had up to this point been inherited. Education and rebellion against the traditions of the past were ever-growing. Still, however, those who questioned the past were outnumbered by those who, with all of these factors threatening and pushing in on them, looked again to the myth for identity and meaning. As Cash points out, this was also the case when considering the 'Red Threat' which was at this time (1920's, 1930's) rampant in the Western world:

And so they were afraid, these Southerners, like all Americans and like all Western men. Afraid cloudily and, as always without analysis, even subconsciously and blindly, but none the less really for all that. Afraid of all that stood without them, and perhaps even afraid of themselves. And because of their fears, desperately determined to hold fast, even in spite of themselves, to their own old certainties – somehow to island themselves impregably from the threatening flood. (Cash 294)

Again, the distrust for whatever stood outside of themselves, the reluctance and even open hatred of difference in the South began to take root once more “But above all, because of their fears and their will, they were filled with hate for whatever differed from themselves and their ancient pattern” (Cash 294). And likewise, as a great defence in the face of these uncertainties, it was the island of a Southern past which they swam to. Terror and distrust became a distinct aspect of the Southern mind of this time, an ever-present fear which made the Southerner look to his past with more determination and to lock his jaws about it against the flow and current of what was happening around him. And, of course, some of the results of this living history were ugly “to counteract the drive toward class division on economic and social questions by a more powerful drive toward cohesion and the tightening anew of the old solidity: the fears and hates which were to issue in such phenomena as the Ku Klux Klan and the anti-evolution campaign which headed up the trial of John T. Scopes at Dayton, Tennessee” (Cash 292). Reacting against the times, and seeking meaning in the past, the firm and unquestioning Southerner, already so accustomed to his tradition and his mythic memory, so used to returning to his roots and tradition for identity and defence, built a foundation against the threatening factors of his present time, against the emerging power of the Negro and the deconstructive power of a brutal war and the critical questions directed against his tradition, and moved, as he has always seemed to do, from the present towards the past.

This represents an important time in the development and especially in the perpetuation of the traditional Southern mind. It was as a reaction to and a result of these fears and this sense of terror at the changes which the Southerner was facing everyday that at this time younger generations began to realize the full implications of the Southern

mind. Through schools and parents, the Southern mind in 1920 was, in fact, an identity based upon the echo of two generations before it. In its attempt to defend itself against the terrors and the changes of a new world order, the South thought about its past in mythical, exaggerated terms, and as such over-compensated not only for that continual sense of defeat, but the present sense of terror as well. There is in this echo generation almost a complete return to the past:

In the name of religion, of morality, of patriotism, of the purity of Southern Womanhood, and of the will to avert the Red Peril, then, the accepted leaders of the South proclaimed their fear and hatred of the new spirit which had wormed its way in – in their name called up the fear and hatred of the masses against it. And now, as in all times past, it was quite impossible to say where calculation ended and genuine religious conviction, sentimentality, moral notions, and patriotism began. You could say with fair confidence that calculation [...] played the major role [...] for returning the schools to the status of pure stamping mills for the old pattern. (Cash 332)

Moreover, it was not necessarily a past which only dealt with pre-Civil War times: it dealt also with all of the myths and heroes which the Confederacy produced. The Confederate cause became one of the foundations of the echo generation's ideology, one of the moments where, heroic in defeat, the South proved its mettle and its worth. As Conkin notes of the Southern Agrarians: "[Davidson] had absorbed as a child the epic story of the heroic South defeated in its bid for independence and then cursed by Federal occupation and black rule. Thus, he already identified strongly with the Confederate

cause. So, shortly, would Tate. These two young men were only two generations removed from that war” (Conkin 33). The inherited past of the Civil War and the myths (made metaphysical) it produced informed the mind of the South in 1920. This was, then, a glance backwards all the way to 1865:

As in every time past, however, the element of calculation here flowed over, through the medium of the old easy capacity for unreality and the old habit of high and noble affirmation, to consolidate with, and to emerge wholly in the form of, terror and anger for high religion and high patriotism to the South, for the preservation of the way handed down by the fathers, tested by experience, and hallowed by the blood of the Confederate dead. (Cash 329)

As I have already suggested, the South constructed the Civil War, the heroes and the legends, the men and the causes, in metaphysical and mythic proportions. This was the war the echo generation inherited. The men, their deeds, the utopian Old South, its landscape and its ideals, all grew to poetic heights and in those heights represented something very different for the mind of 1920 than it did for the generation immediately following or living during the Civil War.

The echo generations, which included the Southern Agrarians and William Faulkner, were more removed from the reality of the war, from the grit and dirt and blood and severed bodies of those conflicts. The Civil War handed down to them was not the one of amputation and the sounds of sawed and broken bones. Their inherited war, the perspective placed on it in the universities, the colleges, and eventually the public schools, (sometimes named Lee High or located often in Lee County) was one of a

gleaming and heroic General Lee astride his gallant white horse. They knew of slavery, but even the potent whiff of that had been diluted by years of stubborn refusal and rationalization; they did not see the Civil War as a battle over slavery but one of poetic implications, an example of a nation striving, despite the inevitability of defeat, to liberate itself. Even if they had seen the war as a conflict over slavery, the institution had been so deodorized and mythologized that they could acknowledge Southern race relations as a patriotic inheritance. Everything about the mind of the 1920's rang of heroic battle and moral superiority: the South "hoped to find 'within the regional tradition the cultural assumptions often lacking in modern life'" (Karanikas 122).

In an interesting way, the remembered terror the South felt so poignantly at this time about its war was similar to the reaction which many modernists also felt in connection to the First World War: one of alienation, rootlessness, and meaninglessness. C. Vann Woodward argues that the only stable thing the South has ever had was its history; by 1920 it had become urbanized, its landscape had been industrialized, and even its myths had begun to be criticized and would continue to meet scepticism in the future. Thus Robert Penn Warren: "the Southerner's attitude toward the situation is frozen [...]. He is trapped in history" (Warren 56), not the actual history but its conception of that history-as-meaning. The most stable factor in the South, then, was its mind, its tenacious and often unflagging conception of itself. By the 1920's this mind remained traditionally what it had always been, living memory and mythical construct.

William Faulkner was born into this generation.

Chapter Two: Faulkner and the Duality of the South

“biography when geography’s the clue
locale & history of the clear ‘you’.”

-bpNichol
(*continental trance*: lines 417-418)

How did he fit into Robert Penn Warren’s trap? That frozen mind was the background key to that distinctive space, Faulkner’s own mind. How did Faulkner take up the main themes of the South’s narrative of itself and fit them about himself? To answer this question is the way into understanding William Faulkner the novelist.

Robert Penn Warren placed Faulkner’s roots in his history in Oxford and northern Mississippi:

In a profound way Faulkner resembles Robert Frost, and his relation to the South resembles that of Robert Frost to New England. Both men seem so deeply demanded by their moment in history, at the very end of their respective cultures, that, forgetting the matter of genius, one is tempted to say that the moment is the man, and the man a role created by the moment. Both Faulkner and Frost were firmly and intransigently rooted in Old America, the America which was liquidated by the First World War, and both were even more firmly and intransigently rooted in a particular locality and in the history of a locality. (Warren 2)

It cannot have been unusual for a person growing up in a region so particular in its mores and ideas, so poignant in its memories and identity as the South was, to have taken on the history and to have perpetuated those mores. Education and family were the

public and private avenues by which history and identity imprinted themselves on the post Civil War generations. Faulkner grew up inside stories and legends:

Faulkner was born into a wretched South, defeated barely thirty years before, with that fiery conflict still a living phenomenon in the older generation's memory. He grew up, as did Conrad, surrounded by remnants of defeat and dimensions of desultory rebuilding; both observed society shifting radically from what they had once known. To the end of his life, Faulkner would remain drawn to his past. (Karl 16)

Yet, Faulkner was drawn to the past in a different way. Unlike the Southern Agrarians – unlike, even, many Southern whites – Faulkner's awareness of the past could not be selective in that collective way. The truths that he did not avoid about slavery, degradation, evil, injustice, racial bigotry and violence made his glance backward to an Edenic Old South more painful, more complicated. Not that he could, nor that he wished, to escape the mythological and nostalgic traditions all around him. He was, as Penn Warren indicates, a product of his time and place, and he could not, even with a critical eye, completely sever himself from his communal past. Some Faulkner critics (John L. Stewart, Robert Penn Warren. and C. Hugh Holman) see his work and his life as a search for truth amongst the distortion of the Old Southern myth, an obsessive compulsion to salvage grains of truth from history. This is not the case. History was an invaluable source of inspiration and identity for Faulkner; it was not an ideological battleground of incongruities and lies that had to be adjudicated. Faulkner's relationship to history reminds me of Herder's conception of history: both men came from “a conquered, humiliated and oppressed nation dreaming of resurrection” (Talmon 96) and likewise, as

already suggested of the South and now seen in Herder's account of Poland "To the Poles, patriotism could no longer be the loyalty of faithful subjects to their king, or a sense of partnership in the common weal. It assumed the character of allegiance to an idea, devotion to a ghost" (Talmon 96). This resembles the Southern mind after 1865. The Poles after their humiliation and the Southerners after their defeat began to chase a ghost, an idea of what they were once, of what their identity was and must be. That ghost became a living apparition in both of their societies, a concept of the past as a greater unsullied time, when their nation had an unchallenged identity and when patriotism could define itself from a definite set of communal values. Herder identified and Faulkner chased this ghost – but with more critical eyes than most. They glanced back into history, unconcerned really with 'truth' or 'facts' of defeat to find roots before and beyond that defeat; they sought a beginning myth, a primal space, a Genesis.

There are further similarities shared between the ideologies of these nations and between the minds of Herder and Faulkner; reconstructed history became their reality: "Herder developed a passion for the unpremeditated immediacy of folk-song, ballad, popular epic, old women's tales, proverbs and sayings. Language emerged as the most significant of all cultural phenomenon" (Talmon 98). Faulkner too shared this passion, he also sought out tales from his grandfather about the Civil War, listened intently to old Negro tales, and in his writing on Indians he re-enacted their methods of story telling and their oral traditions: "What we do know is that [Faulkner] became part of the circle of regular listeners to the *storytellers*, and from these White farmers and old Chickasaws and Black dayworkers he began to gather not only life stories but also ways of telling them" (Glissant 193). For the romantic nationalism of both Herder and Faulkner the

local and the historical served as a well of unmediated and potent meanings. It sidelined the truth and politics of standardized history books; it concentrated on the untold cultural values that these tales provided with a poignant understanding of the humanity at their roots. These tales spoke to and from the minds and traditions of romantic nationalists sustained through memory and retelling:

In the process of retelling, Faulkner had also discovered a historical method, a means by which history could be revealed. It does not matter whether history is 'true' or not. As he mentioned later in his life, there were facts, and there was the truth. Faulkner did not ignore the facts; they were useful as pawns on a larger chessboard on which he sought the truth of things. (Karl 22)

Faulkner's mind always depended upon the act of retelling. Memory at Rowan Oak was alterable, fluctuating, and fluid. As Wyatt, author of *The Prodigal Sons* observes: "The test of a good listener is his ability to retell with a difference" (Wyatt 83) and Faulkner was always a good listener, and a great teller, in his fiction and in the details of his own life. Fredrick Karl reveals the writer's tendency to fabricate and mythologize his own life:

Faulkner went from a completely marginal figure (in his own eyes) to one of heroic stature, in the way he presented himself and in the stories he related of his experiences. Faulkner cherished the transformation well into his fifties by maintaining the military falsehoods [...] At first he had become the subject of his own inventions, and this was the process of 'lying' which was so central to his imaginative thrust; then [...] Faulkner

assimilated the idea of the 'lie', or tall tale, treating memories in their expansiveness as if they had originally been true. (Karl 17)

When Faulkner joined the RAF at the time of the First World War he was a young adult. This provided him the transitional moment when he began to seek an identity of his own. Faulkner at this time uncovered the symbolic usefulness and value of a usable past retold. In this case, Faulkner was not so much retelling as simply 'creating' his identity; that he would come to adopt these tales as truth illustrates the power that telling or retelling would assume for him: Thus "Faulkner was concerned not only with writing history, but with rewriting it; this included his personal history" (Karl 22).

Cynically speaking, this sort of personal myth making, telling and retelling history, (especially one's own history) is difficult to accept. Faulkner comes off, at times, as a liar, a shy man who sought acceptance and who created a myth by which that acceptance might be garnered. This misses the point. In his own mind, Faulkner was not lying; in fact he was seeking truths and possibilities beyond the historical facts: "Memory (telling and re-telling) is so significant in Faulkner because it bypasses mere pastness and re-creates a truer form of history; actualization would be a betrayal" (Karl 740). Not only would actualization be a betrayal, but pure and static history would assume the role of the lie in Faulkner's mind. He came to understand how tenuous a thing truth is: "but here he has found a means of expressing the softness of truth, the possibilities of a deobjectified, decentred world" (Karl 394). And so, because of his approach to history, his method and relationship to it "he had looked as far as he could look and discovered through his method that truth exists in the mind of the speaker: deception, self-deception, and truth are intermixed" (Karl 394). Emerson, characteristically, put this in a nutshell: "All

history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography” (Emerson 119). Faulkner similarly could only appreciate history on his own terms, as an individual and this too has echoes of Emerson who suggested that a man “should see that he can live history in his own person” (Emerson 118).

If there are hints of Emerson in Faulkner’s attitudes to writing, language, biography and history, there are also considerable influences from Thomas Jefferson in his relation to man’s connection to land, nature, as well as to the romantic privileging of yeoman-like independence. Faulkner’s Jeffersonian perspectives go deep and represent one of the major aspects of Faulkner’s world view. There are two aspects of Jeffersonian philosophies Faulkner proved again and again to support: a firm belief in nature and through it subsistence, leaning almost to a Southern Agrarian position (with slight differences because although the Agrarians also subscribed to Jefferson, Faulkner’s conceptualization of these ideals was more critical), a strong sense of individualism and man’s ability to be self-reliant. For Faulkner, independence represented the heroic possibility in life, one of the few redeeming characteristics of mankind by which it could sustain itself through personal endurance. Many of Faulkner’s characters are caught in a continual war of self-doubt, as Faulkner himself said: “The human heart in conflict with itself.” It is not only in his fiction that we can see Faulkner’s Jeffersonian bent. His speeches and actions throughout his life indicate how important a role these ideals played in Faulkner, “Like Jefferson, he favored decentralization, self-reliance, and responsible individualism, and distrusted technology, urban life, and collectivism” (Karl 23). Faulkner’s connection to nature will be dealt with in more detail presently. For now it is important to understand what role the individual man played in Faulkner’s world vision,

how much agency and responsibility he assigned to the individual against the greater universal concepts he held about Fate and determinism: "I think that man's free will functions against a Greek background of fate" (Faulkner 38). This belief was the fuel behind many of Faulkner's stances towards government and economics:

Faulkner stressed every person's responsibility for his own acts, which is the true meaning of liberty and the core of duty. Without individual responsibility, the Declaration of Independence means little or nothing. Faulkner lavished rhetoric, in his soft, drawling voice, on the Jeffersonian vision of man: the farmer who depends on no one besides himself. (Karl 837)

As was the case for many Southerners of this time period, there remained that strong sense of individualism, personal agency, and self-reliance, especially for the farmer who could subsist on the land. This concept of self-reliance goes further still to encompass Faulkner's conception of the American Dream as he understood it:

Jefferson, for example, not only declared that freedom and power of choice were individual rights but wanted to go further and guarantee the right of every individual to receive from the state at least a basic education and the ownership of enough land to render him economically independent and thus able to cast an honest vote. Such was the Jeffersonian American Dream and, as we have seen, such was essentially Faulkner's. (Brooks 142)

Faulkner consistently defers to the individual man, frequently asserting his power and ability to endure. Such Jeffersonian concepts would translate into almost all of Faulkner's beliefs and stances, especially when it came to the South's racial problems.

Yet, here we also begin to see the special paradox (different from the more general Southern paradox but built upon the same shaky foundations) which Faulkner represents: Faulkner was a firm believer in individuality and self-reliance, just as the South was, yet paradoxically, he also assigned great importance to the community, just as the South did. The paradoxical nature of the Southern mind is mirrored (but distortedly so) in the paradoxical nature of Faulkner's mind. As I proceed to investigate the mind of Faulkner these paradoxes will prove more and more important as they become more and more telling of the battle, the moral/ethical battleground of his conscience, of his consciousness. Of course, to attempt a general and all-encompassing synopsis of any man's world view is just as complex a task as Cash's effort to depict a generalized mind for an entire people. Faulkner lived for sixty-five years and his mind, like any human mind, changed and grew and was affected in wide and diverse ways throughout his life. Yet, if it is fair to say that Faulkner's mind changed throughout his life, it is also equally safe to say that those aspects which were embedded in him, his firm and unshakable moral convictions, his fundamentals, remained consistent throughout his adult life.

To return to Faulkner's paradoxical nature, then, one can look to his speeches, like the one which he delivered at his daughter's graduation:

Emphasizing the need for individuality, free will, and man's capacity for decision. Whatever peace and security were attainable could be achieved only through individual acts, not through group or state action. He

deplored mass mentality, comparing it to a drove of sheep. The heuristic function was clear: to tell the graduating class its destiny was Jeffersonian, not Hamiltonian. The enemy, implicitly, was the state and its welfare programs, which turned people into wards; salvation lay in individual initiative, even with all the attendant mistakes. (Karl 860)

This supports again the Jeffersonian individuality. Even with this in mind, it is clear that for Faulkner “The enemies of a true god [were] everywhere: industrialization, modernization, progress, loss of community life, uncertainties in the individual. These ideas played in and out of Faulkner” (Karl 230). The contradiction is immediately clear. A loss of community and uncertainties in the individual represent two very different conditions; although not separate, certainly different. Faulkner “deferred to the idea of individual man, but he was not indifferent to society” (Karl 400), especially later in his life when he began to see the community with growing admiration and lamented its perceived failing. If “In sum, Faulkner insists on man’s responsibility for his actions” (Brooks 18), and since he maintains a firm belief in humanity, humankind, and the individual man to endure, succeed and strive for betterment, then Faulkner could only perceive the community as an institution in which this individualism must define itself against others. To circumvent the theme of community for the present moment, a most telling example of Faulkner’s belief in the individual can be seen in his relationship with the Southern Agrarians. The two were similar in their world views and yet Faulkner’s distinct philosophy made his acceptance of the Agrarian symposium *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930) impossible.

Faulkner was beginning to write at the same moment that the Southern Agrarians were proposing a return to an organic and traditional Southern culture. It was singular for the South to have suddenly produced such a collection of writers and intellectuals at the same moment. This is not to suggest a direct connection or affiliation, however. Faulkner was a loner throughout his life, especially when it came to his writing and his sense of himself as a novelist. There were some similarities: both valued the past and the myths of the Old South; both had grown up surrounded by Southern attitudes solidified through memory and fear; both valued nature as a source of divinity and goodness; both strongly distrusted and often expressed open dislike of industrialization and commercialization. There were differences: the Agrarians wrote as academic intellectuals who collaborated together to further a collective project and collective views. Faulkner's work was with the imagination, the individual man, and the Fates. The Agrarians idealized the Old South while Faulkner was aware of how dispossessed that Old South had been and how flawed the present South remained. Race was absent from the Agrarian manifesto; Faulkner never turned a blind eye to slavery and segregation. He rejected formulaic approaches to anything and distrusted ideas on the whole as a form of shorthand explanation. Faulkner and the Agrarians did share Jefferson, but Faulkner took a more subtle, universal, more individualistic view of Jefferson.

Karl addressed a key difference between Faulkner and the Agrarians:

Faulkner would not have recognized the South as superior because of moral, social, and religious considerations. If anything, his fiction demonstrates that major tensions exist between what the South thinks of

itself and the reality of life there [...] he agreed the backbone of the South was the small farmer (Jefferson's image of democracy at work), and he certainly deplored the encroachment of an industrial complex. But he hardly glorified the small farmer, nor saw in him the salvation of America. Neither did he glorify the agrarian ideal. For him, agrarianism went well beyond farming, back to the wilderness and the primitive, the 'big woods' [...] He looked for deeper values in man, and farming, while commendable, did not in itself create or reinforce those values, however often he later referred to himself as a farmer. (Karl 217)

Yet, Faulkner was not entirely without romantic visions of the old nostalgic South. His high regard for the yeoman farmer was unmistakable, and although the difference between the Agrarian ideal of farming ("clean-cut policy that the rural life of America must be defended, and the world made safe for the farmers" (Ransom 25)) and his own Emersonian and spiritual approach to 'the big woods' and nature shows that he had a better idea of what farming meant in the South, he still frequently expressed a desire to return to the old ways of the South: "What Faulkner wanted, he forcefully emphasized in the final segment of his talk, was a return to the tough old farmer of past times. Speaking as an incurable romantic in this respect, he hoped to see the return of yeomanry (Karl 838). And Faulkner did not differ very distinctly from the Agrarians when it came to modernity and the North as a malignant intrusive force in the South either.

The Agrarians:

After the South had been conquered by war and humiliated and impoverished by peace, there appeared still to remain something which

made the South different – something intangible, incomprehensible, in the realm of the spirit. That too must be invaded and destroyed; so there commenced a second war of conquest, the conquest of the Southern mind, calculated to remake every Southern opinion, to impose the Northern way of life and thought upon the South. (Owsley 63)

And Faulkner:

Faulkner then gets into difficulties when he tries to explain why the North has not produced a literature out of the war – because, he says, it has become enslaved by machines. (Karl 734)

Moreover, Faulkner's Old South was very different from the twelve Agrarians' Old South as the Edenic and lost world of a moral and organic society. Despite his hatred of industrialization and the receding effects it had on his beloved big woods, for Faulkner progress was inevitable:

Well, the New South has got too many people in it and it is changing the country too much. It's – has – it gets rid of the part of Mississippi that I liked when I was young which was the forest. Though it's foolish to be against progress because everyone is a part of progress and he'll have no other chance except this one so he – it's silly not to cope with it, to compromise with it, cope with it. (Faulkner 98)

The Southern Agrarians were nostalgic for the beginning days of the Old South, for the romantic and all-encompassing formula within which they found a means of preserving the myth of a moral, political, and economically unsullied time. Faulkner's Jeffersonian

philosophy made such an organic conception of the South impossible. Karl put his finger on a very un-Jeffersonian aspect of the Agrarian program: “Jefferson was distant indeed from the agrarians. For him, reliance on the individual was foremost; for them, it was the nature of an organic society which dominated” (Karl 512). Brooks suggests another important distinction between the Agrarians and Faulkner which I have already alluded to: “The latter group were extremist Neo-Confederates, indulging in special pleading for their section, intransigent secessionists still, whereas Faulkner was able to stand back from the more emotional issues, regard the faults of the older Southern culture with a critical eye” (Brooks 6). In this critical approach to his own society, the duality of Faulkner’s mind emerges. This is a distinguishing factor when trying to understand Faulkner’s fiction and his person.

One must recognize that Faulkner was often fighting with himself. Unlike the Southern Agrarians (“It is the hope of the essayists in this book to aid the South in its reorientation and in a return to its true philosophy” (Owsley 67)), he was not blind to the faults of the South. Faulkner was burdened, as was the whole South, between issues of freedom and slavery, old/new, agrarian/industrial, idea of America/idea of state, community/individuality, myth/fact, progress/tradition. Being born into these turbulent times, Faulkner’s mind was at war with itself. Throughout his life he juggled the allegiance which he ought to feel toward the South, the patriotism which the Southern code demanded, and his own sense of the burden of history: defeat, injustice, aggression, intimidation. Karl, in speaking about Faulkner in school, spoke of how:

Billy picked out the elements which failed to fit, and he nagged them – schooling, family life, the idea of home itself. Ferment centered on the

ever-present issue of Negroes: their schooling, their right to vote, their protection under the Constitution, the subversion of federal law by state's rights. It was a time of irreconcilables and irresolutions, problems which could only be postponed for future generations. (Karl 83)

These problems were not being postponed in Faulkner's mind for any future. They were contradictions that he would fight with, which split his mind right down the middle.

This is why Faulkner is so easily misunderstood, and in his interviews he often seemed to contradict himself. He was balancing on a tightrope and that balancing act defined his world view, became the shape of his mind, a contradiction that came out in his fiction as well:

Faulkner himself preserved part of the Edenic myth, as a past-present, but he also subverted it; to the extent that he did so, he was reviled by some of his Oxford contemporaries. What most Oxonians wanted as historical truth was what Thornton Wilder had demonstrated in *Our Town*: birth, love and marriage, death, and lots of neutral words in between. No violence, no alcoholism, no madness, no sexual or social kinkiness – all of which Faulkner had brought out of the closet and re-created imaginatively, and all too realistically, for his neighbors. (Karl 77)

Even while seeming to follow the Southern Agrarians into the past, he could not ignore the lack of legitimacy which the Southern foundations of self-identity were inherently based on. His writing was not the only aspect of his life which was affected by this split;

that writing was in reality a mere by-product of this ever-present dilemma. Karl suggests that Faulkner's name change was a symbolic act on the part of Faulkner to separate himself from part of his past and his familial obligations while still resisting outright change: "By adding a 'u,' he could suggest his independence from history and family, but also not make a change which stressed outright defiance. It was the kind of balance which foreshadowed a good deal in Faulkner's later career: the ideological tightrope he walked on several issues" (Karl 18). Like all Southerners, Faulkner resisted and distrusted change, especially quick and monumental change. To criticize his heritage was to embark upon a legitimization crisis of absolute, ultimate proportions and go against the grain of his upbringing.

The First World War provided Faulkner with escape from these mounting tensions. When he got back from Canada, Faulkner had a newly constructed personality, military with a touch of the artistic Bohemian. The military persona Faulkner adopted for himself was consistent with the Southern code of military honor and strong masculinity because they reconnected to his grandfather and the family tradition of military involvement. The artistic pose was trickier in the South, mistrusted; in his own words: "'art' was really no manly business" (Karl 734). In acting out the military role while simultaneously positioning himself as writer, Faulkner created a set of incongruous identities in Oxford (much as Sam Fathers or Lucas Beauchamp represent sites of their own contradictory blood, their own battlegrounds). Faulkner's mythical construction of his own identity indicates how deeply his sense of connection to and yet distance from the South ran. The power of place was intense, however, and Faulkner's fear of change indicated how fundamentally traditional he was: "That fear of rapid change, of any

alteration in the rhythms and paces of Southern life, filled him with horror. Beneath the often daring content and the innovative fictional methods was a man not at all bohemian or avant-garde, but deeply traditional” (Karl 771) – the traditional being Faulkner’s love of hunting, need for male-bonding, and often deeply disturbing views on the race problem of the South. Behind and inside and around it all however, was Faulkner’s imagination, his insistence on individuality and human endurance (not necessarily human goodness, but certainly endurance), his approach to history and his love of nature, all of which served to shape his fictional world. The Southern tide of orthodoxy washed into shore again and again, but the high water mark of his strongest private and writerly convictions remained intact.

II

“I am I, howe’er I was begot.”

-William Shakespeare
(From *King John I*, i, 175)

If we want to grasp the convictions that Faulkner maintained throughout his life we have to get a sense of his constructed self, that composite identity we can call Faulkner’s *myth of self*. I have already talked about the narrative (myths) of *family*, *history* and *society* in Faulkner’s conceptualization of the South and identity; these three recurring factors (*family/history/society*) together form a triangle of items that we can call *myths of tradition*. From the base formed by these *myths of tradition* Faulkner also constructed mythical accounts of the *Civil War*, of *Nature* and of *Race*. Into these connections (the composite *tradition, nature, Civil War and race*) Faulkner poured his thoughts. Inside each theme/concern we meet hints of that duality which plagued

Faulkner all his life reflecting the duality of his community. We can also see the reluctant sadness of a man in conflict with the very country that produced him.

The most stable belief Faulkner maintained throughout his life was Jefferson's philosophical stress on Nature: Dabney says that "the frontier [was] another age of chivalry" for Faulkner (Dabney 65). When Faulkner was a child the frontier was still very much alive, although receding fast. He found there a similar spiritual and personal meaning to that found by Emerson and the Agrarians in nature:

Worried about the role of religion in society, the symposium writers perceived religion as being man's submission to 'the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable; it is the sense of our role as creatures within it.' If we redefine 'nature' as the big woods, Faulkner would agree: inscrutable nature contains if not a religious message then at least a spiritual one. In the big woods, there is a transcendence of the petty and trivial in human character, a vaunting of man's potential to enter into and possibly understand his surroundings. (Karl 397)

The frontier of Faulkner's youth was "a paradise lost" (Dabney 153), a place where the romantic nostalgia of the Agrarians was possible. The wilderness gave Faulkner opportunity to escape from the burden of (Southern) history. This piece of Mississippi frontier was to his mind unsullied, uncomplicated, a source of moral and spiritual laws enabling humanity to recapture what was once good and heroic and poetic in itself. This *myth of nature*, most poignantly and obviously a romantic myth, was the one inside which Faulkner felt no contradictions: "the great Faulkner myth, if we must single one out, has to do with the big woods – with 'hunt dreams,' with escape into a different time

and space where everything is possibility and the experience an echo of the Garden” (Karl 629). Faulkner’s frequent hunting trips, especially in the later years of his life, suggest not only an increased need for escape (negative), but a true belief in the transcendental power of nature (positive).

Karl makes an important distinction between ‘nature’ (as Jefferson and Emerson might use the term) and Faulkner’s concept of ‘land.’ For Faulkner the land had caught the blood of both the whipped slaves and the Confederate soldiers that had fought to keep them enslaved:

Implied in nearly everything Faulkner wrote was a critique of the land as fulfilling; what was fulfilling was nature as some abstract principle, a vision of nature, the idea of the Edenic myth extending into the hunt and into man’s relationship to nature. But the ‘land,’ as apart from nature, was doom-filled: doomed as people left it, doom for those staying with it. (Karl 399)

Faulkner had to make this distinction to get out of his cultural bind; the burden and curse of the South in *historical* time and space was embodied in a large way by the land – the physical and social geography which surrounded Faulkner and the Southern states. Allegiance to that land saturated with connotation compromised Faulkner’s skeptical moral and critical stance. Nature, not land in this compromised form, preserved aspects of the *nostalgic* primal Old South which found its most genuine expression in the rituals of the hunt.

In the practice of these rituals the traditional Southern code of honor as it touches on man’s relationship with nature comes into its own. Dabney caught this: “‘I slew you;

my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death.’ It is the aristocratic code of the South of Walter Scott, and of General Lee” (Dabney 128). In understanding life and death, the relationship between the hunter and the hunted gets translated in the foundations of Southern aristocratic society and the beginnings (and need in the absence of organized law) of a higher moral value system. Again, what Faulkner shows is a continuous fortification of his Southern heritage married with a mythical construct of what that Southern heritage entailed.

One of the tenets of this higher moral system of values, according to Dabney, came from Rousseau: “Faulkner had been reading Rousseau on the origins of inequality. ‘You are lost,’ Rousseau concludes, in a passage from which Isaac McCaslin’s vision stems, ‘if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody’” (Dabney 55). Faulkner traced much of the Southern curse – which included slavery – to the moment when land was first bought and sold. Owning land led to the plantation system; that system led to slavery; with industrialization now sweeping the big woods away ownership was rampant again in a new form. This is Faulkner from *Absalom, Absalom!*: “the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say ‘This is mine’ was crazy” (AB 221). Faulkner’s *myths of nature* go back before the ‘South’ had been formed: this is precisely where all myths must go: to the beginning before the beginning.

If we now look at society, we can ask the question how it as myth connects to Nature. Could there be a connection between the fall of Nature and the fall of society?

Faulkner was not misanthropic believing, like Thoreau, that the only way to find peace and meaning was to separate oneself from neighbors and society as a whole. Community was one source of traditional values which made the South distinct and therefore important to Faulkner. Community was, for Faulkner, the most viable means of perpetuating the moral codes of the South. Karl put forward a widely held view of the South on the South: “‘It’s the only really authentic region in the United States because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment. In the South, above all, there is still a common acceptance of the world, a common view of life, and a common morality’” (Karl 849). Diminishing nature diminished man and society. When the wilderness recedes an essential source of identity and of moral guidance is erased. Faulkner saw himself present at the failure of the South:

Faulkner writes that the degeneration had arisen at the ‘moment in our history when we decided that the old simple moral verities...were obsolete and to be discarded.’ His calling them ‘old’ indicates that he was thinking of the traditional values of the kind that the whole community had long accepted. Faulkner attached great importance to the community. (Brooks 140)

This is where his own fabricated – in the forms of fiction – myths of Nature, man and society intervened. The act of re-telling history and oral traditions took place in a specific community. Shared stories reinforced identities.

There was a problem however, in this generally accepted pattern for Oxford Mississippi: the Civil War: “this aspect of the stories [the aspects of defeat and

destruction and death of his countrymen] impressed William as much as episodes of valor. He was surrounded by survivors, not of victory, but of lost opportunities, romantic notions, and fantasies of heroic acts” (Karl 69). Faulkner was surrounded by the actual physical testimonies to the Civil War – the battle fields and grave yards, parades and cannon ball holes in the sides of buildings; he was surrounded by the stories of the Confederate soldiers, the history lessons in schools and the tales from his own family:

And these were not isolated, disconnected stories, but episodes which in some instances involved their own great-grandfather, and great battles fought within a horseback ride of home. What makes these experiences so indelible is that William assimilated history as part of his heritage and land, not the history of some ancient peoples whose fortunes remained distant in time and place. (Karl 69)

For Faulkner personally, the Civil War complicated his position/engagement with history because he could not find a moral ground for it; he could not blind himself to the racial implications that the war denoted. Like his relationship with tradition, Faulkner is again painfully aware of the lingering stench of slavery which in so many ways represented the Southern Cause. So the war came to serve a dual-purpose in Faulkner’s fiction and his personal life: it represented a stage for valor, honor and fortitude, but it also represented what had gone terribly wrong with the South, and the subsequent retribution which continued to damn it.

If Faulkner generated *myths of tradition* based upon family, history and society which he would forever confront in his fiction and in his life, then his distinctive burden under myths of *nature*, *war* and *race* all stemmed from his inability to fit nicely into the

established and generally accepted Southern traditions. Faulkner picked out the faulty aspects of the South (aspects which ran through all of the myths from *nature* to *history* to *tradition*) and saw that it was a dispossessed Eden at best. He could not romanticize the South like Margaret Mitchell; his South could and did not resemble the South of *Gone with the Wind*.

Although it was the tendency of the Southern mind to look ever-backward to a better time, Faulkner's vision was sullied by the mark of slavery, the exploitation of land and the blind acquiescence to tradition which represented the true Genesis of the South. Always teetering on the edge of repudiating the South, Faulkner would at the same time stand up for it vehemently.

Faulkner was not blind to this split in his mind:

And those of us who were born in Mississippi and have lived all our lives in it, who have continued to live in it for forty and fifty and sixty years at some cost and sacrifice simply because we love Mississippi and its ways and customs and people; who because of that love have been ready and willing at all times to defend our ways and habits and customs from attack by the outlanders who we believed did not understand them, we had better be afraid too, – afraid that we have been wrong; that what we had loved and defended not only didn't want the defense and the love, but was not worthy of the one and indefensible to the other. (Karl 795)

Patriotic yet apprehensive; Faulkner was not blinded by the one, but was at the same time reserved and traditional in the face of the other.

Yet the will to fit in, the necessity of having a homeland, was a part of Faulkner's character. He was not an expatriate and maintained close ties to his homeland despite its faults, "Well, I love it and hate it. Some of the things there I don't like at all, but I was born there, and that's my home, and I will still defend it even if I hate it" (Karl 911). Such strong patriotism is evidence of a growing need for Faulkner to re-attach himself to his community, one which he did love throughout his life despite its failures; "Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults" (Glissant 212). So Faulkner engaged *myths of tradition* based upon the foundations of history (which Faulkner engaged and needed), society (a part of community through which Faulkner found valuable mores) and family (a source of tales and history and community, an important and ever-present construct in Faulkner's life). But although he both romanticized and criticized the traditions (through his fiction and his life) it is also true that Faulkner could not abandon them.

Nor did Faulkner entirely want to abandon those traditions in the first place because Faulkner could sense the importance at the core of the myths – his identity was formed and maintained by the traditional/historical South, and to debunk those myths was to saw away the branch upon which he sat. Faulkner could not escape his locality, but now, he could not fit comfortably in it either.

These myths not only defined Faulkner, they also predicted his position to and formulation of *myths of race*.

III

"The blacks were but living witnesses, not a responsible party,

to the original sin of the South”

-Edouard Glissant
(*Faulkner Mississippi* pg.58)

Even Faulkner's family resisted his views on segregation (see the biography his brother John Faulkner wrote entitled *My Brother Bill*). The burden of racial hatred which Faulkner so poignantly felt and saw generated very untraditional *myths of race* than were generally accepted in the South. As I have already documented, it was on issues of race that Faulkner most vehemently differed from the South and race was most instrumental in sullyng his nostalgic glance backwards. Although this is a topic which has been covered in many critical works on Faulkner, some of the more important distinctions can be tracked into Faulkner's mind, important features of which we have been looking at.

Faulkner first and foremost established the importance of Southern independence when it came to issues of race. Like most Southerners, he distrusted outside influences, especially in politics and the implementation of laws, and he continuously argued the necessity for the white Southerner to deal with the racial problem on his own:

[Faulkner] believes that segregation is going; but if relief comes from the South, the Negro will be grateful, whereas if it derives from the outside by compulsion, he will be 'the winner against opposition.' He adds: 'And no tyrant is more ruthless than he who was only yesterday the oppressed, the slave.' (Karl 936)

Flashing his Jeffersonian individuality and his Southern patriotism, along with a resistance to the outsider, Faulkner indicated how even in the South, with the Southern

characteristics and distinctions, the racial problem could be solved by the benign parts of the Old Southern myth. Yet, how that change was to be brought about, how the white Southerner was to come to terms with the black population in America were complex questions. Faulkner suggested education as a starting point towards equality. Notice that I have said equality, for this is an important distinction to maintain: Faulkner believed in equality, not integration:

I think that equality for the Negro will come. I think if the Negro has political equality to vote, if he has economic equality, then he won't want to mix with white folks any more than white folks want to mix with him, because I can't imagine any Negro after the – his experience with white folks wanting to be that close to them. (Faulkner 148)

Again and again, Faulkner made this distinction in regards to race, showing how powerful his cultural heritage really was. Integration was not the issue for Faulkner; he could not conceive that the Negro would even *want* to mix with the white any more than the white man might wish to mix with the Negro. Faulkner maintained that the important issue when dealing with the question of race-relations in the South was equality. And although it is true that Faulkner abhorred slavery, as he says of his character Ike McCaslin:

I think that he [Ike] saw, as everybody that thinks, that a condition like that [slavery] is intolerable, not so much intolerable to man's sense of justice, but maybe intolerable to the condition, that any country has reached the point where if it is to endure, it must have no inner conflicts based on a wrong, a basic human wrong, (Faulkner 46)

it is also true that Faulkner's stance on equality is still at the root very Southern. In his speech at the University of Virginia, Faulkner suggested that the Negro would have to earn his right to have equality: "He must learn to cease forever more thinking like a Negro and acting like a Negro" (Faulkner 211). What this entails is learning from the white Southerner: "the hard things – self-restraint, honesty, dependability, purity" (Faulkner 211), all traits which he should exhibit consistently, without fault. The Negro, Faulkner goes on to say, must be better than the best white man. It fell to the white Southerner to teach the Negro how to become a respectable citizen. He thought the Negro should 'earn' the right to equality – "to teach the people of your race to *earn* the right to equality, and to show the white people that they are and will be responsible and keep it" (Karl 1009). In his time, in his place, these were some very progressive and, not to mention brave, assertions.

For Faulkner the racial problem was the weakest link in his country's future. Not only did Faulkner feel strongly about the inhumanity and degradation which the American Negro suffered, he was also painfully aware of the implications which slavery had on the future of the United States and of the South especially. When further pressed on the racial issue, he argued that the condition of the American Negro was "an outrageous, an anomalous condition that simply cannot continue. That no nation can endure with seventeen million second-class citizens in it nowadays" (Faulkner 162). In saying this, Faulkner was further endorsing his belief in equality. Equality for the Negro meant making him a responsible and an active participant in the state and country. Equality would elevate the social status of the Negro and provide the country with a more firm and fully integrated society.

Contradictions came up when Faulkner argued that the races were being bleached out and that a solution to the racial dilemma could be brought about through a process of racial mixing. As opposed to having several different races, Faulkner seemed at times to advocate one large race bred and integrated to such a degree that the differences would no longer be apparent: appearing “on the edge of suggesting that the resolution of the South’s (and the nation’s) racial dilemma was in a single race, one that would transcend black and white by becoming black-and-white” (Karl 558). Faulkner encountered difficulties when he tried to organize and argue his personal positions on the South’s racial issues; any generalized consistent summary of his stance was impossible, proving again how difficult a thing it is to fight entrenched traditions. On one matter Faulkner never contradicted himself: the Negro population, black culture that would endure over time – “the blacks are destined to inherit the earth, after the red man and the white have failed to destroy it” (Dabney 16). After the suffering and constant deprivation and humiliation, the Negro had been conditioned to endure great burdens and harsh conditions. The endurance of the American Negro was all around him: a stoic and resigned demeanor spoke to Faulkner of how much humanity could endure in the face of a hostile vindictive world. Endurance, fortitude, honor, and courage were the most heroic and valued human aspects of Faulkner’s universe; the American Negro had them all:

For his sense of man’s survival, he clearly had the Southern Negro as his model. As we see Faulkner position himself in race relations in Mississippi and the South, for him the ability to prevail and endure belongs to the Negro – and in his Nobel speech, the Negro is at the center of his mind, at the center of the universe. (Karl 815)

Because Faulkner had a romanticized conception of the Negro, the themes of endurance and fortitude he praised them for can be labeled as a *mythology of race*. Faulkner's experiences with Mammy Callie early on in his life colored his conceptualization of the Negro race and how he imagined them as characters:

Did this mean that the Negro, represented by the Mammy, was to be revered because she/he stood and served? There was in Faulkner's reverence for this woman an emblem of those traditional relationships unchanged by the Civil War. While Mammy was not a slave and was free to go, she undertook the slave woman's role in the family [...] all of this fixed a certain kind of Negro role in Faulkner's memory and imagination.
(Karl 634)

This is an astute and important observation. His romantic vision of the Negro illustrates again how surrounded, how immersed in the racial assumptions of the South Faulkner was. In the South, the character and condition of the Negro was, for them, a fact of nature and therefore an unquestioned given.

In his life and his writing the past issues of slavery and the present racial dilemma was a source of angst for him. He attributed the Southern burden, all that was cursed, illegitimate and morally corrupt in the South to the 'peculiar' institution of slavery. If he told organizations like the NAACP to take their time, to be patient and allow change to occur slowly, he was simply reflecting the knowledge of how unacceptable and overwhelming this change would be for Southerners like himself, revealing in this warning "how powerful the pull of custom and history are; so powerful that Faulkner has become

one of the people whom Faulkner, with all his literary and public rhetoric, has been unable to convince” (Karl 1010).

If the *mythologies of race* connected to the American Negro served to plague Faulkner, those surrounding the Indian did not in the same way. He could lock his myth-Indian into two clear roles: (1) they expressed the values and morals Faulkner found important in nature, and (2) they were emblematic of the first people to sell the land and begin a Genesis of corruption. Unlike the black society around him, Faulkner knew very little about Indians actually or historically, as a result he was more free to mythologize and romanticize: “‘With no experience to draw upon and with his aversion to research,’ Howell writes, ‘Faulkner makes no pretension to accuracy in his treatment of Indian life’” (Dabney 12). They were not the noble savages or brutes of mainstream literature or Hollywood movies; in fact in dealing with the Indians of the South “[Faulkner] both elaborates and undercuts the American romance of the Indian” (Dabney 38). The Indians were based upon the moral and ethical mores of an Emersonian connection to nature:

The Indian background supports the legend of the big woods and the great hunters who are the last of their kind, the chivalry of a society cursed by slavery and the violation of the land. Faulkner treats the passing of the southern frontier as the loss of the new world Eden. (Dabney 135)

Faulkner reinforced his love of the wilderness, the frontier, and nature by mythologizing the Indians. They were the keepers of the earth before the white man came and summarily dispossessed them, and so they were also “the first dispossessed and ravaged people of the South” (Dabney 21). This account speaks to Faulkner’s continual search into Southern history for a point of Genesis – that point when the burden first appeared.

Initially, one is inclined to see Faulkner as attributing the South's lack of legitimacy to the institution of slavery, but in fact, going farther back than that, Faulkner points out that the owning of land, the mere presence of the white man and his influence on the Indians was a more likely starting point which ran parallel to slavery. It ran parallel because the institution of slavery affected the Indians as well.

Initially "The Indian theme is part of the 'great prose hymn to nature,' as Cleanth Brooks calls it" (Dabney 152), gave Faulkner a means to return to the great wilderness where beginnings could be established and an "innocence hungered for" (Dabney 73) satisfied. Faulkner uses his Indians to investigate an Eden which preceded Southern white culture, when the wilderness was owned by no man, the Indian was uncorrupted, and nature was an undisturbed source of the spiritual.

Faulkner's Indian theme was an imaginative exercise in tracing the events which lead up to the Southern failure: "I think the ghost of that ravishment lingers in the land, that the land is inimical to the white man because of the unjust way in which it was taken from Ikkemotubbe and his people" (Faulkner 43). Moreover, the influence which the white man had on the Indian – slavery and capitalism – implicated the white Southerner even more:

It demonstrates Indians utterly corrupted by slave owning. They are slothful, lazy, fat, declining in their own way as the Sartoris tribe declines in it. The founder of the clan, Doom, fathers a declining race, ending with Mocketubbe, who is maybe an inch over five feet tall and weighs 250 pounds. The Indians have lost their traditional skills, and now, like

planters, they sit around while slaves work for them and become their capital. (Karl 398)

This is a vanishing world which Faulkner begins to both understand and engage. The only way to escape Southern society was to flee into the quickly receding wilderness, to try and grasp the last remaining vestiges of the vanished beginnings. This is why Sam Fathers begs to go into the wilderness. In going back there, living there full time, Sam Fathers in effect recaptures his freedom from slavery. Sam Fathers is also the “preserver of the tradition the tribe abandoned for the white man’s ways” (Dabney 15), and as such is a character who represents the importance Faulkner assigned to the Indian culture before the South. As the Indians decay, as the white man introduces capitalism, slavery and sloth, the plantation south began to grow and flourish on a parallel line. Faulkner’s fear and hatred of slavery and of destroying the land are traced back to the first instances of these heinous crimes in the Indian cultures. Eden and “the quasi-noble savage vanishes under the weight of slavery. In like manner the wilderness was lost, and southern society emerged” (Dabney 71).

Chapter Three: Faulkner’s Triangulation of Damnation

“No, there had been no shot. That sound was merely the sharp and final clap-to

*of a door between us and all that was, all that might have been –
a retroactive severance of the stream of event:
a forever crystallized instant” (AB 158).*

Faulkner's Genesis is represented by a triangle; a primary and interconnected set of themes which can be biblically translated as the eating of the forbidden fruit or the murder of Abel by Cain. This triangle discovers the beginning as well as the peculiar source of Southern history as encountered by Faulkner's imagination and is best represented by three terms: Land – Indians –Slavery.

Ikkemotubbe (Doom) is the instigator, through the sale of land, of the triangle and the Southern curse (as Dabney points out, the significance of the name Doom, altered from the French Du Homme, should not be lost on the reader). By selling the land, Ikkemotubbe compromises and negates the innocence and harmony of the wilderness. Isaac McCaslin later maintains that: ““I can't repudiate [the land]. It was never mine to repudiate [...] because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing”” (GDM 256-257). The sale of land is an illegitimate act which begins the grander and more tragic illegitimacy of the entire South.

On the instant of sale, the harmony between man and nature so poignantly portrayed in Faulkner's short story “The Bear” is disturbed. The land becomes commodity, resource, rape-able. This sets into motion the ripple effect of Faulkner's Genesis – ripples which can be discovered ad infinitum throughout his works. It is not surprising that a man self-named Doom separates the Southerner from the land forever by the mere act of selling it; nor is it surprising, then, that the man who acquired “that

hundred miles of land [...] he took from a tribe of ignorant Indians” (AB 16) is Thomas Sutpen because the sale of land and the fall from innocence which it sets into motion is mirrored in Sutpen’s own life and fall from innocence. Being told to go around to the back of the plantation house begins Sutpen’s progression toward his fall from childhood innocence into his resulting obsession. Like the sale of land, the concepts of capitalism and opportunism, of class distinction and the caste system are engraved into the young boy’s mind and these spur him on to the realization that he too must attain commodity and class before he is allowed to walk through the front door. Also like the selling of land, it is as if on an instant, one moment frozen in time and mythologized, literally invested with meaning and consequence, the moment when the Negro manservant tells the young cracker white to go around back, the minute Doom sells the land, the minute the shot is fired by Henry Sutpen, the inevitable illegitimacy and damnation of the South is set into motion. Sutpen’s innocence, his unequivocal belief in harmony is distorted swiftly and irrevocably. Imagine a boy who:

had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them; he did not even imagine then that there was any such way to live or want to live, or that there existed all the objects to be wanted which there were, or that the ones who owned the objects not only could look down on the ones that didn’t, but could be supported in the down-looking not only by the others who owned objects too but by the very ones that were looked down on that didn’t own objects and knew

they never would. Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'This is mine' was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to take and keep, and only that crazy man would go to the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for power and whiskey. So he didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own. (AB 221)

Once the harsh realities of the plantation South are revealed to Sutpen through this moment frozen in time, (the pebble into the pond), the natural progression is his unshakable and unwavering resolve to inherit the tradition of ownership and exploitation:

he knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life and he could not decide what it was because of that innocence which he had just discovered he had, which (the innocence, not the man, the tradition) he would have to compete with. (AB 234)

To resolve himself into collecting the stuff of commodity and attaining the status of class, Sutpen falls out of his happy state of ignorance and into the role of the cursed. Having decided that "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (AB 238), the rest of Sutpen's life (and the damning effects of his life on his

family) is set into motion. Not only does the boy realize, and the man epitomize, the capitalist system which the plantation South embraced, but Sutpen also comes to perceive the land as commodity along with the rifle and the slaves. Human beings and land (even nature) are now possible acquisitions, forcing them to lose their meaning; the natural harmony is thrust out of joint by the need to amass land and slaves in the name of success and position.

The land's role in Faulkner's triangle far exceeds the tragedy of simple ownership, however. The land was sold and owned, but not at that instant conquered. Human dominance and imposed will on nature (seen in such simple acts as the building of fences and the establishment of property lines, and in such exploitive acts as the clear cutting forests and forcing nature to conform to the logic of the human mind) is a further perversion and contortion of the landscape of the South. Faulkner's love of the wilderness, his frequent 'escapes' into the hunt and the Big Woods are represented in his novels and short stories as follows: "as though the time and space of the hunt are a suspension of human history, a refusal of the inevitable cascade of time over generations" (Glissant 137). Disregarding Faulkner's own love of the wilderness and hunting, within the frame of his fiction those characters that frequently inhabit, if only for a short period of time during the Hunt, the wilderness, find there a relief from the burden of Southern history. In this we see the primal myth in its beginning, in its unsullied state before ownership and sale. The Bear Old Ben, the old trout in *The Sound and the Fury* and in many ways Sam Fathers are all outside of time, timeless, even progenies of their own past and their own traditions. This is an understandable conceit to maintain in Faulkner's fiction since to be in the as yet unsullied wilderness enables a more noble, less corrupted

character to form outside of the effects of the Faulknerian Triangle. For these three characters, the concept of inheritance does not exist, while for Quentin and Ike repudiation of such inheritance is impossible. Hence the wilderness and the hunt represent “a time of unanimity, of indivisible nature, and a time of origins, that is, before property, slavery, and profit, a time that hunters ritually try to revive at a certain season each year” (Glissant 46).

Moreover, to understand the value attributed to the wilderness and the land within this imaginative space one must recognize that the hunt and the wilderness also represent a time of invested meaning, a time when, as Faulkner himself labeled them, ‘the old verities’ still had meaning and still stood for something. Of course Faulkner’s connection to the Southern Agrarians is discernable here. Faulkner as narrator maintains: “perhaps even a city-bred man, let alone a child, could not have understood it; perhaps only a country-bred one could comprehend loving the life he spills” (GDM 181). The romanticism of the country-bred, the very postulation that moral and traditional standards and codes derive from an agrarian way of life all point to similarities between Faulkner and the Agrarians. This becomes enhanced when considering the inclusion of (or perhaps more aptly the demonizing of) the city.

Although Faulkner unmistakably privileges a rural way of life and the wilderness, he shies away from making the same mistake of nostalgia that the Southern Agrarians are traditionally held to have made (see Karl, Conkin and Karanikas). From his more realistic perspective, Faulkner encounters the dissolution of the wilderness as an inevitability. Throughout the story “The Bear” Ike does not, as we might have expected him to, and as we as readers do, lament that fact:

So he should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn't know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn't know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too. (GDM 226)

This is, of course, an extension on the theme of 'the old verities.' The pride mixed with a humble acquiescence to the fatality of the receding woods, the concept of being worthy, the strength not to grieve: these are all the enduring aspects of Faulkner's most divine characters. The codes of the hunt and the supplication of the hunted to its fate as the natural order of the land are the distinctions and characteristics of a time before the beginning of the South, time before Doom and a time before young Sutpen went to that front door only to be turned away in scorn. Here are the distinctions of Faulkner's mythic primal space, the top of the triangle before the impetus and intervention of the tragic.

And after the land was sold and the deeds had names upon them, then the fences began to be put up, the trees cleared, and the harmony disturbed. The will of man to impose his own order on nature, in light of what the wilderness represents, passes mere exploitation in Faulkner's works and becomes rape. This exploitation is the natural progression of the tragic Genesis as can be seen in the fate of Old Ben: the creature out of time and yet seemingly representing all time before the fall, just as Sam Fathers represents his own battleground and his own vanquishing. The Bear "out of an old dead

time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life which the little puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorrence and fear, like pygmies about the ankles of a drowning elephant” (GDM 193). And again, “that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness” (GDM 193). Indicated in these passages is not only the disconcertedness with which Faulkner and Ike see the dissolution of the wilderness, but also the concept that nature (such a large and transcendental source of morals and meaning) is being destroyed by man (so small, insignificant and minute); in this subversion of power alone tragedy resounds. This is a gradual exploitation, a slow and unflagging destruction of nature and the land.

Because “Men [...] determine to conquer nature” (Ransom 7), because progress is industrialization and advancement is technological, the meaningful resonance in nature are drowned out by the hacking of men and their machines. This is a theme to be likewise found in Southern Agrarianism, it reads straight out of their manifesto, as does the character of Jason Compson. Jason Compson is one who, the more Northern he becomes, the more intent he becomes on getting out of the small town and away from the Agrarian (remember that Jason makes his first steps towards opulence by selling off the ‘old Compson place’ and so he too sells the land but not for the education of a son or the marriage of a daughter as his father had) the more corrupt he becomes. In fact, the final act of selling the Compson residence and his lonely yet comfortable life as portrayed in the “Compson Appendix” are repellent in light of so much tragedy at the close of *The Sound and the Fury*.

What remains for the South after having exploited the land and nature? In George Grant's essay "In Defense of North America," the Greek notion of autochthony is put forward as one of the failed building blocks of North American settlement. Autochthony translates as the connection between man and nature, a very important connection if one agrees with the Romantics or Transcendentalists, as Faulkner most certainly did. This connection, the Southern desire for the autochthonous, becomes weaker and weaker as the ripples from Doom move outward in time and history. The land of the South itself becomes cursed. The crop it yields, the generations it feeds, the soil itself are damned. Charles Mallison Jr. understands this in *Intruder in the Dust*:

the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man, not just with a man's passions and aspirations and beliefs but the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race and even more. (INT 116)

Selling the land was, in effect, selling the future of the South. Having made tenuous the connection (Grant's Autochthony) he hoped to have with nature, the Southerner doomed and cursed himself into the inevitable history of his geography as we have known it to be. The ripples of these acts are violent indeed; as Ike seems prophet-like to say: "The woods and fields he ravages and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment" (GDM 349). As such, the land takes on a personified form. When crimes are enacted against it, like a vengeful human, it responds, as seen in *The Unvanquished* where Uncle Buck and Buddy:

Believed that land did not belong to people but that people belonged to land and that the earth would permit them to live on and out of it and use it only so long as they behaved and that if they did not behave right, it would shake them off just like a dog getting rid of fleas. (UNVAN 55-56).

The land becomes inimical and cursed, and as such it becomes impossible to build a lasting foundation upon a land which resists its people as illegitimate. This is the first act of Southern Genesis.

As I have already suggested, the Indians represented for Faulkner an integral part of nature and the dominant people of the primal myth. The theme of Indians throughout his works, although not as extensive as his thematic use of blacks, comes to represent a microcosmic view of the macrocosmic corruption which the settlers of North America began in the first stages of the South. Before the white man came, the Indian was noble, in connection to and in harmony with nature which surrounded him in abundance. For Faulkner, the Indian ~~race~~ (the Choctaw) was an easily romanticized people whom he could imaginatively construct to represent, through the stories "Red Leaves," "Lo," and "A Justice," the second point of the Faulknerian Triangle.

From the moment that the Indians took slaves in trade with the white man they began their descent from innocence. They become lazy, fat, they lose their connection with the land and in some cases (red shoes, slaves, women and steam boats in particular) they succumb to the principles of commodity. In taking up their story, Faulkner uses the Indians to illustrate the eventual conclusion of the Southern Genesis through an advanced conclusion of the ripple effect. Initially the Indians represent connectedness with nature, and their swift corruption mirrors the slower and more exacting one of the South.

Without being overtly didactic, Faulkner's Indians are representatives of a race destroyed by the consequences and victimized by the punishment which they helped to tragically set into motion.

At the head of the Indian people is Doom. To compare the Ikkemotubbe of "A Courtship" with the Ikkemotubbe of "Lo" is an exercise in antithesis. In "A Courtship" Ikkemotubbe is honorable, fair to a fault, capable of love, compassionate, and lacking the drive and will of aspiration for anything but a woman. In "Lo" Ikkemotubbe returns from New Orleans renamed as Doom with a box of puppies and some golden powder with which he will first warn and eventually kill any who stand in his way of becoming 'The Man'. His acquisition of the steam boat shows that he will, like Sutpen does, accept the rules of capitalism and industrialization. In fact, the connection between Jason Compson in regards to his hatred of the small town mentality and traditions, his opportunism, his aspiration for monetary affluence and even his need and indomitable will for respect and power, his general unconcern with deeper meaning or nature or community and Ikkemotubbe, after he returns from the city of New Orleans are staggering and tend to show again Faulkner's Agrarian dislike for large cities. Doom comes back very much altered, very much the bearer of tragedy. Edouard Glissant argues in his book *Faulkner Mississippi* that Faulkner avoids the use of direct cause and effect, opting to illustrate the effect alone by deferral. However, it is hard to ignore the ripple of Faulkner's Genesis as it moves from Doom onto Sutpen, from Sutpen onto Quentin, and continues to move, we get the sense, to eventually catch up to the South, and destroy it – much as it did the Indians of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.

The final point of the Genesis triangle is represented by slavery. As I have already indicated, once the Indians began their participation in the buying and trading of slaves their race became fat, lazy, bereft of their honor and their previous noble position. If the Indians stand as a warning (perhaps not so much a warning as an experiment of the imagination, a hypothesis of where the white South must eventually go – must in essence eventually disappear in fact) then the repercussions of slavery in the white culture seems to indicate a like source of crime and therefore another act by the white South which will demand retribution and reconciliation. It is impossible to say that the land was the beginning and that with the acquisition of land the White South found the need for slavery because, in reality, they arrived in the primal South with slaves already in tow. This triangulation of damnation is positioned as an inevitability, almost a foregone conclusion of the circumstances by which the settlement of the South was first planned. Slavery functions initially within the triangle to represent the source of familial illegitimacy in the South.

Southern illegitimacy stretches beyond the land and the ownership of slaves and through its shifting into the family the permeating nature of the Southern damnation can be detected. Illegitimacy through incest, rape and miscegenation crept into the white families of the South. Throughout Faulkner's novels these three abominations rear their ugly heads again and again and are sources of tragedy. Sutpen's urgency and desire to establish a family line and a foundation in the South through a male heir of pure blood also becomes a tale of illegitimacy. Sutpen leaves his wife in New Orleans after he finds that she has a minute fraction of black blood in her: enter miscegenation. The resulting offspring of that relationship is Charles Bon, who then courts Sutpen's daughter: enter

incest (and this is a tame version of incest for Faulkner's works). The Negro slaves brought out to Sutpen's Hundred are mostly men, but Sutpen still begets a child upon one of the few female slaves amongst them. He also, later in his life, begets yet another child upon the granddaughter of Wash Jones whom, since the child is female, he repudiated. Sutpen's tale, fueled by his desire to establish a family line and a male heir, is composed almost entirely of illegitimacy. These are the foundations, based on crime, rape, miscegenation and incest, rotten to the core, which provoke the Fates and taints the Sutpen bloodline: "the current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to, black and white both" (AB 269).

Thematically, tainted blood is just as much a source of damnation as man's division from nature. Notice Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*: "The man apparently hunting out situations in order to flaunt and fling the ape-like body of his charcoal companion in the faces of all and any who would retaliate" (AB 206). And then compare the similar result of such tainted blood and miscegenation found in Joe Christmas of *Light in August*: hating himself but never really knowing it; learning to live as both white and black; daring both white and black to insist his illegitimacy to either race; violently striking hating the blood within him almost as if by violence he might expiate the one fraction of blood which had tainted the rest, either the white or the black, just so that he might be one or the other and know then; both men "who rebel against [themselves]" (Glissant 43) the victims of a corruption of blood and both the results of illegitimacy. Their violence against themselves is a heightened mirror of the violence the entire South has towards them. They are symbols and reminders to the people of the

South of the corruption in their own blood, of the foundations that Southern communities and families are built upon.

Yet, such illegitimacy looks so different in the blood of Sam Fathers. Having escaped the burden of history, Sam Fathers comes to represent the composite of the issues surrounding slavery, miscegenation and the Indians: "He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seethless, unrumored in the outside air" (GDM 104). In *Go Down, Moses* Sam Fathers and the Bear are both ancestorless, and this is a highly valuable thing in light of the dilemma faced by Christmas and Charles; this would prove valuable even for Quentin and Ike could they too escape the corruption of tainted blood and tragic bloodlines. Instead, Sam Fathers embraces both bloodlines and even the tale of his miscegenation (as he relates it in "Lo.") Sam Fathers inexplicably represents both the vastness of the crime which created him and the endurance and acceptance by which he escapes the repercussions of it.

There is still, however, such poignancy in *Go Down Moses* regarding this theme of tainted blood and illegitimacy in the South when Isaac goes through the account books of his Old Carothers. Through these accounts he learns of the incest, the rape and the miscegenation which were all committed in the same single act, as if the one person in the whole of the South Old Carothers could and should have avoided sexually was the one he seemed intent upon picking, unconcerned with the consequences. Isaac's first reaction is disbelief: "*His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him*" (GDM

270), but he knows the truth beneath his rejection, the undeniable and damning proof of the crime. This blood, then, is likewise tainted: "old Carothers' doomed and fatal blood" (GDM 293).

How then to tie this continual familial illegitimacy back into the triangle? It is because the institution of slavery provided the opportunity for rape and miscegenation. The commodification of human beings made them vessels, playthings for some, and the rape and incest which resulted were realities of the South and of slavery. Slavery provided the appropriate moral position and excuse for lavishness in lust. Yet how strange and contradictory this is: notice where the source of Henry Sutpen's concern really lies when he defies Charles Bon and his sister's marriage: "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear*" (AB 356). The power of racial hatred supercedes the power of incest, the common and irreconcilable crime in most Greek tragedies. How contradictory that Sutpen would forsake his first wife when he learns that she has some black blood, but would still beget a child with one of his black slaves. Is it any wonder that the crimes of illegitimacy resulted in the subsequent damnation of the South; any wonder that the foundations of the South were doomed to failure and damned to be the victims to the hand of retribution from the outset when so much retribution is required and so much contradiction is enacted?

The question of race and slavery is again addressed in *Intruder in the Dust* but from a different point of view than illegitimacy. In this novel, acts of retribution and expiation, even repudiation are not viable options. Here the dominant theme in regards to slavery is shame. Charles Mallison Jr., in considering the history of racial degradation,

returns to the theme of cursed land, of geography as a living witness personified and vigilant, capturing and preserving the crimes of the South:

This land was a desert and a witness, this empty road its postulate (it would be some time yet before he would realize how far he had come: a provincial Mississippian, a child who when the sun set this same day had appeared to be – and even himself believed, provided he had thought about it at all – still a swaddled unwitting infant in the long tradition of his native land – or for that matter a witless fetus itself struggling – if he was aware that there had been any throes – blind and insentient and not even yet awaked in the simple painless convulsion of emergence) of the deliberate turning as if with one back of the whole dark people on which the very economy of the land itself was founded, not in heat or anger nor even regret but in one irremediable invincible inflexible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame. (INT 75)

Corruption is still present here. The land itself corrupted and witness, the South corrupted by its own provincial points of view, its own traditional tenacity. Here, though, is an attempt to address what Glissant terms “the deferral of the South’s damnation” (Glissant 15). In accepting the shame, Charles accepts the guilt. When his Uncle Gavin tells him to be ashamed but not to stop, to never stop, there is a move towards reconciliation. In shouldering the shame of the past, Charles begins a move towards not expiation but acknowledgment. Unfortunately for the South, Charles is one of the few who can accept this shame:

not just Lucas but *Lucas: Sambo* since what sets a man writhing sleepless in bed at night is not having injured his fellow so much as having been wrong: the mere injury (if he cannot justify it with what he calls logic) he can efface by destroying the victim and the witnesses but the mistake is his and that is one of his cats which he always prefers to choke to death with butter. So Lucas will get his tobacco. (INT 152)

By giving Lucas his tobacco, the White South preserves their right to call him a 'nigger,' they preserve their status above him as superior, and so they are not forced the bitter taste of admitting that they were wrong. In this isolated case of Lucas' unjust incarceration is tied up the whole injustice of the South upon the black race. In deferring the damnation which they rightly deserve, the South also defers the reconciliation of the curse.

One of the most obvious manifestations of the 'Southern deferral' was the Civil War. As Shelby Foote points out in his interview for the Ken Burns PBS special on the Civil War, if a Northern soldier in the South were to ask a Southerner why was fighting the war the response would most likely be 'Because you're here.' In war, the highest moral ground must be appropriated by both sides in an effort to justify so much death. The South was fighting for its economic system, its way of life – tragically a way of life and an economic system based entirely upon slavery. Throughout the Civil War both sides, North and South, changed their mandates, suggesting again the inability, or at the very least reluctance, of the South to accept that they fought for a basic human wrong, one which they themselves could not turn a blind eye to, and for the North to either embrace or deny that they fought for the freedom of the black race. Yet both the North and the South did, in many ways, turn blind eyes to the realities of the Civil War. The

romantic myth-making of Hightower in *Light in August* and the clear privileging and honoring of the Confederate soldier and generals (even Sutpen despite his villainy and tragic flaws) are indications of how even Faulkner deferred the damnation and took the whiff of slavery out of the war. The Southern Agrarians took the whiff right out of Southern culture in their nostalgic positioning. Here, then, is an extension of what Charles Mallison Jr. fights against: To accept that they lost the war is inevitable (although the South still maintains that it was unfair because the North had more resources and more men), but to accept that they were wrong is too complete a defeat. Even in Reconstruction the resistance to the Northern civil laws was complete. What does this all mean to the Genesis of the South, a South which, as I have already suggested, started historically after the Civil War?

The tragic effect, the role which the Civil War plays in the triangle of the Southern damnation is that it not only represents the inability of the South to accept and embrace the shame of slavery, but in that resistance they defy reconciliation:

The gap left open in Faulkner's work is that for him the sacrifice that was the Civil War has already taken place. The defeat is complete, yet the equilibrium has not been restored. What war is this that presents every aspect of epic struggle, yet has no redemptive effect? (Glissant 97)

The absence of redemption and reconciliation is a direct result of the South's unwillingness to accept their defeat. The Agrarians argue that

The North defeated the South in war, crushed and humiliated it in peace, and waged against it a war of intellectual and spiritual conquest. In this conquest the North fixed upon the South the stigma of war guilt, of slave

guilt, of treason, and thereby shook the faith of its people in their way of living and in their philosophy of life. (Owsley 66)

But this is simply a direct example of the defiance of the South to acknowledge that the guilt very likely was theirs altogether. It seems that Gavin Stevens' philosophy on the war is one of the only avenues by which reconciliation can be achieved: "I only say that the injustice is ours, the South's. We must expiate and abolish it ourselves, alone and without help nor even (with thanks) advice" (INT 156). He accepts the guilt but maintains that the burden upon the South must be dealt with by the South alone. *Intruder in the Dust*, then, didactically suggests one way in which to escape the corruption and damnation of the South.

But *Intruder in the Dust* also points to the enduring problem of the conceptualization of the black in the South. To finalize this last aspect of the triangle, it is important to consider the tradition of slavery and racism in the South as an institution for preserving racial inequality. Notice how even the smell of the blacks strikes Charles as indicative of secondhand citizenry:

perhaps that smell were really not the odor of a race nor even actually of poverty but perhaps of a condition: an idea: a belief: an acceptance, a passive acceptance by them themselves of the idea that being Negroes they were not supposed to have facilities to wash properly or often or even to wash or bathe often even without the facilities to do it with; that in fact it was a little to be preferred that they did not. (INT 11)

This conceit is echoed throughout the Faulknerian canon: Slavery as a condition, a way of being which is imposed by tradition upon the race and which the race buys into almost because within the Southern culture it has become, much like tainted blood, an inherited and accepted discourse. Notice also the use of the word 'rich' in the next passage: "He had smelled it forever, he would smell it always; it was a part of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner" (INT 11). It seems strange that Faulkner would use the word rich when writing of the condition and even smell of slavery in the South. Inescapable as the past certainly is, that inescapability is the reality of this triangle, an inescapability which only Sam Fathers, Old Ben and the old Trout can achieve as ancestorless. But how and why 'rich?' Here is the love of heritage, the need to embrace a culture not despite its flaws but because of them. This passage also sets the stage dramatically for Charles' eventual epiphanic moment:

he now recognized the enormity of what he had blindly meddled with [...]
 (who now simply because it seemed to him now that he was responsible
 for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and
 shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he
 himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it. (INT 106)

What Charles had blindly meddled with was the tradition of the South. In trying to save a Black man from lynching, especially when that Black man is widely believed to be the murderer of a white man, Charles goes against the inherited hegemony of Southern culture. In this revelation Charles again recognizes the guilt and shame which the South must bear. This strain is one which Quentin cannot bear like Charles does. As such, this moment represents a legitimization crisis, a moment of revelation where the entire tradition

and culture one has been blindly accepting turns out to be invalid and corrupt. Such a legitimization crisis is necessary for the entire South if it ever hopes to escape the ripple effect of this triangle.

What we see throughout Faulkner, then, is an imaginative application of this triangle on the Southern people and community. Yoknapatawpha is cursed and burdened under this weight throughout all of Faulkner's works. What we learn is not only that "what is founded on slavery and oppression cannot last" (Glissant 95), but also we are made witness: "we witness the playing out of slavery and its repercussions" (Glissant 95). We do not witness slavery alone but the entire triangulation and its repercussions, the cause and terrible effect of this Genesis.

II

"And when you get settled down, all of you spend a lot of time
trying to figure out why whoever made everything went and made it."

-Kurt Vonnegut
(*The Sirens of Titan*)

One way in which this triangular predicament is preserved and perpetuated is through tradition. *The Sound and the Fury* is concerned with just such a crisis of tradition in the South while simultaneously indicating in part the duality of the Southern mind. Quentin's tragic flaw is his inability to reconcile the shifting moral ground upon which the South is progressing. Having established after the Civil War a culture and tradition based on 'the old verities' of honor, valor and chivalry, the South unwittingly set

up subsequent generations (especially those of the echo generations) for a great moral and ethical fall. This fall is embodied in Quentin's love for his sister. Having cast her in the mould of the ideal Southern belle, the pedestaled scion of all honor, beauty and purity, Quentin represents in this his dilemma and the dilemma of the Southern traditions. The Romantic aspect of the Old South is easy to believe in, as the Agrarians did, but that romanticism is lost in the past and therefore impossible to see unless in theory and nostalgic memory – it never works in practice. The powerful effects of 'present' observation battle the powerful effects of 'past' memory. The rigidity with which the South sought to maintain its (flawed) foundation corresponds to the frigid stubbornness Quentin brings to his own and his sister's virginity: "Quentin III. 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 maiden-head as a minute replica of all the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal" (SF 411).

Time also plays a major role in this novel, but this theme can be traced back to the lost traditions of honor and purity which give life meaning for Quentin for, just as Robert Browning's apostrophic characters in *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover* prove, the only way to preserve immaculate love or incorruptible virginity is through death, because death is a means of escaping time and thereby escaping the inevitable mark of life. As Quentin strives to stamp out time (notice the use of shadows and how often Quentin is standing upon his: both a constant reminder, as the sun moves and casts shadows in different directions at different times, that he cannot ignore the progression of time, but also an indication that he is trying to outrun time, to stand upon his own shadow which no

longer advances before him nor follows behind him) he shows the felt necessity of maintaining his sister's honor and by extension his own: "and I it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to free us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been" (SF 220). In taking her out of the world, Quentin makes honor a viable possibility once more, and hence makes life meaningful again according to the old traditional verities.

What seems to haunt Quentin is the diminishing quality of the honor code he subscribes to. When he goes to meet Dalton on the bridge, in effect to exact revenge and attempt to preserve his sister's honor, Dalton Ames tries to explain to him the world as it has become: "a young man gets these ideas and I'm all for them does him good while he's in school forms his character good for tradition the school but when he gets out into the world he'll have to get his the best way he can because he'll find that everybody else is doing the same thing" (SF 136). The world is inimical to the old codes of honor. Quentin is defeated by time and progress, defeated out of tradition and therefore, tragically for him, meaning. This is a sudden legitimacy crisis which involves the destruction of everything he held to be important in the world. As such, Quentin moves from: "Father and I protect women from one another from themselves" (SF 119) to:

I knew if I tried too hard to stop I'd be crying and I thought about how I'd thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldn't be anything and if it wasn't anything, what was I. (SF 183)

To question “what was I?” becomes the tragic motto of Quentin’s now meaningless life. Having taken up the traditions and bought into them absolutely and unequivocally, Quentin has made himself a victim of the romantic and the nostalgic. He has inherited the duality of the Southern past, the contradiction which it, like virginity, involves.

Because to romanticize and idealize is to inevitably fetishize, the romantic cuts itself, makes itself impossible, and for Quentin to accept this fact is for him to accept that life means nothing at all – hence the *reductio ad absurdum* of the human race which Quentin’s father is always stressing. He says: “But to believe it doesn’t matter and he said, That’s what’s so sad about anything” (SF 96). This is in direct opposition to Quentin because the honor code and the ‘old verities’ are incumbent upon faith. To degrade the human being, the high morality of man and to reduce him to “just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not” (SF 218) is to rob Quentin of the romantic tradition he has based his life upon.

The duality of the Southern mind has such firm root in these traditions of the South. Because Quentin believed in the traditions, he doomed himself to a tragic fall. So Faulkner seems intent on establishing two disparate themes here: One, that Quentin is one of the last to maintain the old high morals of the romantic South and how honorable that is for him and how tragic it is for the rest of those who have surrendered the important moral positions; Two, how scornful the world has become towards those old verities, how tragically Quentin is damning himself by buying into the traditions which are from another time and perhaps not even that, perhaps even that they never really had a chance

to exist at all in the world or in the couch of the illegitimate South. Quentin: honorable and foolish, tragic in accepting the traditions and heroic for not being like Dalton Ames, is nevertheless doomed.

Quentin “cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt like this now” (SF 220) because if he were to accept that fact he would *be* Dalton Ames, he would have already surrendered his morals. This theme is mirrored in *Absalom Absalom!* Henry, described as the provincial Southerner, is corrupted by Charles Bon, the city man. This is another instance where the Agrarian-like hatred of the city is put forth by Faulkner. Charles, “the man for whose sake [Henry] had repudiated not only blood and kin but food and shelter and clothing too, whose clothing and walk and speech he had tried to ape, along with his attitude toward women and his ideas of honor and pride too” (AB 110) who would later be called “the corrupter” acts as Dalton Ames did for Quentin. Both Dalton and Charles teach the provincial characters of Quentin and Henry the ‘way of the world’ and tragically they begin to lose their provincial innocence. This loss of innocence can be compared to Sutpen’s loss of innocence as the moment when the wider world encroaches upon the country life of the Southerner and teaches him the corrupt nature of the world and the South. As Henry tries to imitate Charles, and as Quentin tries to shut out the voice of Dalton (“They’re all bitches”) they are irrevocably being corrupted. What tragedy lies here is not the malignancy of the world but the blind and innocent folly of following traditions. Faulkner laments the loss of the old verities, but he laments just as powerfully the acceptance of romantic traditions (especially traditions which are based on such triangulations of damnation as the South). It is interesting that at one instant Faulkner clearly sees Henry’s actions (his repudiation of his father even

when he knows that he does not lie) as part of the problem and curse. But still it remains the case that these fundamental aspects of his character, those fundamental provincial aspects, are valued very highly by Faulkner in these texts.

The tragedy of Quentin in the passage: “*I was wrong. I admit it. I believed that there were things which still mattered just because they mattered once. But I was wrong. Nothing matters but breath, breathing, to know and to be alive*” (AB 207), is that in losing all hope, Quentin starts to feel that those things which made the Old South good no longer matter; the South he lives in seems to lack the honor which he (the provincial) had always believed in. The foundations of what made the South are proving rotten (falling from ignorance into the knowledge of the triangle), and so the South becomes meaningless, life is explained by simple biology as the source of meaning. By inheriting the traditions of the South, Quentin and Henry “prove again how no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors” (INT 39).

Notwithstanding this, however, we are still left with a moral dilemma, a duality of the South which is not easily reconciled: How does one maintain meaning and honor and all those characteristics which make heroes in the Faulknerian Universe and yet not tragically adhere to the old tainted traditions of the South? How be Not-Quentin and Not-Dalton at the same time? To answer this is to study Bayard Sartoris in *The Unvanquished* and come to an understanding of his final act in the novel. His father being murdered and the responsibility of revenge falling upon Bayard's shoulders, he goes through a series of moral perplexities. Bayard had already carried out the grim institution of Southern retribution for murder (an eye for an eye, the Southern duel was a very real form of justice and a code most religiously followed) when he ‘avenged’ his

grandmother's murder by hunting down and killing Grumby. Yet, Bayard does not feel as though he can carry out this retributive and traditional act of revenge again. The accepted nature of this tradition is found throughout the fourth part of "An Odour of Verbena" (it is a foregone conclusion that Bayard will come home and kill Redmond. Redmond himself sits in his office and waits for Bayard to arrive. It is a stoic acceptance of the inevitability of tradition in the South). They come from Drusilla, from George Wyatt, from everyone who watches Bayard approach Redmond's office. The burden of the Southern tradition is again and again hoisted upon Bayard. But here Faulkner diverts from the traditions and still allows Bayard his honor and courage. Whatever the reason, whether it be because there has already been too much death and killing in the South, whether Grumby haunts Bayard even after so long ago, or whether this is in fact a legitimization crisis on Bayard's part (much as Charles Mallison Jr.'s with slavery). Bayard goes unarmed, allows Redmond to fire at him twice and then watches Redmond get up and leave Jackson forever. By going to the office Bayard proves he is no coward, and yet he proves something more when he refuses to kill Redmond. In altering the traditions of the Old South, Bayard makes a move away from the blind acceptance of the Southern tradition and averts more tragedy (for if he had killed Redmond would not someone come to avenge that death and so begin a new cycle of tragedy in a South already full of death and defeat). Bayard's act is the middle ground between the tradition and the corruption in the South; perhaps many might call it the high ground, but for Faulkner it is simply an act of courage, more courage than killing would take; the kind of courage and yet humility to not forsake the traditions, nor follow them blindly either.

III

“‘My Ivory.’ Oh yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my – ’ everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter [...] Everything belonged to him – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own.”

-Joseph Conrad
(*Heart of Darkness* pg. 81)

I made reference to the duality of the Southern mind in the last section, and this stands some clarification if we as readers are to appreciate the battle which Quentin, Charles, Ike and even Faulkner himself, (“William Faulkner enters silently into a severe schizophrenia” (Glissant 24)), waged during their lives under this triangle curse. This concept of duality is connected directly to the creation of the romantic and mythic traditions of the Old South; this duality is connected directly to Quentin’s assertion (lamentation, supplication?) “I don’t hate it. I don’t” (AB). Having already discussed the myths of the Old South and, in part, the split of Faulkner’s mind, it allows us to move directly into the personification of this Southern duality in imaginative space: Thomas Sutpen.

In Milan Kundera’s *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera, considering Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, suggests that “The whole history of his country suddenly looms up as a single adventure of a single character: a single Faust” (Kundera 55). This same single adventure and single character of a country (the South) is likewise found in its composite form through the story of Sutpen. His tale reflects the Genesis, the traditions, the dualities and paradoxes, and the eventual damnation of Faulkner’s South. Not only is Sutpen a character out of the backwoods who then aspires to aristocracy (like so many of the ‘factual’ Southern aristocrats), he also sets into motion the story of the South as it begins with the sale and buying of land. His innocence corrupted, Sutpen, with

monomaniac drive, determines himself to conquer, control and exploit: the land, his slaves and his own lineage. But the way in which Faulkner writes and reconstructs, through Quentin and Shreve, the story of Sutpen illustrates the duality of the Southern mind. Sutpen's role in the Civil War is heroic, his will to endure a highly respected characteristic in Faulkner's universe, his indomitable will to succeed at all costs against all odds with only courage and wit as his weapons, "*Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*" (AB 46), represents the rags to riches myth of the American Dream in its very distinctive Southern formulation. He is at once villain and hero: the backwoods, rags to riches, determined confederate hero and the monomaniac racist, incestuous and illegitimate character.

Is it any wonder, then, that Kundera's reference to Faust seemed appropriate to me as I read it? Sutpen's pride and will, *his hubris*, are certainly his downfall, and are also the impetus to the curse upon his entire bloodline. One might consider Sutpen's character as a type, a mould into which many of the Southern plantation owners, backwoods farmers really, who generated and dominated the South fit: a single adventure, a single character creating a single foundation upon which the South must stand. Such things as valor and honor and courage and will can be seen all throughout Quentin's conception of Southern tradition; yet, so too can miscegenation, racism, crime, a woeful disregard for the repercussions of one's actions, and an exploitation of land be traced into the same conception. This is the double contradiction of the Southern mind.

How fitting it is, then, that Sutpen's story represents the playing out of Faulkner's Genesis triangle; how fitting that Sutpen himself plays a major role in that Genesis and, inevitably, how fitting that the curse of the South and the ripples of tragedy which spread

out into all of Sutpen's bloodline end in apocalypse. Notice how Faulkner foreshadows the tragedy of Sutpen the man, and therefore the South as a country:

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. (AB 72-73 my italics)

The presence of fate in this representative story, the promise of retribution for the illegitimate roots of Sutpen's bloodline and therefore the South's blood and geography, this stage manager who now exacts and carries through to the end the repercussions of so much displaced water in what was once a rather calm pond – this is what interests us now.

IV

“You saying God give up? Nothing left for us but to pour out our own blood?”

“I’m saying they came in my yard.”

“You punishing Him, ain’t you.”

“Not like He punish me.”

-Toni Morrison
(*Beloved* pg. 179)

Faulkner approaches the tale of the South using this complex triangle, the inheritance of traditions and the loss of moral meaning in life. Having established the Genesis, the consequences of the ripple effect must now be imaginatively engaged. Faulkner approached these repercussions through what might be termed his paganism. Having looked at his Greek conceptions of tragedy and lineage and incest as the roots of damnation, there remain the themes of retribution and the curse of the gods to be

considered. Because Faulkner lived his life in the middle of these realities the actualities of this Genesis, the only means by which he could approach their repercussions was through imagination and myth.

It was a common conceit for both sides during the Civil War to appeal to God. God plays an ever-present role throughout accounts of diaries and veterans, speeches by Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. He is entreated, His favor hoisted upon either side with each subsequent victory and defeat, His curse felt as the South made its long years of retreat and Reconstruction. This sense of God's curse is likewise carried through Faulkner's works, especially when he writes about the Civil War:

I told you then. And now, and now it won't be much longer now and then we won't have anything left: honor nor pride nor God since God quit us four years ago only He never thought it necessary to tell us [...] and when you don't have God and honor and pride, nothing matters except that there is the old mindless meat that don't even care if it was defeat or victory, that won't even die, that will be out in the woods and fields, grubbing up roots and weeds. (AB 354)

Ignoring the presence again of the *reductio ad absurdum* of humanity, in this Faulkner begins to trace the repercussions of his Southern Genesis through Greek traditions: forsaken by God or the Gods, victims of a cruel retributive Fate. Retribution becomes the creed of the Southern people in Faulkner's works. They feel that a sort of forced attrition is being exacted from them. In tracing the movement of the ripples, Faulkner carried on into his work the inevitability of having to own up to contaminated foundations:

Like what the old Aunt Rosa told you about some things that just have to be whether they are or not, just to balance the books, write *Paid* on the old sheet so that whoever keeps them can take it out of the ledger and burn it, get rid of it. Maybe he knew then that whatever the old man had done, whether he meant well or ill by it, it wasn't going to be the old man who would have to pay the check; and now that the old man was bankrupt with the incompetence of age, who should do the paying if not his sons, his get. (AB 325)

Moreover, the business of inheritance and of cursed bloodlines indicates the scope of this Genesis, the price of reconciliation. As Quentin reconstructs Sutpen's story, he comes to realize with its completion: "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore Nevermore Nevermore" (AB 373). Peace has forsaken the damned of the South, a very Greek and mythically charged approach to the corruption of foundations. Glissant points out it is not simply that "you cannot build a lasting foundation on appropriation and crime" (122) but that having tried it, the South has a long and painful absolution ahead of them.

And so hanging over the entire geography of Faulkner's South is a curse, inimical and malignant. It is not enough to "*know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth*" (AB 11). One must also recognize that "This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse" (GDM 278). From the outset, the South established itself upon the corruption of the land and the crime of slavery. It

polluted and destroyed the native population, lost touch with the moral in nature and humanity; it fought and deferred guilt; suckled its children on traditions which were not only impossible to maintain, but tragic if tried, and after having built its illegitimate foundations of family on incest, rape, and miscegenation, Faulkner's South fell under the hand of Fate; under a curse which began with the Civil War but never left because the people never accepted supplication nor allowed reconciliation. The echo generations are thrust into a false and a flawed tradition: "And then one day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him" (GDM 111).

This is the tale that was bred into Faulkner's generation, that Faulkner lived in, lived with, worked in, worked with. It was a tale of suffering, of witnessing. In Faulkner's rendering of it, three witnesses stand out: Quentin Compson, Ike McCaslin and Charles Mallison Jr. These three characters represent Faulkner's varied and imaginative engagement with the Southern past and the tale of the South's beginning.

Chapter Four: The Blind and the Suffering

“Be still, be still my soul; it is but for a season.
Let us endure an hour and see injustices done.”

-A.E Housman
(*A Shropshire Lad*)

First, a word about the tales:

The tale (history/tradition/heritage) of the South was perpetuated through a set of dominant discourses. Through both the public spheres of school, government, propaganda, and community as well as through the private avenues of family (and family pride), stories and genealogies of the South are propagated. The effect was very powerful; it dictated what it meant to be Southern, it defined identities and mind-sets, captured and maintained traditions and heritage. The effects of these discourses are caught in Faulkner's Quentin: “his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth” (AB 12). Quentin is not an individual character but rather represents the narrative of the Southern commonwealth, an engrained aspect of the Southern mind which developed over time into an accepted truth.

What made Quentin's expression of this collective predicament tragic? The answer is that he bought into an ideological account dedicated to perpetuating a set of ideas and ideals, social mores and accepted customs designed to deny, to obscure realities it could not, would not face. This narrative of nation froze history and stopped time, kept the Southerner mired and suspended in a ghost state of inaction, a limbo. The tale that his society spun for itself, around itself, contained both curse and contamination (war, slavery, incest) and became itself, as a tale, a curse. Glissant is right when he says that Faulkner's characters “[Faulkner's characters] do not speak of the past: they suffer it and

perpetuate it through suffering. By carrying on in this 'role,' they re-create the past" (Glissant 63). Faulkner's characters *never* engage what might be called 'factual truth'. His Southerners avoid historically given forms of truth and either construct myth (without slavery, without sin, as defense mechanism), or they arrive at something more valuable, more indicative of knowing the reality of the South (understanding the mind of the South, why it is constructed the way it is, to what end and for what purpose – this is why so many Southerners have such a problem with Cash's work). In the latter case truth, by generating understanding, courts doom. Retelling represented for Faulkner an imaginative and self-reflexive engagement with dominant versions of the Southern past. Notice how Gavin Stevens engages his past: "(and his uncle who had for everything an explanation not in facts but long since beyond dry statistics into something far more moving because it was truth: which moved the heart and had nothing whatever to do with what mere provable information said)" (INT 40). Inheriting this account was more than inheriting the past as recorded history or as mythic construct (the blind). The implications of this past were based not only in the human responses of it, but also the repercussions of those actions (against a Greek backdrop) upon the South. 'Truth' then, for Faulkner, connotes the unavoidable grains of truth within the myth of the South. 'Truth' is tragic knowledge and tragic vision. It still represents something more valuable than pure myth, and most certainly more valuable than the dry facts, but in that knowledge is an unhappy fall.

It seems paradoxical, then, that through time the South has sought nothing more than to maintain its distinct characteristics in the face of an encroaching and prevailing American threat. If inheriting the tale must either be an act of blind acceptance or one of

tragic suffering, then how does the South find a language, a means of dealing with the past which does not result in either perpetuating or evoking the curse of the South's beginning?

Quentin is in this conundrum himself. In the following passage his fear of oblivion, his lament for the receding traditions and ways of the South are apparent:

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 then not even to read it or keep it, even to 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 that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone can be *is* because it can never become *was* because it can't ever die or perish. (AB 127-128)

To fear 'was,' while at the same time bearing all time (all 'was' as complicated as that sounds) is not only a fear of death and mortality, it is a fear of shifting foundations, receding woods and diluted meaning. Stone carries the mark of time when it is etched and paper can immortalize and crystallize moments in time without allowing them to shift. The problem with a constructed history is that there is no foundation (or if there is it is one built upon gravel). There is no resolution or reconciliation in the Southern past or the Southern tradition. For Quentin, the shifting times and the precarious heritage he

tries so vehemently to support force him to seek solid ground. He will never find it in the South.

It is not enough to hope “to make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of oblivion to which we are all doomed” (AB 129). There is such a thing as a white Southern myth; there is also such a thing as a white Southern history and tradition wrapped up in that myth. What there is not is a white Southern fact.

Constructed meaning by the South, by Faulkner, by anyone leads to myth, then. Myth is not a static form of history. If the South always looks back to the past, it is looking back to a form of myth, and in doing so it also looks back at an ever-changing vista of myth. But so many critics of Southern history and culture argue that the South has a tenacious hold on the past, that it is preoccupied with the past and as such it stagnates there. How can the South stagnate in a mythic past of constructed truths that shift constantly? How can Quentin and Shreve reenact, recreate and retell Sutpen’s life story if the past is a prison? If the South inherits the tale, if it is born with it, into it, like being born into original sin, how does the fact that it is an interpreted construct affect that myth?

The burden of Southern history is not that it is simply inherited (whether blindly or through suffering), but that it is living history, a history which has stopped but which continues to live in present time: the Southern tale is forever in suspension.

Faulkner illustrates how the Southern tale is a series of myths constructed and passed on; he documents two students recreating the entire legacy and life of one man. But the root of the Southern burden is not to be found in its fluid history or its recreation which are simply means of perpetuating the dominant myth. The tragedy of the South

lies deep in its origins, in its Genesis. As I have already suggested, Faulkner has shown how the Southern terrain is based upon a lack of legitimacy. Now he shows, through inheriting the tale, why resolution has yet to come to the South. Note this important passage from *Intruder in the Dust*:

a community's history, since not only the cryptic forgotten initials and words and even phrases cries of defiance and indictment scratched into the walls but the very bricks and stones themselves held, *not in solution but in suspension*, intact and biding and potent and indestructible, the agonies and shames and griefs with which hearts long since unmarked and unremembered dust had strained and perhaps burst. (INT 40 my emphasis)

Here Faulkner is talking about an old jail in Jefferson. It is here, engraved in the walls, that history is locked. The stones hold not in solution but in suspension the history of the South. Everything the Southerner inherits, that which is in his blood, *is in a suspended state*.

This is the precarious situation which Quentin, Ike, Charles and Faulkner find themselves: there is no resolution to the tale, no reckoning, acceptance, apology or concession. The Southern tale is indeed locked, quite un-solid within its own confining boundaries. The real danger is that it is a tale in limbo. The people of the South are ghosts; the tale is liminal. Just as the Civil War offered no reconciliation, the Southern tale offers no resolution – it only holds intact and unaltered all the old sins. Upon the shoulders of generation after generation of the South the Genesis still awaits absolution through recognition. This resolution is the ingredient which is missing in the following passage:

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*. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable – Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (AB 100-101)

In the absence of resolution or any sort of recognition: 'we were wrong,' 'we are sorry,' 'we will change,' 'yes, we did that, it all happened,' comes instead the reduction of all history into the blind and stoic acceptance of the mischancing human affairs – the acceptance of fate as deity. Stoicism is the failsafe for a country without the hope of alleviating the burden, without the hope of eradicating the suspension, without the hope, in the end, for acquittal of any kind. Going through the tales, reconstructing them, searching through them, looking at them from different points of view, from different heads, from different places, even, is not enough to expiate the curse of the beginning, or exorcise the past. Indeed, so often all of these different vantages are simply different ways of looking at the same blackbird (usually all from the perspective of the Southerner anyhow), none of which does any more than to perpetuate the problem further.

Those who suffer the tale though (Quentin, Ike and Charles) all move out of that perpetuative cycle; they face, engage and endure a legitimization crisis. Each responds to that crisis in a different way and as such each represents a type of witness to the South.

II

"The wheel has come full circle."

**-William Shakespeare
(*King Lear* V, iii, 176)**

Quentin is Faulkner's most tragic witness. He teeters upon the precarious edge of being blind and being forced to suffer. As he seeks meaning from the traditions of the South, he also, almost simultaneously, suffers the reality of those traditions; the implications of which bastardize and sully the very dominations which he tries blindly to accept. Quentin's tragedy is one of hindsight. He has fallen from an innocent and

unaware position of acceptance to a knowing, and through that knowledge, a suffering position. Quentin wants nothing more than simply to be Southern, to have the old verities of the Southern orthodoxies define him and serve as a deep and calm pool of meaning. Unfortunately, Quentin watches as the traditions which inform him, which serve as his foundations, begin to collapse. As he constructs the tale of Sutpen he also similarly constructs that definitive 'truth' which Gavin Stevens and Faulkner lament and value at the same time. In tracing through Sutpen's life, Quentin realizes how illegitimate the South's past really is. Again, because Sutpen's tale is also the Southern tale, to watch the sin, injustice and illegitimacy in Sutpen (coupled with experiencing Caddy's 'fall from grace') is the source of Quentin's legitimation crisis. The very walls that the Southern hegemon had built around him in an effort to hide the injustice of the past (the defense of the Southern Mind at work) begin to crumble upon his head. As they do, Quentin continuously laments the fact that he must bear witness: "*I am going to have to hear it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*" (AB 277), and "*Yes. I have heard too much, I have been told too much*" (AB 207). The role of witness, then, is the same as the role of the suffering. Quentin must watch, but more importantly *see* the South not through the emerald glaze but rather stare at it directly; and like staring at the sun it burns his retina, but he is not blinded, he is rather forced to see.

So Quentin seeks a solid ground in a South where there is none. He grasps at the tale (again, history/tradition/heritage) even while it deteriorates in front of him. The loss of meaning resulting in the loss of hope is the most absolute and tragic of legitimation

crisis. Incapable of being Southern blindly, he loses the only remaining source of meaning he had in the world. This is the first case of legitimation crisis in Faulkner's witnesses: the loss of all meaning (and inevitable/eventual suicide).

But what is suicide other than an extended version of repudiation? In killing himself Quentin forsakes his culture, his past, his South. Ike similarly seeks to repudiate the South when he learns of his own genealogical roots. Just as Quentin learns of the Southern Genesis through Sutpen, Isaac McCaslin learns of the illegitimacy of his own familial Genesis through the records of Old Carothers McCaslin. When he discovers the rape, incest, miscegenation and cruelty of his past Ike refuses to accept his inheritance. Notice that he tries vehemently to repudiate his *inheritance*; not only the land and the money, but the tale as well. Ike seeks refuge where all of Faulkner's characters (and Faulkner himself) sought refuge, in the wilderness. The curse follows him there though. In the closing pages of *Go Down, Moses*, as Ike sleeps in the woods, the curse walks into his tent. He learns that the cycle of damnation has been perpetuated through his relation to Roth Edmonds (who has committed incest and miscegenation but refuses to accept the responsibility and so also has perpetuated illegitimacy as well and so continued on in the footsteps of the cycle). Escape from the reality of the South, the burden of the suffering witness, is not to be found by turning one's back. Repudiation is not enough – it is, in fact, part of the problem of the historical suspension. Repudiation is not acceptance, it is denial: the second kind of witness.

But a legitimation crisis in the South is not necessarily the source of damnation. No, damnation stems from the Genesis of the South and the perpetuation of its cycle through the inheritance of the tale. This is made clear through Charles: the one witness

who, engaging his culture and his country's past, has a legitimization crisis but also has the only chance of surviving in the South (and the only character who has the ability to help the South survive). This brings us back to the difference between suffering and feeling regret and between shame and repudiation. If Charles were to (like Ike) cast the inheritance aside he would have done nothing for Lucas, he would have walked away from the unjust incarceration of the black man and the eventual lynching of him; or even worse thrown himself over a bridge, and the curse would have eventually walked into his tent or followed him to wherever he went (the curse likewise follows Quentin even after death in damning Caddy's daughter Quentin). Notice that Charles is the only character of the three witnesses who act; Quentin is locked in an obsession with time and with the telling of the South; Ike seeks refuge and escape through repudiation; Charles is the only character who, not-Hamlet, acts immediately almost without knowing why even. He glares at the Southern tale with determination and, although certainly painful, engages his tradition. Moreover, he seeks to understand why the South lacks legitimacy, how it is corrupt and crumbling. He does not seek to understand it in order to hate it, nor to feel shame about it. Rather, Charles realizes, (with Gavin Steven's help) that he must simply bear the burden of the past and accept it. In feeling regret, in not stopping (suicide/repudiation) but rather feeling sorry, Charles' legitimization crisis is the closest we ever get in Faulkner's universe to a resolution of the suspended history in the South.

Charles does not run away or repudiate, he endures. If Faulkner's *Genesis* represents the rotten core of the South, his insistence on endurance represents his didactic position and his universal hope. Through forbearance, fortitude, and endurance, the South, after a time, might finally bring down the tale from its suspended state, might

eventually, (although as Ike maintains it might take two thousand years) absolve itself of its beginnings; and not only expiate the crimes of its beginnings but also reconcile the crime of stubborn refusal, of tenacious denial, of so long a stalemate against its own damnation. The witness watches the South continue this stalemate and has three options, three distinct positions. Only Charles can endure, only he shows the necessary wherewithal to resolve the story and put the ghosts to rest.

Why these three characters as witness, then? Because they alone in Faulkner's work seem to recognize, as Faulkner himself did, the impossibility of unintelligently and unimaginatively accepting Great Traditions of the South. Although they inherit the tale as all of the South must, they are never reconciled to accept it as ideal. They delve deeply into it and illustrate in a composite form, Faulkner's own division of mind. He too delved deeply into the South. He sought out the meaning, realized the beginning, engaged it, tried to resolve it in his own mind. Faulkner was a witness to the South. A lingering question remains: Does Faulkner, through his life or his writing, put the ghosts to rest, or simply point them out?

Conclusion

And this was all to bring me closer to the inside of Faulkner's Mississippi home. Understanding the South, and then more importantly, as if by a natural progression, understanding Faulkner's imagination in that South was to provide me with the key into what Faulkner had created in his novels. This was my ticket to becoming the witness. As I moved along through this material I realized that although the South was the key to not only what Faulkner created, but also to what created Faulkner.

There was Yoknapatawpha County and it was an imaginary place based upon a real county in the Deep South, but this was only a microcosm of the universe which Faulkner imaginatively inhabited. I had found an entire ring of keys through understanding the myth of the South. I had found even more when I began to understand the duality of the Southern mind embodied by Faulkner. But where did this progression take me but to the novels themselves? Traveling through those novels after having understood the South, the defeat, the duality and the paradox; walking into the battleground of the Southern mind and imagination at work, it became more obvious to me that this was not theatre, this was Genesis.

There was reconstruction and defeat which had caused defiance and romantic nationalism; there was a tragic war which had provided no reconciliation; before 1865 there was a society based upon the economy of slavery and the love of leisure and aristocracy; even before that there was frontier and the illegitimate taking of land; before that the big woods stood alone in the South which had yet to be doomed from the minute the first fence was put up and the first slave was made to do it and the first Indian was fooled or forced (it really doesn't matter which) into giving up the land and taking slaves

in return for it. The writing of William Faulkner became beginning, lineage, the drop of a pebble into a pool, a time line and progression of a society translated through tale. Standing in Mississippi, looking at the Magnolia flowers which were mutant to my eyes (nothing that large and delicate would grow in Canadian climates, there is simply not enough time) I became aware that Faulkner was the witness of time immemorial, that his place was here but also it was a ubiquitous place; it moved from Mississippi to every other civilization's beginning. As such (and contrary to many critics ((Brooks and Glissant come immediately to mind)) Faulkner's work emerged in my mind as didactic; it does not preach forcefully, it tends to hide more than it reveals, but the unmistakable sense throughout his work is that the human heart in conflict with itself is part of this same Genesis, perhaps because it is human, and after the Genesis the heart remains in the land which it destroyed and pays for its beginnings forever.

The Magnolia flower at which I stared reminded me that the South is essential in understanding Faulkner's Genesis. Faulkner suggests something universal about the land and injustice, but the South's peculiar flavor and color is his means towards such an end. To the beginning then: to the Genesis of the South as Faulkner created it within tradition, within history, and within imagination.

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