

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

THE MYTH OF PASSION IN
SELECTED NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

by
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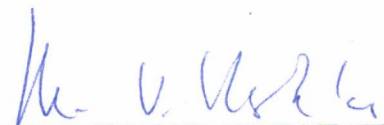
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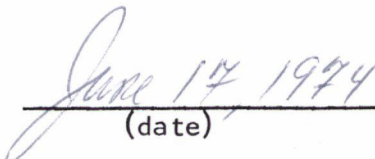
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Myth of Passion in Selected Novels of William Faulkner" submitted by Iris Spurrell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.


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ABSTRACT

One of the interesting phenomena in the fiction of William Faulkner is the recurring presence of romantic love. The incidence of its use and the emotional intensity of its portrayal combine to suggest that the theme of romantic love is of particular significance in the fictional world which Faulkner has created. The present analysis examines selected novels by Faulkner in order to see how his perception of romantic love shapes the plot and characterization within this fiction.

It is my contention that Faulkner's concept of romantic love has various similarities with the myth of passion. This myth has been the subject of various studies which trace the conception of passion embodied in The Romance of Tristan and Iseult from the twelfth century to our own day. Generally, these studies conclude by agreeing that for us, the prospect of a passionate experience has come to seem the promise that we are about to live more fully and more intensely. According to Denis de Rougemont, whose examination of the subject is the most intensive, the myth of passion operates wherever passion is regarded as an ideal. It feeds upon the lives of people who believe that love is their fate, that love can make them a member of an exalted section of mankind outside the rules of morality and society. For Rougemont, the whole concept of passion embodied in the myth is one of the illusions on which we subsist; as such, it is a deterrent to true happiness.

To examine Faulkner's perception of romantic love in the light of the myth of passion, I have chosen four novels -- Soldiers' Pay (1926), Sartoris (1929), Sanctuary (1931), and The Wild Palms (1939). Although Faulkner's use of the myth is by no means restricted to these novels,

it is in them that his views of the importance of the myth of passion are most clearly delineated. Each of these novels contains a juxtaposition between a passionate approach to life and a response that is devoid of the security offered by passionate illusions. The dynamics between this juxtaposition is portrayed in a number of varying contexts, so that the reader comes to understand how passion functions with respect to war, death, ritual, and illusion in Faulkner's world.

Such an analysis allows one to make several statements about the role of romantic love and its essence, passion, in the fictional world which Faulkner has created. It seems that passion is the most important value in this world. Because Faulkner's characters glorify passion, they are blind to its debilitating consequences. They do not see that passionate love is tantamount to self-love, that passionate experiences seldom result in profound self-understanding and an insight into the meaning of life. Indeed, much of the pessimism in Faulkner's novels appears to stem from the unchecked spread of passion which they depict. This notice leads to a consideration of an implication which is always present in the fiction -- when the true nature of passion is understood, life becomes worthy of something more than despair.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A very familiar character to readers of the novels of William Faulkner is Eula Varner. She first appears in The Hamlet in an incredible episode which imprints itself indelibly on the reader's mind. Eula even at the tender age of eight, inspires an overpowering passion in Labove, her schoolteacher. For Labove, Eula is the Unattainable Woman. She becomes an obsession for him, and he sacrifices everything else in his life so that he can be near her. He forsakes the promise of a successful career in law and lives a self-imposed monastic existence, devoting all his powers of concentration to his obsession for Eula. The reader knows of the intensity of Labove's longing to possess Eula, and reads with keen interest, the climax of the episode when Labove has finally decided to express his feelings in action:

She was strong. He had expected that. He had wanted that, he had been waiting for it. They wrestled furiously. He was still smiling, even whispering. "That's it," he said. "Fight it, fight it. That's what it is: a man and a woman fighting each other. The hating. To kill only to know forever afterward he or she is dead. . . ." He held her loosely, the better to feel the fierce resistance of bones and muscles. . . .

Interestingly enough, readers of the novel accept without questioning

or even a second thought, Faulkner's treatment of Labove's responses in this scene. We sense that Labove's reactions are exaggerated, of course, but apart from this aspect of degree, his responses seem familiar and proper to us. The portrayal of Labove seems to speak directly to some sensibility buried deep within us, such that our response is intuitive -- so much so that we completely overlook the contradictions which are inherent in Labove's behaviour. If his desire to possess Eula is so intense, why does he fail to take advantage of this opportunity of their being alone together? If he wants her to submit, why is he so pleased that she resists? Why does he hold her loosely when this is supposedly the very opposite of how he has dreamed of holding her for six long years?

Incidents of this nature are a relatively frequent occurrence in Faulkner's novels. Such episodes reveal his concern with the contemporary concept of romantic love. The amount of attention which Faulkner gives to this kind of love, arouses one's curiosity as to the reason for the recurring presence of this theme in his writing. Romantic love seems such a commonplace subject; why then is it the basis of so much of what happens in Faulkner?

The answer to this question may lie in the fact that romantic love appears to be symptomatic of a more serious sickness which has pervaded western attitudes. In his investigation of romantic love in Love in the Western World, Denis de Rougemont interprets the nature of the underlying malady. From his perspective, romantic love

is a manifestation of the fatal psychological and spiritual disease of passion.

For Rougemont, passion has special connotations. He observes that

Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its passion. And passion means suffering.²

According to his analysis, the first appearance of this concept of passion-love coincides with the flourishing of courtly love in twelfth century France. C. S. Lewis, who has also investigated the subject of romantic or passionate love, concurs with Rougemont on this point. In his view

French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination or our daily life untouched. . .³

Both Rougemont and Lewis link the appearance of passion with the split between the age's amatory and religious ideals.

Rougemont deals very specifically with the cause of the division between these sets of ideals. He contends that the troubadors

who were responsible for the spread of the rhetoric and rituals of courtly love were followers of the doctrines of a small religious group, the Cathars.⁴ In his analysis, the Catharist doctrines had much in common with Manichaeism and Gnosticism. Cleanth Brooks has presented a concise summary of Rougemont's position in this regard. He notes that the love which the troubadors sang was imbued with Catharism in that

it does not look forward to the possession of the loved one, but is a transcendent love - love for a lady who is an ideal or a dream vision rather than a woman of flesh and blood. Because the Cathars frowned upon the flesh as evil, the love they celebrated could not be consummated in this world but only in the world to come, when death has freed the soul of its bondage to the body. The courtly lover. . . is really in love with death: the passion that possesses him is a dark passion. It is incapable of 5 any real satisfaction in the flesh.

Certain objections have been raised against Rougemont's analysis of the relationship between Cathars and troubadors. Not enough is really known about either Cathars or troubadors to allow the kind of generalization which he has made. This point is made by Father M. C. D'Arcy S. J., in his Mind and Heart of Love. He sees the doctrines of Gnosticism, and hence of Catharism, not as beliefs that can be restricted to a certain time and place and requiring certain social conditions to flourish. Rather, to him, "Gnosticism seems to have been one of those unfortunate forms of thought for which

human beings have a chronic appetite.⁶ In spite of this objection, Father D'Arcy does state that, "there is no reason . . . to reject Rougemont's main thesis It is enough if we accept his view that romance did contain a special doctrine of love."⁷

The classical embodiment of this special doctrine of love according to Rougemont is contained in the Romance of Tristan and Iseult, written by various authors in the twelfth century. Rougemont deals with the Romance

not as a piece of literature, but as typical of the relations between man and woman in a particular historical group -- the dominant social caste, the courtly society, saturated with chivalry, of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The group in question was long ago dissolved. Yet, its laws remain our laws in an unsuspected and diluted form.⁸

For this reason, the Romance of Tristan and Iseult may be regarded as "a kind of archetype of our most complex feelings of unrest."⁹ Rougemont sees in the Romance and the peculiarity in the rituals of love which it demonstrates a myth¹⁰ which has extended its influence from the twelfth century, all the way to our own day. He refers to the concept of love embodied in the Romance as the myth of passion.

A study of the events in the Romance demonstrates at once, the nature of the kind of love which is passion. Rougemont's analysis of this love story shows that, although Tristan and Iseult claim to love each other, their behaviour seems to deny their claim. Instead

of scheming ways in which they may meet and physically express their love, these lovers seem more concerned with arranging obstructions to prevent their meeting. Sometimes the events appear to result from external happenings which the lovers cannot control. But, at one point, there can be no ambiguity as to cause, for Tristan sets the obstruction himself. In an incident which embodies the concept of passion contained in the Romance, the lovers are alone in the forest after a lengthy separation. They might now at last possess each other. But Tristan draws his sword and lays its naked edge between them. Lying thusly, fully clothed, the lovers (who have ostensibly been yearning for each other) fall asleep. This action leads Rougemont to conclude that

Tristan and Iseult do not love one another. . . . What they love is love and being in love. They behave as if whatever obstructs love must ensure and consolidate it in the heart of each and intensify it infinitely in the moment they reach the absolute obstacle, which is death. Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving far more than he loves Iseult the Fair. And Iseult does nothing to hold Tristan. All she needs is her passionate dream. Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are. What they need is, not one another's presence, but one another's absence. Thus, the partings of the lovers are dictated by their passion itself, and by the love which they bestow on their passion rather than on its satisfaction or on its living object.¹¹

The need for obstructions conceals something more awful than the mere love of love, however. The greatest obstruction of all, the one most suited to intensifying passion, is death. Rougemont interprets Tristan's inclination for a deliberate obstruction as a desire for death.

But this death is for love, a deliberate death coming at the end of a series of ordeals, thanks to which he will have been purified; a death that means transfiguration, and is in no way the result of some violent chance. . . . At this point, the obstruction is no longer serving irresistible passion, but has itself become the goal wished for for its own sake. Passion has thus only played the part of a purifying ordeal . . . in the service of this transfiguring death.¹²

This, then, is the awful secret of the myth of passion, a secret which, in its now 'degraded' and 'profaned' form, continues to haunt the Western psyche.

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As Rougemont and others have noted, the concept of passion embodied in the Romance underwent an extremely influential revival during the nineteenth century. Wagner's opera Tristan and Isolde once more "restored the mislaid significance of the legend in all its virulence."¹⁴ But this marked its last appearance in its pristine form.

In England at this time, however, the myth of passion expressed itself as a philosophy of art which imbued the works of those writers and artists whom we know as the Decadents. Using the

myth's basic assumptions -- passion is intense emotional experience; passion is desirable -- the function of art was to "give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass,"¹⁵ to reward the reader or viewer with a succession of moments of intense and exquisite emotion which ordinary life would likely never provide. While this theory may appear suitable as a function of art, it seems altogether too absurd and fanciful to gain acceptance as a modus operandi for life as well as art. Such, however, is not the case as a closer investigation of its sources quickly makes obvious.

Central to the philosophy of the Decadents was the revival of the Heraclitean metaphysic that "the universe is all of a piece, being in fact a continuous flow of change. Everything is in a state of flux and there is nothing fixed or permanent."¹⁶ This theory was extended by the Decadents to encompass the function of art. Their general conclusion is stated very succinctly by Walter Pater in the "Conclusion" to his The Renaissance; Studies in Art and Poetry. Having examined the above concept with regard to knowledge and the brevity of life, Pater concludes that, "since everything changes and dissolves under our touch, wisdom consists in making the most of the moment as it passes. . . . We should grasp and enjoy as many moments of exquisite experience as we can contrive."¹⁷ "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end;"¹⁸ this is the essence of his theory. He goes on to say that "with this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly

have time to make theories about the things we see and touch."¹⁹ This is Pater's justification for displacing the contemporary emphasis on rationalism by a reversion to an emphasis on the value of sensory impressions. Speaking of the frightening brevity of man's life, he comments that, "our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested²⁰ or otherwise which come naturally to most of us." For Pater, "to burn always with this hard gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy,²¹ is success in life."

It is important to remember that Pater's primary interest was the role of art in our lives; his study concludes with the observation that "art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass and simply for those moments' sake."²² At first, these ideas were confined to intellectual circles, but with the then current emphasis on the value of "Culture," they soon gained appeal with a wider audience.

According to William Gaunt's analysis, Pater's theories made "Culture" more easily accessible to those who sought to have their lives (and social standings) enriched with its refinements.

The great thing about Mr. Pater was that, as a result of listening to him, you did not have to make any effort at all. You simply had to be -- to admire. He never suggested as Ruskin did, that people who were interested

in beauty must concern themselves also with such ugly facts as railway trains and factory chimneys and cheap lodging houses. On the contrary, he caused those things to disappear by never referring to them at all. None of the vulgarities of existence must be allowed to disturb the state of contemplation in which 'full and perfect experience' was to be found.²³

For these reasons, Pater's theory of art gained popular acceptance.

Gaunt goes on to observe that, as a result,

Such part of the middle class as was in revolt against itself, was equipped with a suitable deportment. Those who had, or thought they had, souls, moved in imagination 'to the sound of flutes,' became languid, crooned in low adoring tones and tried to succeed in life by developing exquisite sensations.²⁴

Before long, fashions began to reflect these artistic trends. Some women became like Pre-Raphaelite pictures in their demeanor. Dress was affected similarly, and even the style of interior decorating felt the influence of these attitudes, for as Gaunt says, "The stage must be properly set if the actor, and more particularly the actress, were to achieve the intended effect."²⁵ From these beginnings in the late nineteenth century, passion began its unchecked spread into other spheres to underlie the accepted modes of behaviour of the next generation.

As Gilbert Murray has pointed out, by the time of the next generation, this 'glorification of passion, any passion -- just because it is violent, overwhelming, unreasonable. . . which had its

place in art, . . . had burst out into real life and, in country after country, taken possession of the common man. What was an interesting speculation among intellectuals has become to the unthinking a dogma and an inspiration.²⁶ In this way, Pater's theories ceased to be merely a form of aesthetic tinkering. Instead, they had evolved into a cultural myth which shaped the values of the generation, especially those who fancied themselves as young intellectuals. Faulkner, as one of this group, could not escape the effects of its values and attitudes.

Awakened interest in Faulkner's early work during the past decade has led to an awareness of the great influence which the artists and artistic ideas of the past century had upon his poetry and early fiction. H. Edward Richardson, in his extensive investigation of Faulkner's poetry, noted the young poet's borrowings from the French Symbolists,²⁷ especially Mallarme, Verlaine, and Villon. He noted also, the influence of Swinburne's techniques and imagery in several of the poems,²⁸ an influence which is, by no means, restricted to the poetry, for as R. P. Adams has pointed out, Faulkner paraphrases lines from Swinburne in his first novel, and "throughout his works. . .uses much of the kind of imagery Swinburne likes."²⁹

It is also apparent that Faulkner was acquainted with the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley. In Ole Miss, the yearbook of the university of Mississippi, for 1919-20, there is a drawing which, with its medium of black and white, its motif of the candelabrum, and its strangely-shaped human figures, appears to be a direct imitation by Faulkner

of Beardsley.³⁰ As Addison Bross has convincingly argued, Faulkner availed of Beardsley's artistic techniques in matters of character presentation and in the development of mood and atmosphere in his first novels.³¹ Finally, Faulkner himself admitted that his views of God and the fluidity of time were the same as those of Henri Bergson,³² whose influence gave Pater's artistic theory a solid validity in life. Clearly then, Faulkner was familiar with the spirit of *fin de siècle*, and we can presume, with its underlying philosophy.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact (as several of the above mentioned critics have) that, because Faulkner borrows from the Decadents, he uses his borrowings in the same way and for the same ends as they. In fact, quite the contrary is true. The effect of the Decadents' theories was ultimately the glorification of passion, the spread of passion into every sphere. In the upheaval of values which the twentieth century has witnessed, passion is the one value which has remained the most stable for the most people. Passion thus, could be the centre of reference through which Faulkner could communicate his vision of life.

How does passion operate in the fictional world which Faulkner has created? To all intents and purposes, his treatment of the meaning of passion for his characters parallels Rougemont's presentation of what passion means to us in our lives. In Rougemont's analysis, the glorification of passion by the masses, has continued

with increased momentum since the turn of the century.

Our eagerness for both novels and films with their identical type of plot; the idealized eroticism which pervades our culture and upbringing and provides the pictures that fill the background of our lives; our desire for 'escape,' which a mechanical boredom exacerbates -- everything within and about us glorifies passion. Hence, the prospect of a passionate experience has come to seem the promise that we are about to live more fully and more intensely. We look upon passion as a transfiguring force, something beyond delight and pain, an ardent beatitude. In passion, we are no longer aware of that 'which suffers,' only of what is 'thrilling.'³³

In effect, passion may be interpreted as a manifestation of our wish to escape a horrible reality. It promises a fuller, richer, more meaningful life. For both Rougemont and Faulkner, the promise of passion is an illusion which nonetheless continues to shape our attitudes toward life.

The theme of passion is a recurring presence in Faulkner's works. Various aspects of his perception of passion and its effects are present in most of his novels. However, several of these novels seem to contain a particularly clear statement of his concern with passion. These novels -- Soldiers' Pay, Sartoris, Sanctuary, and The Wild Palms -- are not usually regarded as among Faulkner's best works. Indeed, this may well be because the circumspection and subtlety with which these same ideas are presented in the major novels have not yet developed, and his ideas are expressed in too

blunt a fashion. Yet, it is precisely because the presentation is less circumspective in these novels that they are most appropriate as a basis for an investigation of the role of passion in Faulkner's world.

Each of the four novels chosen, focuses upon a different aspect of Faulkner's concept of passion and its effects. Soldiers' Pay centres around passion and war, and develops a vision of what it is like to do battle without the protective guise of a passionate illusion about the significance of fighting well. Although this novel portrays civilian life after the war, it does not develop to any extent the full implications of the loss of passion for these returning veterans. They have not yet recovered from the numbness engendered by the shock of their loss. Consequently, they are unable to see its full application to the readjustment which they must make to ordinary daily life.

In Sartoris, the relationship between passion and death is explored. The novel depicts the attempts of its main character, young Bayard Sartoris, to find something in life to give it meaning. His war experience in Europe has cost him his illusion about the significance of dying properly, which has been imposed by the Sartoris family tradition. Bereft of this illusion, he can no longer attach any meaning to life. His response is to turn away from life and seek death. The despair which accompanies Bayard's disillusionment is heightened by the presence in the novel of two characters whom the now vulgarized myth of passion has overpowered. Horace and

Narcissa Benbow seek to enrich their lives through the experience of passionate love.

Sanctuary focuses upon the modern myth of passion. The characters in the novel follow the rituals which are the legacy of the archetypal myth of passion, but it becomes clear that these rituals are now devoid of all meaning. The events which occur in this novel lead the characters to a confrontation with the rules of conduct which have given rise to these events. Although they glimpse the meaninglessness of the rituals by which they structure their lives, their response is to persist in clinging to the rituals and their concomitant illusion of order.

The Wild Palms is Faulkner's clearest thematic statement of his perception of the myth of passion and its modern counterpart. Its chapters, which alternately tell two apparently unrelated stories, present two worlds of experience for the reader. One world is built upon passion in love, and is created by a modern Tristan and Iseult. Their story parallels the myth through to the death of one of the lovers. The other world is created by the irrational force of a flooded river. In it, circumstances continuously work against the preservation of any passionate illusions about life. In spite of this, the main protagonist at the end of the story, has basically the same perceptions about life as he had at the beginning. Although the worlds of this story and its companion piece are very different, they both point to man's persistence in clinging to illusions and

his inability to cope with life when it is fully exposed without their protection.

Considered together, these four novels permit an insight into Faulkner's perception of the myth of passion and the significance which it has for modern man. By investigating the role of passion in Faulkner's world, it becomes possible to understand more fully why so much of that which occurs in his world is worthy only of despair.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

1. William Faulkner, The Hamlet, 1931, rpt. (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 122.

2. Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Beligion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), p. 15.

3. C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 1936, rpt. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 4.

4. The Cathars appear to have gained a following in southern France in the twelfth century. Rougemont notes that "simultaneously with the lyrical surge of the domnei (the ritual of love's vassalage) and in the same provinces and among the same classes, there also arose a great heresy," namely the Catharist doctrines. See: Rougemont, op. cit., p. 78. Their central beliefs may be summarized as follows:

There are two worlds and two creations, God and the world. In effect, God is good and the world is evil. The Angels, or Souls, in God's world were lured away to the world below by Satan who tempted them with 'a woman of dazzling beauty, who inflamed them with desire.' The Angel-Souls were ensnared in material bodies in this world of evil. As Rougemont notes, "Tempted by the prospect of freedom, a soul actually becomes the prisoner of a body with terrestrial appetites and subject to the laws of procreation and death." The Cathars believed that, if they renounced the world, they could re-enter God's realm. The major rite of their church was the consolamentum, a baptism by the consolatory Spirit. "It was given at initiation ceremonies to brethren who undertook to renounce the world and solemnly promised to devote themselves to God alone, never to lie or take an oath, never to kill, or eat of, an animal, and finally ever to abstain, if married, from all contact with a wife." The Catharist Church consisted of two groups: the Perfect who had received the consolamentum, and the mere believers. The latter alone could marry and go on living in a world which was condemned by the Perfect.

For an elaboration of these beliefs, see Rougemont, op. cit., pp. 77-82.

5. Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 197.

6. M. C. D'Arcy, S. J. Mind and Heart of Love, rev. ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 57. D'Arcy goes on to say that "This tendency or habit is a chronic malady of human nature, and it is as prevalent today as it was at the beginning of the Christian era."

7. Ibid., p. 226.
8. Rougemont, op. cit., p. 19.
9. Ibid., p. 18.
10. For Rougemont, the meaning of myth is as follows:
 . . . a myth expresses the rules of conduct
 of a given social or religious group. It
 issues accordingly from whatever sacred prin-
 ciple has presided over the formation of this
 group. . . . But the most profound characteristic
 of a myth is the power which it wins over us,
 usually without our knowing. See Ibid., pp. 18-19.
11. Ibid., pp. 41-42.
12. Ibid., pp. 45-46.
13. In addition to Rougemont, op. cit., see M. C. D'Arcy, op. cit., p. 227; Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 341, p. 381; Joseph W. Krutch, The Modern Temper (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), pp. 85-86.
14. Rougemont, op. cit., p. 231.
15. Walter Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Literature and Art (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 239.
16. C. M. Joad, Decadence: A Philosophical Inquiry (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 98.
17. Pater, op. cit., p. 236.
18. Ibid., p. 237.
19. Ibid., p. 238.
20. Ibid., p. 236.
21. Ibid., p. 239.
22. Ibid., p. 239.

23. William Gaunt, The Aesthetic Adventure, 1945, rpt. (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1957), pp. 74-75.

24. Ibid., p. 76.

25. Ibid., p. 77.

26. Gilbert Murray, cited in Joad, op. cit., p. 98.

27. The assumption is that the source of the English Decadents' theories was French Symbolist poetry. See Gaunt, op. cit., pp. 11-25.

28. See H. Edward Richardson, William Faulkner: The Journey to Self-Discovery (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, Chapters 5 and 6.

29. Richard P. Adams, "The Apprenticeship of William Faulkner," Tulane Studies in English, 12(1962), p. 120.

30. See Addison Bross, "Soldiers' Pay and the Art of Aubrey Beardsley," American Quarterly, 19(Spring, 1967), p. 5.

31. See Ibid., pp. 3-23.

32. Adams, op. cit., p. 152.

33. Rougemont, op. cit., p. 16.

CHAPTER 2

SOLDIERS' PAY: PASSION AND WAR

Considering the wealth of critical consideration given to the works of William Faulkner, it is surprising that his first novel has received so little attention. Generally, Soldiers' Pay has been ignored except for notices of prototypal Faulknerian characters and scenes which are drawn so much more effectively in the later novels.¹ The critics comment that the novel's plot line is confused. There are too many unrelated characters and incidents in the novel for it to contain the overall unity essential to a major work of fiction.²

It is my view that the assortment of characters and incidents in Soldiers' Pay contains an inherent unity derived from their relationship to the novel's prevailing theme of passion. In this novel, Faulkner has brought into focus, the connection which inevitably exists between passion and war. When the parallels between passion and war are understood, the reader of Soldiers' Pay can better appreciate the method which Faulkner has used to dramatize the theme of passion. As well, the values depicted in the world of this novel are enriched with nuances of meaning which otherwise seem to be absent. I wish to discuss the relationship between passion and war, and then use this discussion as a basis from which to interpret the novel's events and issues from the point of view of their overall

unity.

In Love in the Western World, Rougemont shows clearly why passion and war go hand in hand. Passion disguises a longing for death; it fosters the notion that suffering, especially suffering on the brink of death, permits a clarity of understanding of self which cannot be gained otherwise.³ Strongly present in this whole notion is the view of the fruitfulness of suffering. According to Rougemont, this "fruitfulness of suffering. . . encourages or obscures⁴ justifies in the recesses of the western mind a liking for war." Furthermore, he contends that

. . . the formalities of war and of courtly love had given Europeans an impress that did not fade till the present century. The notion of personal valour and of the warlike feats represented by the duel and by prowess (the single-handed combat between two leaders); the notion of regulating the conduct of battles according to a quasi-sacred etiquette; the view that military life must be ascetic (long fasts before the ordeal of battle), rules for settling who should be the victor (he, for example, who spent the night on the battlefield), and finally the close parallel between erotic and military symbolism -- all that never ceased to determine the modes of making war throughout the ensuing ages. So that any alteration in military tactics may be looked upon as related to an alteration in the notions of love, or vice versa.⁵

In illustrating the resemblance between love and war since the twelfth century, Rougemont sees the eighteenth century as best

demonstrating his point of view.

Don Juan succeeded to Tristan; perverse sensuality to fatal passion. And at the same time war was 'profaned:' in place of Judgements of God and in place of sacred chivalry, ascetic, bloody and barded with iron, there arose a crafty diplomacy and an army commanded by courtiers in lace cuffs, who since they were libertines, did not intend to jeopardize the refinements of life.⁶

Thus, the century witnessed the complete profanation of war and of its sacred passion. From his observations of the rituals of love and war since the age of chivalry, Rougemont observes that

. . . everytime war has recovered the aspect of a game, this was because society wished to reintroduce the passion myth into its culture -- that is to say, wished to confine a lawless force within a framework and give it a ritual form of manifesting itself.⁷

But what of these two concomitants, passion and war in modern times? Rougemont feels that war no longer serves as an outlet for passion. "With the Battle of Verdun in 1916 . . . the resemblance instituted⁸ by chivalry between the modes of love and war came to an end." He concludes that

The technique of dealing death from afar (employed in World War I) has no equivalent in any imaginable code of love. Total war eludes both man and instinct; it turns upon passion, its begetter. And it is this, not the scale of the massacre, that is new in the history of the world.⁹

The suggestion is that, in our century, passion has not been

permitted to manifest itself in war. If there is no passion in war, what effects does taking part in the fighting have upon soldiers? Can they express passion in other spheres or does the passionless experience of war reveal that passion in any context is only an illusion? What does life look like when it is devoid of passion? These are some of the questions which are answered in Faulkner's treatment of passion as it touches the variant characters and issues depicted in Soldiers' Pay.

To answer these questions, it becomes necessary to consider first of all, the climate of attitudes which influenced most post-war novelists. These attitudes were usually shaped in the colleges, and then adopted by those in attendance and those who wished to convey the impression that they had attended. As Malcolm Cowley has noted of the pre-war days

In college, the process of deracination went on remorselessly. We were not being prepared for citizenship in a town, a state, or a nation; we were not being trained for an industry or profession essential to the common life; instead, we were being exhorted to enter that international republic of learning whose traditions are those of Athens, Florence, Paris, Berlin and Oxford.⁹

The quality of life of the less educated masses did not appeal to the idealistic sensibilities of these young aesthetes. By comparison, the glories of war promised something more than materialism and mundanity. According to Stanley Cooperman's observations,

The war. . . was seized upon by precisely those elements most disaffected with their time -- it was taken, indeed, as a means for escaping materialism; for achieving personal nobility and social mobility, for carrying the banner of disinterested justice, for living life to the hilt.¹⁰

Often, these young aesthetes were so anxious to test themselves in battle that they fought in the armies of other countries long before America entered the war. For these idealists, the actual fighting proved to be a very shattering experience. Their notions of the glories of battle proved to be mere illusions, and without the protection of these illusions, they were forced to regard life in a different way. With these points in mind, the significance of the Battle of Verdun in 1916 becomes more clear. For the first time, passion was absent from war, and if we agree with Rougemont's analysis, we can anticipate that there was a carry-over from the loss of passion in war to a change in the way passion operated in the society at large.

Soldiers' Pay attempts to capture the prevailing attitudes toward war, and by extension toward passion, within the society it describes. As a consequence, the novel is structured around two distinct groups of characters -- those who participated in the war, and those who remained at home in the drowsy peacefulness of small-town Georgia. Always, however, the reader is aware that Faulkner is concerned particularly with each group's concept of passion. The problems which arise in the novel allow for a dramatization of the

concepts held by each group, so that the theme of passion becomes the central thread which unifies the various characters and episodes.

The opening two chapters of the novel are indicative of Faulkner's intent: the first is devoted entirely to one group, the second, to the other group, with no overlapping of the action. Indeed, the two chapters seem designed to invite the reader to observe the vast differences between the two groups, differences which are elaborated upon throughout the course of the novel. The opening chapter introduces the reader to the first group -- returning soldiers, noisy and drunk on the train. The war is a felt presence in this chapter, and a certain aura of experience surrounds Gilligan, Lowe, Mahon, and Margaret Powers which separates them from the other passengers. In his discussion of the opening chapter, Robie Macauley has criticized its tone of "laboured G.I. joking," saying that, although the scene is "real enough on any wartime train," its tone of "low comedy and raucous confusion" is wrong.¹¹ In his view, "it is a clumsy and insignificant introduction to the novel,"¹² in that "it leads to nothing in the story."¹³ Macauley seems to have entirely missed the point of this chapter, which seems to have been designed by Faulkner to reflect the mood of the soldiers, a mood which is markedly different in tone from that of the civilians on the train who are making an ordinary kind of journey.

From the general atmosphere of restlessness and despair which characterizes the first chapter, we move abruptly into a totally different world with the beginning of Chapter Two. The

coarseness of the soldiers' language and the stark terms in which their experiences are recounted, changes to a lyrical and poetical language. We first meet Januarius Jones, "baggy in gray tweed. . . who leaned upon a gate of iron-grill work breaking a levee of green and embryonically starred honeysuckle, watching April busy in a hyacinth bed. Dew was on the grass and bees broke apple bloom in the morning sun while swallows were like plucked strings against a pale windy sky."¹⁴ Dominating the scene and lending it an air of stability is "the consummate grace of a spire and a cross" (56). The characters present in this world of springtime beauty are a kindly old rector with a Jove-like brow (60), referred to by the narrator as "the divine", and a visitor whose propensity for lechery quickly becomes an object of humour and ridicule for Faulkner. The rector's vision of Utopia (of which Jones heartily approves), characterized not by non-war, but by "eating and sleeping and procreating" (59), offers an ironic contrast to the tenor of thoughts expressed in the previous chapter. We meet Cecily Saunders in this chapter, as well. Her appearance in the chapter seems designed to contrast with that of Margaret Powers in the preceding one. The contrast between the two prepares the reader for the more subtle lines of difference which are later shown between them. For Macauley,¹⁵ this chapter is the novel's "second false start," and like the first, it "hampers and misleads the reader."¹⁶ Again, he has missed the structural significance intended by Faulkner, who seemed to feel that the discrepancies between veterans and civilians could be best

dramatized by this counterpointing or contrasting technique.

These two chapters reveal at once, that Faulkner shares the concerns of other post-war novelists. His 'civilians' exhibit the same "sentimentality" and "the pre-existing national attitude toward the glories of war" which caused so many Americans to enlist. The war has not changed these attitudes and they look upon veterans of the fighting with a certain envy. Yet, for the veterans, such "war enthusiasm (as accompanied them to Europe) [has] played a vital role in their disillusion."¹⁷ Their behaviour points to a backlash against the ideals of the previous generation. The new world which the experience of war has led them to discover, contains little that is fixed or stable. These veterans have a new understanding of the significance of a man's life, and this new 'truth' shapes their responses to the old world of the homefront. Cooperman feels that

The hostility to idealism in the years following the war, produced or accentuated a flight from all abstraction. . . the object, the thing, the experience-in-itself, stated boldly and without rhetorical flourish, would recreate truth to an extent far beyond even the idealism and abstraction of protest.¹⁸

The style of Faulkner's writing in these opening chapters, reflects this view. The episodes of the first chapter are depicted without any of the lengthy, poetical-sounding descriptions which accompany those of the second.

Into the peaceful and quiet world of the homefront, society comes all the horror of war, embodied in the irrevocably changed Donald Mahon with his "devastated face and that dreadful brow, his whole re-

laxed inertia of constant dull pain and ebbing morale." (82). The end of the second chapter, marked by Cecily's scream and fainting spell at the sight of Donald's scar, represents the first collision between these two different worlds and groups of characters.

Donald, the inert centre of attention in the novel, acts as a touchstone for the other characters, whose natures and motives are revealed in their response to him. His role as touchstone assumes even greater significance on the symbolic level. On this level, Donald may be seen as a representation of the actuality that was the war. In this context, by examining the responses of the characters and their society to him, we can, by extension, infer the nature of their reactions to the war and the difference, if any, that have resulted in their values.

Faulkner devotes considerable attention to the group of civilians who remained at home during the war. Januarius Jones, Cecily Saunders, and the rector, all figure significantly in the novel's action. But, we also meet an array of minor characters who are representative of the citizens of Charlestown. Faulkner captures the town's general reaction to Donald very succinctly in a description of their behaviour during their dutiful visits to welcome the wounded hero.

Donald Mahon's homecoming, poor fellow,
was hardly a nine days' wonder even.

Curious kindly neighbours came in -- men who stood or sat jovially respectable, cheerful: solid business men interested in the war only as a by-product of the rise and fall of Mr. Wilson, and interested in that only as a matter of dollars and cents, while their wives chatted about clothes to each other across Mahon's scarred, oblivious brow; a few of the rector's more casual acquaintances democratically uncravated, hushing their tobacco into a bulged cheek, diffidently but firmly refusing to surrender their hats; girls that he had known, had danced with or courted on summer nights, come now to look once upon his face, and then quickly aside in hushed nausea, not coming any more unless his face happened to be hidden on the first visit (upon which they finally found opportunity to see it); boys come to go away fretted because he wouldn't tell any war stories (149).

After their initial visit, the significance of Donald's fate is forgotten by them. The older people are prompted to go to see him by a sense of duty (tempered, of course, by curiosity) which makes the appearance of sympathy and concern necessary for the maintenance of their respectability. As Gilligan astutely observes, however, they are not kind. "They are just like that Saunders brat: come to see his scar" (168). Once the horror of its ugliness has impressed itself upon their senses and they have fulfilled their obligation to the rector, Donald ceases to exist for them except as a necessary adjunct to their speculative gossiping about how Cecily will handle the situation. It seems reasonable to conjecture that this reaction is representative of their reaction to the war. Certainly they did their duty -- they knit socks and encouraged young men to enlist --

and undoubtedly their curiosity was aroused by the reported atrocities of the war, but generally, even those reactions were short-lived. Doing business and keeping up with all the details of local intrigues were infinitely more important to them. Hence, they can erase this whole incident from their minds, and proceed as though untouched by the experience of war. Their concept of war can remain intact and they can continue to believe that it offers a glorious opportunity for living fully. For these townspeople, war and passion continue to go hand in hand.

With grim irony, Faulkner develops the character of one of Donald's visitors in order to further comment on one of the great discrepancies between those who went to war and those who remained at home. We are permitted to follow the thoughts of Mrs. Burney, mother of a so-called war hero, who takes full advantage of the new status her son's death has afforded her. Objectively, she knows full well that Dewey, her son, "was not any good" (181), but in playing the role of bereaved mother, she exalts him and in her mind he becomes a noble soldier, "so good to me, so big and strong; brave. . ." (183). In a guilty way, she is pleased that he died in the war. As she goes to visit Donald, we are told that

When she thought of her destination,
of her changed status in the town, above
her dull and quenchless sorrow she knew
a faint pride: the stroke of Fate which
robbed her likewise made of her an aristocrat.
The Mrs. Worthingtons, the Mrs. Saunderses
all spoke to her now as one of them. . . . Her boy had done this for her,

his absence accomplishing that which
his presence had never done, could
never do (180).

At this point, of course, the reader knows the true nature of Dewey's heroism. A preceding chapter-section indicates that it was he who, out of uncontrollable fear, shot Lieutenant Powers, Margaret's husband. By juxtaposing these two incidents, Faulkner clearly delineates the disparity between the townspeople's visions of the opportunities for heroism at the front, and the actual conditions there. The same disparity is underlined quite pointedly in a later meeting between Mrs. Burney and Margaret. Again in the role of bereaved mother, attempting to solicit sympathy, Mrs. Burney comments about the veterans who returned home well, "Them officers come back spry and bragging much as you please. Trust them officers and things not to get hurt!" (258).

For Mrs. Burney and the civilian townspeople of Charlestown, the experience of war carries no tangible or lasting significance. Because their information is a combination of propagandized facts and romantic ideas of heroism which have not had to be tested in reality, they can turn from it just as they can from Donald. They can dissociate themselves from it (and from Donald) simply by virtue of its distance from them. Like the war, Donald's return is, for them, an event which occasioned a certain dutiful interest and caused a certain amount of curious speculation, but generally, it was a minor and temporary ripple on an otherwise placid surface of certainties.

For these citizens of Charlestown, passion and war are intertwined within a single ideal. And just as they continue to value passion in war, they also glorify passion in daily life. In the descriptions of the everyday routines of Charlestown life, careful recognition has been given to the rituals in which various aspects of the passion myth are manifested.

An extreme of the average citizen's response to passion is presented in the novel through the characterization of Januarius Jones. In one sense, Jones caricatures the Decadents' idea of burning always with 'the hard gemlike flame' of passion. Like the aesthetes whom his behaviour parodies, Jones lives wholly in the present. Significantly, he is the only character in the novel who has no past. He is a foundling and desists from either thinking of talking about the past, except for one instance where he fabricates a heart-rending incident from his boyhood as a means of ingratiating himself with Cecily Saunders' mother. It is ironical that he is a Latin scholar who can quote effortlessly from Homer and the classics, but yet has learned nothing from his study of the past which might enrich his present life. Instead, he is totally a creature of the present, "where he pursues sensuous and sensual experiences for the delight afforded by their novelty and immediacy."¹⁹

For Jones as well, only physical sensations are significant. From his perspective, gratification of the senses comes by means of food and sex (setting him apart from his more artistic counterparts like Walter Pater who revered beauty above all else). The importance

of these two values to Jones is established upon his introduction into the novel. His vision of Utopia concurs with the rector's -- eating and sleeping and procreating are, indeed, his ideas of pleasure. He even suggests an extra feature, namely that, as one ages, the vacuum created by the loss of sexual appetite could be filled by compulsions of eating. At one point, the rector ponders aloud, "Man's life need not always be filled with compulsions of either sex or food" (70). For Jones, the answer must be an unequivocal yes! In the novel, his love for food is continually before the reader in the emphasis upon his grotesque obesity. But, in spite of this, his love of food tends to be overshadowed by his other compulsion, sex.

In every respect, Jones is depicted as being motivated by lustful designs. In terms of imagery, he is consistently likened to satyrs and goats, both of which, as Vickery notes, are emblems of lust. His eyes are reminiscent of goat's eyes, partly because of their colour (the colour of urine (226)), but also because they are "obscene and old in sin as a goat's" (67, 286). The satyr and goat imagery relates to his lustfulness in another way, however. Addison Bross has noted this relationship in his discussion of the influence of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings on Faulkner's first novel. He argues very convincingly that several of Beardsley's images and motifs influence the techniques of characterization in Soldiers' Pay. According to Bross, Beardsley frequently associated lust with fat
20
and ugly characters. Certainly, Jones' obesity receives considerable

emphasis in the novel, forming a mild comic relief in an otherwise tension-filled setting. His obesity becomes grotesquely ridiculous in the last chapter, when Jones stalks Emmy in the manner of a slim and nimble cat. Significantly, Cecily Saunders rejects Jones because of the two features which are manifestations of his lechery. She thinks that "he would be fairly decent looking. . .if he were not so fat -- and could dye his eyes another colour" (223). Poor Cecily fails to realize that she emanates the same kind of lustfulness, if only in a more socially acceptable manner.

Bross extends the relationship between obesity and lust in Beardsley and Faulkner by noting that Faulkner clothes Jones, his "fat satyr"²¹ (286), in baggy clothes, an effect which is very typical of Beardsley's method of outfitting his obese figures. Jones is almost monotonously "baggy in gray tweed" (56) throughout the novel. At one point, he is forced to don a pair of the rector's voluminous trousers which, of course, make him appear even baggier.

The associations of Jones with lust which are produced by this imagery are borne out as true by his actions in the novel. He is always poised and ready to attempt seduction, and makes only the most blatant and coarse advances. Described by Faulkner as a "disciple of the cult of boldness with women" (76), Jones never seems to consider whether his sexual overtures will be welcomed. His methods invite repulsion, and it eventually becomes clear that he prefers being repulsed to being accepted, even though he himself may not understand this. In the manner of the Decadents, Jones

values not "the object of experience, but the experience itself." For him, the chase is much more worthwhile than the ultimate conquest. The reader who is aware of the myth of passion senses the power which it holds over Jones. As the novel progresses, Faulkner states this idea more explicitly.

In order for Jones to receive the most sustained enjoyment from the chase, he must provoke a negative reaction in the object of his pursuit. If she accepts his pursuit, the game for him is ruined. Hence, when Cecily unexpectedly complies with his advances by allowing him to kiss her, Jones takes advantage of her passivity but feels disappointed and ridiculous as a result. Afterward, "her frigid polite indifference was unbearable. What a fool he had been! He had ruined everything" (80). For most men, Jones' thoughts would mean that he regretted causing the lady's displeasure, but for Jones, they mean that the chase is temporarily over. His game of pursuit must be halted.

Jones' preference for the chase -- the "experience" -- rather than the conquest -- the "object" -- is made more explicit in a later scene. Again, Cecily is being compliant since she realizes that Jones could damage her reputation if he should tell what he overheard in her conversation with George Farr. As Jones embraces her, "feeling her slim bones," he thinks of her as "epicene" (224). She is "not for maternity, not even for love: a thing for the eye and the mind" (224). He insists that it is not her body that he desires, but only that their embrace should continue. His reactions

and thoughts are described as follows:

He refused to hear her breath as he refused to feel a bodily substance in his arms. Not an ivory carving: this would have body rigidity: not an animal that eats and digests -- this is the heart's desire purged of flesh. "Be quiet," he told himself as much as her, "don't spoil it" (225).

Jones' concept of passion is being demonstrated in this scene.

Ironically, for him to "burn with the hard gemlike flame" of passion necessitates his denial of the life of the person who creates the ecstasy. The person who is Cecily means nothing to Jones; the emotional state which she inspires in him is all that is really important to him. He is described as being in "a chaste Platonic nympholepsy" (225), that state of rapture supposed to be inspired in men by nymphs, that ecstasy of emotion inspired by the unattainable. For the embrace to continue means that this emotional pitch which he has attained will be kept at this its keenest pitch but, of course, the effect is soon destroyed.

No, no, he thought with awakened despair, don't spoil it. But she had moved and her hair brushed his face. Hair. Everyone, anyone, has hair. (To hold it. To hold it.) But it was hair and here was a body in his arms, fragile and delicate it might be, but still a body, a woman (226).

In spite of his efforts to make this "epicene," "paper-Maché Virgin" his own so that his nympholepsy can be a permanent state, Jones loses out, ironically enough to George Farr who, of course, is more demonstrative in his love making.

From Cecily, Jones turns his attention to Emmy. Unlike Cecily, Emmy is genuinely repelled by Jones. She shows no mercy whenever she thwarts his efforts to seduce her. She expresses her hatred violently, and Jones is aware enough of its intensity to back away when she threatens him with the hot iron. But her hatred only increases his interest, an interest which is further intensified when she foils another of his efforts by slamming a door on his fingers. Eventually, pursuing Emmy becomes the focal point of Jones' life.

Emmy had become an obsession with Januarius Jones, such an obsession that it had got completely out of the realm of sex, into that of mathematics, like a paranoia. He manufactured chances to see her, only to be repulsed; he lay in wait for her like a highwayman, he begged, he threatened, he tried physical strength, and he was repulsed. It had got to where, had she acceded suddenly, he would have been completely reft of one of his motivating impulses, of his elemental impulse to live (283).

Once again, it is the experience of the chase which he prefers.

Another aspect of passion though not nearly so extreme as that presented in the treatment of Jones, is present in everyday life in Charlestown. Most of the civilian characters are persuaded that their routine lives of mundanity and boredom possess some significance. As a result, they unconsciously rework the ordinary events of their lives so that these take on greater significance. A case in point is Donald's father, the rector. Although he is supposed to minister to the needs of his parishoners, the rector seems to have

forsaken them in order to give his attention to his garden. Close observation of the rector's manner of tending his garden shows it to closely correspond with the way he treats the events which occur in his life.

Michael Millgate sees the rector's garden as symbolizing²² his withdrawal into illusion. This position is well taken, if we consider together the nature of the garden and the manner in which the rector typically responds to experience. The most outstanding characteristic of the garden is its formal order. The plants and trees are carefully set out to compliment each other and enhance the beauty of the whole. Although the garden is alive with growth, the growth is emphasized as being unnatural. Careful planting and weeding and pruning have removed all traces of what may be considered as natural in nature. Because the Greek-like formal aspects of the garden are emphasized, it becomes emblematic of a kind of sterility, by virtue of its preclusion of the natural.²³ The rector can preserve order in his garden, and by selecting and removing what is undesirable, he can make it a perfect world.

Just as the rector improves upon Nature in his garden, he prunes and refines his interpretations of his experiences so that they, too, possess the orderliness of his garden. In one of his typically heavy-handed assertions, he states that "all truth is unbearable" (318). His own life seems to dramatize this statement, for it has been spent redefining the "truths" which have been "unbearable," dressing them in more tolerable, but untrue, guises. In

this way, the rector is affinitive to Januarius Jones for, Jones too, wished to create his own kind of world.

Faulkner apparently intended us to see the rector as affinitive to Januarius Jones also, in terms of his desire for excitement and sensation in his life. We see this in the illusion he has created of Donald's youth, making it wild and free. In addition, he boasts of his son's non-conformist behaviour, and recounts with pride, Donald's extravagant sexual experiences. Cleanth Brooks expresses a certain dissatisfaction with the rector's exposing Emmy's "shame" within the first minutes of his acquaintance with Jones. According to Brooks, this revelation is a lapse in Faulkner's art, for "even if we grant the rector's innocence and naivete, . . . common sense and good manners would surely have dictated his silence on this point."²⁴ However, the fact that the rector tells Jones that Donald has "dishonored" Emmy, points to the secret importance he places upon sex, and it underlines the subconscious affinity between him and Jones. The same can be said of his showing Jones the chemise which Donald acquired in France.

It is important to remember that the events which the rector recounts to Jones are long past. As well, he believes at this point that Donald is dead. Hence, he can safely invest the events with as many romantic trappings as he chooses. The truth of these events has been silenced and cannot rise up to clutter the neat and orderly way they now form a part of his life. By retelling the experiences, he can participate vicariously in them,

safely deriving personal satisfaction.

However, Donald's return shatters these illusions. He cannot balance the Donald of the past, enhanced by his illusions, with the scarred and passive Donald who has come back from the war. For him, this is a "truth" which is totally "unbearable." To compensate for his inability to bear the new reality of his son, he immediately creates another illusion -- that Donald's health, and with it, his activeness, will return and he will be able to play the role created by his father. Naturally, it becomes impossible for him to maintain this illusion, as Donald's worsening condition and the doctor's prognosis both augur impending death. As he comes to realize the fact that his son is dying, the confusion created in his vision manifests itself in his recurring thought "This is my son, Donald. He is dead."

After Donald's death, he retreats into his garden for solace. There, he begins anew to recreate his previous version of what his son was like. This is suggested in his conversation with Gilligan about the scuffle with Jones. The rector comments, "boys will fight, eh Joe?" and asserts that "Donald fought in his day" (316). The preceding two months in which Donald could not fight, are eliminated from what he considers Donald's "day" in this statement. Joe's response lends the necessary ring of truth to the rector's assertion. He says, "You damn right he did, reverend. I bet he was a son-of-a-gun in his day" (316). The idea that the rector has recaptured his former illusion of Donald is left dangling

at this point, and the novel ends without further reference to Donald. But, given the rector's previously demonstrated propensity for distorting the truth, the reader is confident that he has again retreated into illusion.

Olga Vickery and Frederick Hoffman²⁵ take exception to this interpretation of the rector. They see him as a positive force in the novel. Vickery feels that

Throughout the series of emotional crises occasioned by Donald's return, the rector preserves a balance and sanity lacking in the other characters. The source of his calmness is his acceptance of the inevitability of all experience and the necessity of change. Human life is a matter both of love and death, sorrow and happiness; they do not cease to exist simply because men repudiate them, nor can they be made immune to change or destruction.²⁶

This view tends to approximate the ideas which Vickery must find in the novel to substantiate the thesis of her book, but clearly it does not correspond with Faulkner's portrayal of the rector. The important presence of the garden in the novel illuminates the rector's tendency not to accept experience and change, but to reorder and reform these. In his private world of illusion, his "truths" repudiate the facts that presented themselves in the external world. It is precisely because they exist in his dream world rather than the external world that they are immune to change and destruction.

Stanley Cooperman's interpretation of the rector is much

more to the point. He sees Reverend Mahon as a voice of the nineteenth century, "thoroughly charming, totally good, and completely inept."²⁷ For Cooperman, "the failure to distinguish between surface and substance defines his [the rector's] pathos."²⁸ The rector's values remain unchanged at the end of the novel, the intrusion of the grim reality of war embodied in Donald having had no effect upon him. He still clings to "a value structure based upon sentimentality, feminine delicacy, the glory of manhood through battle, rhetoric and faithful love."²⁹ By embodying these values in so inept and ineffectual a character, Faulkner points out their absurdity and unsuitability in post-war society.

Another of the "civilian" characters whose responses to the wounded Donald are very telling of a set of attitudes prevalent in the early twenties is Cecily Saunders. Her idea of war as a glorious testing ground for heroes parallels the rector's. Her introduction into the novel is accomplished by means of a letter which she wrote to Donald and which Gilligan reads. He gathers from it that she does not love Donald, but rather the glory associated with his role as fighter pilot. To his way of thinking, the letter contains "all the old bunk about knights of the air and the romance of battle, that even the fat crying ones outgrow soon as the excitement is over and uniforms and being wounded ain't only not stylish no more, but it is troublesome" (41). Gilligan's description of her is borne out in later events. As she waits for Donald to arrive from the train station, she thinks, "to be engaged to a man who will

be famous when he gets here . . . it was exactly the thing to do" (87). After her initial confrontation with his scar, Cecily manages (by averting her eyes from it) to hold on to the idea of becoming Donald's wife. Being the wife of a hero still has great romantic appeal to her. Now, too, her role has changed slightly -- from the wife of a hero to a tragic heroine dealt a terrible blow by Fate. In the long run, her greater self-interest wins out over what would be merely a sentimental gesture and she marries George Farr instead of Donald.

More important than her visions of war and glory, however, are the attitudes which Cecily holds toward social and sexual freedom. Her attitudes reflect something of the sexual emancipation of young Americans, which significantly was a result of the war.³⁰ We can say that the loss of passion from the experience of fighting, coincided with a greater emphasis on the promise of passion in matters of daily life on the homefront.

The freedom from nineteenth century attitudes toward sexuality created a new role for Cecily and girls like her. The nation's fashion houses responded by creating a standard of beauty which they promoted in the now widely available and much read fashion magazines. Essential to the contemporary standard of beauty was a slim boyish body. In his description of Cecily, Faulkner emphasizes her pride in her stylish body. She is described at one point as

running her fingers lightly over her
breasts, across her belly, drawing
concentric circles upon her body be-

neath the covers, wondering how it would feel to have a baby, hating that inevitable time when she'd have to have one, blurring her slim epinicity, blurring her body with pain (142-143).

Like the models in the fashion magazines, Cecily chooses clothes which accentuate her figure. Her dresses, mostly of transparent and gauzy material, make her the object of local gossip, but make her infinitely attractive to youths like George Farr. For such young people as George and Cecily, sex has become a game with an accompanying set of rituals. The girl's role is to flaunt her sexuality, to make herself the object of her lover's pursuit; the young man's role is, of course, to pursue. Naturally, in such a game, the eventual conquest takes on an increasing promise of fulfillment. For the sexually emancipated, passion is the essence of this fulfillment.

In his treatment of Cecily, Faulkner exposed the real implications of the new sexual freedom. In this new game of sex, the emphasis was on the player's physical attributes. One's emotional and spiritual nature was rendered unimportant. The physical aspect of a relationship became more important than any emotional involvement which might develop. Quite naturally, the emphasis on the standard concept of beauty, on physical attributes, and on sexual freedom, imposed a certain shallowness of personality on those who responded to the new sexual ethos.

Cecily, for example, has never learned to share her thoughts with another. When she suspects she might be pregnant, she

is left with her anguish bottled inside her because she has never learned how to communicate emotions. When she almost divulges her secret to Margaret, her despair invests her with a degree of pathos which elicits the reader's sympathy.

"I certainly don't need any advice from you," Cecily turned her head, her haughtiness, her anger, were gone and in their place was a thin hopeless despair. Even her voice, her whole attitude had changed. "Don't you see how miserable I am?" she said pitifully. "I didn't mean to be rude to you, but I don't know what to do, I don't know. . . . I am in such trouble: something terrible has happened to me. Please! (266).

Cecily's plea for understanding is never carried beyond that and Margaret is left in the dark about the nature of the trouble. When Cecily tells the rector that she cannot marry Donald because she is "not a good woman any more," she experiences genuine grief, even though it is misdirected. Our last glimpse of Cecily does not augur too well for her future. She arrives home after her honeymoon with George, as we read that

they [Margaret and Joe] saw Cecily's stricken face as she melted graceful and fragile and weeping into her father's arms. And here was Mr. George Farr morose and thunderous behind her. Ignored (306).

We sense that the promise of passion implicit in their game of sex has eluded the honeymooners, and without this promise, their relationship seems futile to both partners. For Cecily, the only role she knows how to play is finished. Somehow, such inner resources as she possesses must be developed to help her to adjust to this new

role. Her last appearance tends to indicate that, for her, this will be a difficult, if not impossible, adjustment to make.

As was noted above, Joe Gilligan disliked Cecily even before he met her because of her romanticism. His dislike takes a new direction as the novel progresses. The manner in which Cecily flaunts her sexuality is totally repugnant to Joe who, having been at the front while the changes in sexual attitudes were taking place at home, still believes in the sacredness of Ideal American Womanhood. In spite of his war experience and in spite of the changes in the society he returns to, Joe and the novel's minor characters who are in the same position, "maintain a moral code rendered obsolete during their absence."³¹ This whole concept is presented in the dance episode in the novel. There, among the young people, the veterans divide themselves off from the others to be referred to as "wall flowers." When Joe arrives, he joins them and Faulkner describes their group as

. . . the eternal country boys of one national mental state, lost in the comparative metropolitan atmosphere of one diametrically opposed to it. To feel provincial: finding that a certain conventional state of behaviour has become inexplicably obsolete overnight. . . . Joe perched among them while they talked loudly, drowning the intimation of dancers they could not emulate, of girls who once waited upon their favours and who now ignored them -- the hangover of warfare in a society tired of warfare. Puzzled and lost, poor devils. Once society drank war, brought them into manhood with a cultivated taste for war; but now society seemed to have found something else for a beverage, while they were not yet accustomed to two and seventy-five percent (198-199).

As they watch the frank and careless sensuality being so openly expressed in the dance ("Look at them two: look where he's got his hand. This is what they call polite dancing is it? I never learned it: I would have got throwed out of any place I ever danced doing that. . .Wow, if that tune ever stops!" (196-197), they become more and more indignant about the treatment of the young ladies. They cannot accept the perfectly obvious fact that Cecily and her girl friends are enjoying it. Girls have not changed that much, is the conclusion they must reach. As one ex-soldier says, "Sure they don't like it. These are nice girls: they will be the mothers of the next generation. Of course they don't like it" (199). But they are never convinced enough to attempt to go to their aid. Instead, they sit in their lonely isolation and feel cheated, as one of them indicates by saying, "We can't do them dances. It ain't just going through the motions. You could learn that I guess." It's -- it's --" he sought vainly for words. He gave it up and continued: "Funny, too. I learned things from French women. . ." (199). While these soldiers may have learned about sex in Europe, they did not learn to discard their old attitudes. For them, an aura of secrecy must surround sexuality. Unlike those in their age group who remained at home during the war, they cannot suddenly loosen the inhibitions inculcated through a lifetime. Significantly, they too, insist on passion in relationships between men and women. The only difference is that their's is apparently an outdated version where the promise of sexual fulfillment is disguised, but of the same importance.

Just as the opening chapters do, the dance episode clearly delineates one of the main differences between the novel's two groups -- veterans and civilians. An examination of the actions of the two major characters who have felt the experience of war -- Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers -- points to other distinctions between these two groups. The most significant of these concerns their search to invest their rootless and aimless lives with some kind of personal meaning. Unlike Cecily and Dr. Gary, who are content to follow the dictates of their own social group, Joe and Margaret act as if the social group does not exist. Any meaning or value must begin and be realized within the individual, rather than being unquestioningly adopted from the group. Free of the restraining preconceptions of what one "should" do, Joe and Margaret are motivated by a totally human response to a situation. This accounts for their decision to accept the responsibility for Donald, seeing him safely home and remaining in Charlestown to care for him, seeing that his father is incapable of doing so. They are the only characters who even see the human problems embodied in the wounded Donald, and as well, the only ones who attempt to solve these in a practical manner.

For Margaret, the decision to accompany Donald means a compromising of her position and dark shadows on her reputation. The townspeople, unable to envisage themselves behaving like her, at once accuse her of a variety of perversities. Because she understands the value of what she is doing, Margaret rises above their gossiping and maintains her sense of self-respect and personal

integrity, so much so that she eventually ceases to interest them.

Margaret's motives are not entirely altruistic, however. She, herself, is caught in a curious emotional limbo as a result of the war. In its early stages, Margaret appears to have had romantic ideas about war which were similar to Cecily's. She attributes these to the temper of the times when "everyone was excited and hysterical, like a big circus" (162). Then,

all soldiers were talking of dying gloriously in battle without really believing it or knowing much about it, and women. . . kind of got the same idea, like the flu -- that what you did today would not matter tomorrow, that there wasn't a tomorrow at all (162-163).

Being blinded by the hysteria and excitement, Margaret married a soldier three days before he sailed for Europe. They appear to have spent the most ideally ecstatic and passionate three days together, and Margaret suffered terrible loneliness after her new husband's departure. Gradually, she resumed her old life, however, and was surprised that she could carry on quite happily without Dick. She began to examine their relationship objectively and came to understand that it contained no firm foundation which could enable it to be lasting. Furthermore, Dick's letters to her were full of sentiments which forced her into a role which she had no desire to play. Rather than deceive him, she chose to write and "call the whole thing off," but he was killed before her letter arrived. This has affected Margaret quite profoundly, for as she explains to Joe,

He died believing that everything was the same between us You see, I feel some way that I wasn't square with him. And so I guess I am trying to make it up to him in some way (164).

She attempts to expiate her guilt by seeing that Donald receives the sense of permanence and continuity which her letter denied Dick. This underlines, for the reader, the great disparity between Margaret's and Cecily's responses to a relationship based primarily on passion.

Margaret is aware that the kind of experience promised by passion is only an illusion. She and Joe and the other veterans wish to shape a new approach to life which does not require that the true nature of life be hidden under the protective guise of passionate illusions. They envisage themselves as free to do so, but free in a very limited way. There is always the possibility that unforeseen circumstances may cause a different outcome than one had planned, but an awareness that such may be the case, allows one a great flexibility in coping with new circumstances.

In this novel, Faulkner has portrayed his perception of passion in its association with war, heightening his portrayal of passionless war by exposing a society which holds passion as its chief value. However, this is but one aspect of his total concept of passion, for in a later novel, Sartoris, to be discussed in the next chapter, he focuses upon what passion means in terms of dying.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 2

1. As John T. Frederick notes in his article,
...the general studies of Olga M. Vickery,
Hyatt H. Waggoner, Michael Millgate, and
Irving Howe devote an average of less than
six pages to Faulkner's first effort in fiction;
and the fact that Soldiers' Pay is not a Yoknapatawpha
story justifies Cleanth Brooks in omitting it altogether in
Faulkner and the Yoknapatawpha Country.

See John T. Frederick, "Anticipation and Achievement in Faulkner's
Soldiers' Pay," Arizona Quarterly 23: (Autumn, 1967), p. 243.

2. A comment by James L. Roberts typifies this kind of criti-
cism. He feels that

Basically, Soldiers' Pay is slight and un-
successful with too many divergent interests,
too little selectivity, and too little direction.

See James L. Roberts, "Experimental Exercises -- Faulkner's Early
Writings," Discourse: A Review of the Liberal Arts, 6(Summer, 1963),
p. 186.

3. This is a summary of Rougemont's theory. For his discussion
of this matter, see Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World,
trans. Montgomery Beligion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956),
pp. 50-51.

4. Ibid., p. 243.

5. Ibid., p. 250.

6. Ibid., p. 257.

7. Ibid., p. 255.

8. Ibid., p. 264.

9. Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return, rev. ed. (London: The Bodley
Head, 1951), p. 28.

10. Stanley Cooperman, World War I and the American Novel (Bal-
timore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 45.

11. Robie Macauley, "Afterword," Soldiers' Pay by William Faulkner, Signet Modern Classic edition (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 229.

12. Ibid., p. 230.

13. Ibid., p. 229.

14. William Faulkner, Soldiers' Pay, 1926, rpt. (New York: Liveright, 1954), p. 56. Subsequent references to the novel are taken from this edition and are included in the text.

15. Macauley, op. cit., p. 230.

16. Ibid., p. 231.

17. Cooperman, op. cit., p. 40.

18. Ibid.

19. Olga M. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 6.

20. See Addison Bross, "Soldiers' Pay and the Art of Aubrey Beardsley," American Quarterly, 19(Spring, 1967), p. 7.

21. Bross also details very carefully, how the satyr is a common figure in Beardsley's drawings. See Ibid., pp. 7-8.

22. Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (London: Constable, 1966), p. 63.

23. This interpretation of the garden opposes that of another critic, Walter Brefowski. He has chosen to see the function of the garden as being "in opposition to the images of death and sterile sophistication which are so prevalent in the other settings." See Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), p. 45.

24. Cleanth Brooks, "Faulkner's First Novel," Southern Review, 6(October, 1970), p. 1057.

25. Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner, rev. ed., Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York: Twayne, 1966), pp. 41-42. Hoffman says:

Only the clergyman father of the hero

seems to retain balance and to see beyond the center of aimless horror. He has a "philosophy" which enables him to survive, a point of view which -- if one wishes to push hard at the absolute unity" of Faulkner's work -- emphasizes particularly an acceptance of the inevitability of evil, both human and non-human. The rector's faith is firmly grounded in an acceptance which is vaguely similar to the endurance and basic integrity of Dilsey.

26. Vickery, op. cit., p. 6.
27. Cooperman, op. cit., p. 159.
28. Ibid., p. 160.
29. Ibid., p. 113.
30. For an elaboration of this point, see Ibid., p. 115.
31. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

SARTORIS: PASSION AND DEATH

Sartoris, like Soldiers' Pay, contains a variety of characters and incidents which are unified by their common belief that passion is a value which can give meaning to life. In particular, Sartoris is concerned with the aspect of passion which is associated with death and the 'proper' manner of dying.

Rougemont's analysis of the passion myth has revealed that a longing for passion is really a longing for death, that the object of passion is death. As a consequence of the myth's emphasis upon death, various rituals have evolved to accompany the process of dying so that it becomes the penultimate experience of life. In Sartoris, through the presentation of young Bayard Sartoris, the reader comes to understand what it means to die according to the passion-filled mode of daring heroism. In the treatment of Horace and Narcissa Benbow, we see the vulgarized version of death-through-passion at work. Rougemont has commented upon the effects resulting from the mass-production of the myth in romantic novels, films and television shows.

The claim to passion put forward by the romantics. . . [has become] a vague yearning after affluent surroundings and exotic adventures, such as a low grade of melodramatic novel can satisfy symbolically . . . passion, although the need of it still disturbs us, is now a

mere sickness of instinct, seldom fatal, usually poisonous and depressing.

These are the symptoms which Horace and Narcissa are suffering from. Hence, they are not responding to real death but instead to a kind of symbolic death which they seek in a love relationship. In the novel, Bayard discovers the meaninglessness of his family's tradition of dying honourably and courageously. The feeling of despair which replaces his illusion about the proper way to die is heightened for the reader by the descriptions of Narcissa's and Horace's gestures in the direction of enriching their lives with "exotic adventures".

In the exploration of the illusion which shrouds the process of dying in Sartoris, the war background is particularly important. As in Soldiers' Pay, war in Sartoris offers the best opportunity of dying with glory and dignity. Again, for the civilians in this novel, war is a glorious call to adventure; enveloped in and sanctioned by idealism, it is regarded as a magnificent testing ground where young men can earn their manhood and die with courage and dignity. These attitudes which were shared by all Americans in the pre-war era, are accentuated in Sartoris because they have been reinforced by sentimentalized and romanticized stories about the Civil War.

In this novel, the national attitudes toward war are embodied in the Sartoris family legend. For the first Sartoris males, the great testing ground for courage and daring had been war. The Carolina Bayard and Colonel John Sartoris, according to the legend, were swashbuckling, sabre-carrying, gentlemen soldiers. Their de-

scendants see them as brave and reckless, daring and gallant, seizing the opportunity offered by the Civil War to prove themselves. Indeed, we are invited by Miss Jenny to sympathize with old Bayard for "having been born as he had, too late for one war and too soon for the next."² She regards this as a "joke which they [the fates] had played on him -- forbidding him the privilege of being buried by men, who would have invented vainglory for him" (374). Clearly, young Bayard and his twin brother expected World War I to allow them ground for glorious and heroic action, just as the Civil War had allowed this for the earlier brothers for whom they were named.

However, young Bayard quickly discovers that there is a great discrepancy between what the Sartoris myth has taught him to expect from war and what battlefield conditions actually are in Europe. All of the references to World War I in the novel imply that one individual's part in the war was infinitesimally small, that there was no room for heroics. Buddy MacCallum's "stumbling references" to his role in the war are indicative of this, for they give

an impression of people, creatures
without initiative or background or
future, caught timelessly in a maze
of solitary conflicting preoccupations,
like bumping tops, against an imminent
but incomprehensible nightmare (320).

Caspey, one of the Sartoris negroes, also discovered that there were no opportunities for heroism and glory in Europe for him. He spent his time overseas working in a labour battalion, virtually the only role negroes were allowed in the war. But because his family expects

him to have taken part in the glories of battle, he fabricates for them, the kind of stories they expect to hear about his heroic deeds. It is against this restrictive background that his rebellion against white supremacy becomes an ironic homage to the Sartoris legend.

Like Caspey, Bayard has a public and a private vision of the war. The public vision comes into play whenever he feels that his listeners expect him to tell a certain kind of story. For example, when he describes his experiences to Rafe MacCallum, he recounts them in the way which MacCallum expects. Consequently, he talks of war, but

Not of combat, but rather of a life
peopled by young men like fallen
angels, and of a meteoric violence
like that of fallen angels, beyond
heaven or hell and partaking of both:
doomed immortality and immortal doom (126).

Had Bayard described the actual combat, his story would have been one of apparently pointless suffering and death. He chooses, at this point, to shroud these aspects of war with overtones of romanticism and glory which disguise the truth. Olga Vickery has noted that here in the quality of the similes, Bayard's description echoes Miss Jenny's
3
account of the Carolina Bayard's raid on the Yankee commissary tent. From this observation, Vickery concludes that Bayard is engaged in the same process of myth-making as Miss Jenny, that like her, he is shrouding the facts of the experience in such emotion-stirring overtones that he is losing sight of the true facts. This description is only Bayard's public vision, however. We are told that the stories he tells Rafe are only "ghosts of a thing high-pitched as hysteria,

like a glare of fallen meteors on the dark retina of the world" (126). Whenever he is alone, however, the "ghosts" assume their real proportions and the truth of what he has seen is no longer avoidable.

The clearest lines between Bayard's public and private vision are drawn in the context of the death of his brother Johnny, the incident which is the ultimate cause of his disillusionment and alienation. The first two of the many references to this event establish the dichotomy in Bayard's consciousness which is to become more and more apparent as the novel progresses. Initially, he recounts the incident for old Bayard and Miss Jenny. In this case, he emphasizes the daring aspects of Johnny's deed.

You couldn't see your hand that morning. Air full of hunks of cloud, and any fool could'a' known that on their side it'd be full of Fokkers that could reach twenty-five thousand, and him on a damn Camel. But he was hell-bent on going up there, damn near to Lille. I couldn't keep him from it. He shot at me (45).

Johnny's attacking an entire squadron of the German airforce virtually singlehandedly is reminiscent of the Carolina Bayard's riding back after anchovies with all of General Pope's army shooting at him. The foolhardiness implicit in Bayard's description is enough to convince his grandfather and great-aunt that Johnny died well, as a Sartoris should. But, as if to reinforce their satisfaction, he adds that the flier who shot Johnny was "Ploekner. . . . He was one of the best they had. Pupil of Richthofen's" (46). Faulkner is careful to point out that Bayard makes these remarks in a voice which is "un-

troubled with vindicated pride' (46), which suggests to the reader that, while Bayard feels the need to justify Johnny's act to his family, he does not share in the pride which he creates for them. As well, the repeated notices in his description of his attempts to keep Johnny from his deed indicate further that he does not regard it in the same way as old Bayard and Miss Jenny.

His private vision of the event is hinted at later that same night when, having had a nightmare about Johnny's death, he feels as though he is being smothered.

. . . he went to the window and flung
the sash crashing upward and leaned
there, gulping air into his lungs like
a man who has been submerged and who
still cannot believe that he has reached
the surface again (48).

Still later in the novel, as he carries out the ritual of burning his brother's things, he thinks to himself about the incident. His memory lacks all traces of daring and foolhardy heroism. As Bayard remembers, the bullets "were all going right into Johnny's thighs. Damn butcher wouldn't even raise his sights a little" (214). This kind of fighting is a far cry from methods the old people seem to remember from the Civil War in which, according to them, gentlemanly rules of conduct were observed by both sides and one could die with honour.

Only once does Bayard share his private vision of Johnny's death with another. When he awakens from a nightmare, the memory he recounts for Narcissa, parallels those which have been torturing

his private consciousness. "It was a brutal tale, without beginning, and crassly and uselessly violent and at times profane and gross, though its very wildness robbed it of offensiveness, just as its grossness kept it from obscenity" (251). His revelations of the true circumstances of Johnny's death denies these circumstances of any glory. Set upon by a German with a more powerful plane and more powerful guns, Johnny was helplessly trapped without any recourse to retaliation. While Johnny himself may have felt his final gesture to be noble and heroic, Bayard saw through to its ultimate meaninglessness. Irrevocably impressed upon his mind is the absurdity and horror of the event, rather than the glory and dignity he was taught to expect it to contain. The Sartoris myth of the greatness of dying has been exposed in all its falseness, for Bayard now knows the truth of what dying actually entails.

His final recollection of this event, occurring after his decision not to shoot himself, ends with an insight into the nature of his despair.

. . . he lay presently in something like a tortured and fitful doze, surrounded by coiling images and shapes of stubborn despair and the ceaseless striving for . . . not vindication so much as comprehension; a hand, no matter whose, to touch him out of his black chaos (323).

Bayard is the only character in the novel who has come to the realization of the absurdity and meaninglessness of death. He alone is aware of the impossibility of dying heroically or grandly or honour-

ably. This knowledge is the cause of his estrangement from those around him, for all the others remain held by a passionate illusion of dying. The intensity of his despair causes him to become obsessed with a longing for death.

Critical opinion generally holds that Bayard's death-wish results from his need to prove himself a Sartoris by dying violently and recklessly.⁴ Several critics feel that this need is off-set by Bayard's fear of death, and that the problem which most deeply affects him is overcoming his essential cowardice.⁵ Such a reading of the novel robs it of much of its complexity. While it is true that Bayard is haunted by a death-wish, both his motivation and the nature of his death-wish cannot be explained as simply as these critics would have us believe. To support their position, these critics cite the examples of the runaway stallion episode and the wild automobile rides which Bayard takes, interpreting these as the sorry imitations offered by Bayard as proof that he is worthy of the name Sartoris. However, these incidents may also be seen as indicative of Bayard's longing to die -- not to die heroically or gloriously, but just to die.

When he verbalizes his death-wish, we see that it contains no passionate illusion about the proper way of dying. Rather, it expresses merely the desire that his life be ended.

"Hell," he said, lying on his back,
staring out the window where nothing
was to be seen, waiting for sleep --
Nothing to be seen and the long, long
span of a man's natural life. Three

score years and ten to drag a stubborn body about the world and cozen its insistent demands. Three score and ten, the Bible said. Seventy years. And he was only twenty-six. Not much more than a third through it. Hell (160).

Bayard's resorting to thoughts of committing suicide further indicates that his concern is more with the fact of dying than the manner in which his death might be accomplished. Indeed, his death must be regarded more as suicide than an attempt to prove himself a Sartoris. The plane he tests is not owned by a renowned designer whose success would bring Bayard fame and glory, but rather by a character described only as "the shabby man," one of "these birds [that] show up here every week with . . . some new kind of mantrap that flies fine -- on paper" (365). The warning which Bayard receives ought to convince him that the plane will fail, for he is told, "If the C.O. won't give him a pilot (and you know we try anything here that has a prop on it), you can gamble it's a washout" (365). He is hardly in the air when this warning is proven true and the plane crashes, bringing him the death he has desired. He accepts suicide as a way of dying which is no more and no less absurd or terrible than any other means. In any event, it is clear that his death is accomplished without the shielding presence of a passionate illusion about dying.

The motivation behind Bayard's death-wish is not merely his desire to prove himself a Sartoris. It comes instead, from the truth which Johnny's death forces him to realize. Previous to this,

the untested illusion about dying, which Bayard had inherited, held the power of investing life with meaning and significance. The Carolina Bayard's foolhardy deed transcended the ordinary in life and made of it a kind of apogee worthy of the highest respect and admiration. The Sartoris family legend, by extolling noble and heroic death, also extolled the value and meaning of life; it has done to life what Miss Jenny's myth-making has done to the story of the Carolina Bayard and Jeb Stuart, so that

what had been a harebrained prank of
two heedless and reckless boys, wild
with their own youth, had become a
gallant and finely tragical focal
point to which the history of the race
had been raised from out the old mias-
mic swamps of spiritual sloth by two
angels, valiantly fallen and strayed,
altering the course of human events
and purging the souls of men (9).

Bayard is the one character who comes to understand the true nature of this illusion about death, and hence the only one who sees life robbed of its significance and in all its absurdity. Because this realization is too powerful for him to bear alone, and because he cannot escape it in life, he seeks and finds death.

There is, in the novel, a neatly reversed image of Bayard in the character of Horace Benbow, the man of words rather than of action. Horace is the antithesis of Bayard in almost every way. Whereas Bayard was an aviator in Europe, thereby seeing the most frightening kind of fighting, Horace went overseas as a Y.M.C.A. secretary, engaged in the petty business of selling gumdrops and dispensing moral advice behind the lines. His most vivid memory of

Europe has nothing to do with fighting, but is of glass blower's cave in Venice! The war has supported, rather than destroyed, his illusions and he has come through it emotionally unscathed. For Bayard, the passionate life originally was the life marked by violent action; for Horace, the passionate life necessitates a withdrawal from the world of action into the world of ideas. Yet, their lives share a common pattern -- that of self-destruction. The main difference is the manner in which destruction is sought by each. Unlike Bayard, Horace maintains the untested illusion that it is possible to die nobly and tragically, and that his life has meaning. These illusions shape his lifestyle and the kind of death he imagines for himself.

Horace's concept of the proper way to die is closely linked with the artistic philosophy of the aesthetic movement of the 1890's in England. He probably became familiar with their ideas when he attended Oxford, for at that time, it remained the stronghold of the Decadents' approach to life. Their philosophy -- especially their definition of success in life given by the esthete of the movement, Walter Pater -- appears to have provided Horace with a modus operandi for living. Somehow he must invest his life with a quickened sense of ecstasy; because there are no ideals to be found without transcending, one must "burn always with the hard gem-like flame" which is created with "great passions" and "the ecstasy and sorrow of love."⁶ Pater and his followers recommended the study of great art to fill one's moments with the highest pleasures; the

suggestion is that one might attain ideals as a passive observer of art treasures created by others.

In his withdrawal from the world of action, Horace has indeed become a spectator -- but of his own life, rather than great art. It is as though he thinks of his life as a drama which is being performed in his imagination, and he is its writer, director, main star, and audience all at the same time. The events which occur in the outer world are taken and transformed into passionately sorrowful and nobly tragic happenings in his own inner world. Often, the language which is used to describe his responses to experience indicates the transcending process which is at work in his imagination. At one point, for example, he sits with Belle Mitchell as she plays the piano. The music is not altogether inspiring for she plays "saccharine melodies. . .that you might hear on any vaudeville stage, and with a shallow skill" (194). In spite of this, Horace can embellish the scene in his thoughts, and he sits

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

The theme of the drama which Horace creates in his life is the form of love which Rougemont has called passion. According to Rougemont, passion is that form of love "which refuses the immediate, avoids dealing with what is near, and if necessary, invents distance in order to exalt itself more completely." Horace believes

that the suffering caused by unfulfilled love results in the addition of sorrow and tragedy to his life, so that he will be transported to the realm of 'real life' spoken of by poets. But, disguised beneath Horace's need to create obstructions to love is the most definite and permanent obstruction of all, death. It is as if he imagined himself as Tristan and the lady of his choice as Iseult, and as if he wanted his life to follow the pattern of one of history's greatest loves -- the joyous suffering of unfulfilled love ending in death. To enhance his life with the transfiguring elements of sorrow and tragedy, he involves himself in relationships which are doomed never to be fulfilled, although he will marry Belle.

In his courting of death, Horace is again an antithetical figure to Bayard. The latter sought death only as an escape from a meaningless existence in life. His passionless death-wish offered no transfiguring process in death. Horace, on the other hand, regards death as the ultimate in transcendence; by means of the suffering of death, his whole life will acquire new meaning. His passionate illusion about death invests both it and his life with a significance which is denied Bayard. Yet, his behaviour comes through as a totally unsatisfactory solution to Bayard's dilemma, for, by comparison, Bayard's despair is more desirable than Horace's insistence upon passionate illusions.

Before becoming involved with Belle Mitchell, Horace had made himself a passionately tragic figure in his strange relationship with his sister, Narcissa. Their love for each other is different

enough in nature from normal brother-sister relationships, to imply a kind of spiritual incest. Their behaviour -- kissing each other "on the mouth" (161), touching each other on the face and knees (172, 175), stroking each other's hair (177), and their jealousy over other lovers -- certainly suggests an abnormal love between them. Cleanth Brooks has noted that in preparing Sartoris for publication, Faulkner changed his original presentation of their relationship by toning down Horace's "conscious acknowledgement of a quasi-incestuous relationship with his sister."⁸ In spite of the toning down, enough remains to alert the reader to Horace's subconscious vision of their relationship. In one sense, it is important in the revelation of his character. Because of the taboo associated with incest, his love for his sister must exist always only in his world of words, in his imagination. It can never progress to complicate and clutter up the peace he imagines he has attained in the real world. By the same token, its unchanging nature allows a measure of sadness to surround it, for their love can never know the joy of fulfillment. To an extent, this relationship is the classic Tristan and Iseult situation of passion. Society poses the great obstruction to the fulfillment of their love, and Narcissa is like Iseult, the unattainable woman. But yet, there is something lacking, for as the drawn sword incident in the Romance of Tristan and Iseult indicates, the obstruction intensifies passion all the more if it is placed there by the lovers. Horace wants to be titillated by the knowledge that his lover could be his if he would allow himself this exquisite delight. Because

this aspect is lacking, he seeks it in a new relationship with Belle Mitchell.

In some ways, Horace's relationship with Narcissa may be seen as a foreshadowing of his adulterous affair with Belle. At the outset, this relationship parallels that of Tristan and Iseult even more closely than the quasi-incestuous love for Narcissa. Belle, like Iseult, already has a husband, and while this, in theory, should make her unattainable, in reality it does not. The lax social and moral taboo associated with adultery makes it quite possible for Horace to contemplate the pleasures of consummation and envisage them as a reality while, of course, preventing them from becoming that. In addition, Belle's husband invests the romance with a new dimension of sorrow and pleasure by threatening to murder the man who dares to wreck his marriage as if he possessed the authority of King Mark. In the beginning then, a romantic affair with Belle offers Horace new heights of pleasure and suffering denied him in his love for Narcissa.

As we might expect from our knowledge of Horace's nature, he dramatizes his affair with Belle in his imagination so that he loses sight of what it really is. He envisions himself as playing the role of the unfortunate lover who is trapped by the charms of the Fatal Woman. In his mind Belle is La Belle Dame Sans merci, the femme fatale incarnate, and he is her tragic victim. He has invested her with the power to destroy him, creating in himself a fear of her power over him which at the same time provides him with a

certain pleasure for it gives his role more timeless and tragic proportions. True to the pattern of other lovers of the Fatal Woman,⁹ he maintains a passive attitude which gives Belle's power over him full sway. Although he fears and dislikes her, he can do nothing for the role he is playing demands his total domination by her. According to other stories of La Belle Dame sans merci, the Woman kills the male whom she loves. For Horace, death by this pattern embodies the greatest sense of sorrow and tragedy imaginable, and this, we feel, is the kind of death he seeks. From this notion comes the passionate illusion about death which holds him so firmly in its grasp and, in turn, delineates the main difference between him and Bayard. As he observes the unfolding of his sorrowful story in his imagination, he sees Belle as "enveloping him like a rich and fatal drug, like a motionless and cloying sea in which he watched himself drown" (257). This description parallels what Horace subconsciously desires to happen, for this kind of obliteration in love offers the opportunity to invest his life and death with dignity and significance.

It is important to remember that this picture of Belle has been created by Horace, and although she appears this way to him, the other characters and the reader see her in a very different light. From all points of view but Horace's, she is ill-chosen to play the role he has designed for her. Her first appearance in the novel contains an objective appraisal of her which we never see in Horace's vision of her. Here, we see her as

a plump youngish woman and her cleverly rouged face showed now a hysterical immersion that was almost repose, but when Miss Jenny broke into her consciousness, with the imminence of departure, this faded quickly and her face resumed its familiar expression of strained and vague dissatisfaction and she protested conventionally but with a petulant sincerity as a well-bred child might (29).

Miss Jenny seems to clearly understand what Belle is like behind the facade of genteel conventionality, for she says that Belle has a "backstairs nature." Although Belle enjoys playing the game which she senses she is involved in, she knows better than to ignore the mundane and practical aspects of the situation. Horace briefly remembers an incident in which she breaks away from a passionate embrace and asks with "intent questioning eyes," "Have you any money, Horace?" (257). Although Horace relates this incident, it has no lasting effect upon him. Such outright mundanity is totally antithetical to the transcending process which guides his life and he quickly erases it from his mind.

Belle is a thoroughly mundane and detranscendentalized figure who, although she differs in cast from the Femme Fatale, nonetheless carries her own kind of destruction. She will never cause Horace to undergo the kind of death he seeks, but ironically enough, she does cause a certain destruction of a different kind, for Belle destroys him spiritually. Because he allows himself to be manipulated by Belle, her grasping selfishness causes the de-

struction of his sensitive nature. We last see him sitting amidst the "crude and blatant newness into which his destiny had brought him" (352), feeling a sad nostalgia for the peaceful life he has sacrificed for Belle. But his propensity to clothe the facts of a situation with illusions allows him to escape from the unpleasant and too real present. Horace's course through the novel proceeds on the basis of a total adherence to illusion, although the facts of experience reveal the inadequacy of such an approach to life. While Horace escapes the intense disillusionment and alienation which Bayard suffers, his pitiful attempts to direct his destiny according to illusion offers no reasonable alternative to allay Bayard's despair.

In the novel, Horace is presented as a foil to Bayard, and although the reader grasps the point of the juxtaposition, the message implicit in Horace's lifestyle is lost to Bayard, for the two interact only briefly. It is Horace's sister, Narcissa, who illuminates for Bayard the inadequacy of a lifestyle based on illusion. Narcissa subsists on a set of illusions which are a variation of those which dominate Horace. Her transcendent ideals are all related to her concept of love, which is based entirely upon the rituals associated with love which are derived from the courtly love tradition. Part of her concept of love seems to include the Renaissance idea (itself using the rhetoric of courtly love) that, in the consummation, there is promised a transcending of the bounds of this mundane world and entry into a realm of pure ecstasy and bliss.

Hence, she is very much attracted to the spiritual "dying" which accompanies the act of love, and she seeks "death" according to this passionate illusion. In actuality, she finds the whole idea of death incomprehensible unless it corresponds in some way with her illusionary vision. It is in this context that her relationship with Bayard is important, for the contrast between their values gives Bayard a different perspective from which to approach the dilemma posed by his situation.

Clearly, on the subject of real physical death (as opposed to her idea of spiritual death), Narcissa holds the opinion which was formerly Bayard's, that is, that death, as the culmination of one's life, is an opportunity to enhance its final moments with dignity, glory and nobility. Always, death is surrounded by a romantic haze which precludes notice of the physical facts of the situation. This tendency is particularly evident in the first presentation of her thoughts about Johnny Sartoris' death. Faulkner writes from Narcissa's point of view that

then he was dead -- but away beyond the seas, and there was no body to be returned clumsily to earth, and so to her he seemed still to be laughing at that word as he had laughed at all the other mouthsounds that stood for repose, who had not waited for Time and its furniture to teach him that the end of wisdom is to dream high enough not to lose the dream in the seeking of it (74).

This is the idea of Johnny's death which Narcissa unquestioningly holds until Bayard relates the actual circumstances of the event to

her. While he speaks, she "stares at him with terror and dread. . . her hand pressed against her mouth" (251) as if to suppress a scream. The incident ends with her weeping "with hopeless and dreadful hysteria" (253), for not only is Bayard's story a shock to her sensibility, but she cannot comprehend the fact that the person relating the incident witnessed -- and even participated in -- the violent event. Her intuitive reaction is not to try and make sense of her bewilderment and perhaps to begin to make the necessary adjustments in her own vision of Johnny's death. Instead, she clings pitifully to her own illusion, blocking this new truth from her consciousness by putting it into her own terms of reference. She extracts a promise from Bayard that he will not drive his car fast anymore, as if that were the key to the problem confronting him, adding

That's the trouble, right there. . .
That's the way you act: doing things
that -- that -- You do things to hurt
yourself just to worry other people.
You don't get any fun out of doing
them (254).

The reader is well prepared for this reaction, for Narcissa has witnessed and been horrified by several of the brothers' previous exploits in which they tested themselves in the face of death. Meeting Johnny after his balloon stunt, "she gazed at him with wide, hopeless eyes, then she clapped her hand to her mouth and went swiftly on, almost running" (73). Her facial expression conveys the same reaction when she sees Bayard in full flight on the runaway stallion (134).

Yet, Bayard is attracted to Narcissa precisely because she can turn away and ignore the truth. After he has told her about Johnny's death, he lies stroking her hair and feeling "about him the valleys of tranquility and peace" with "the peak among the black and savage stars" where his spirit usually resided "far above him" (254). Narcissa's approach to life offers him a way out of his dilemma and his marriage to her represents his attempt to adopt her attitudes.

Repelled as she is by the violence which is always associated with Bayard's behaviour, one wonders why Narcissa ever consents to marry him. Her reason appears to be related to her idea of death in passion, for one very telling incident reveals that with Bayard she may find the kind of passionate death which she desires. In this instance, she is more than a spectator of a brush with death, for she is with Bayard when he attempts to re-enact the wild car ride which resulted in his broken ribs. Her posture is as usual in such situations, for again "her bloodless mouth is open" and she is "beseeching him with her wide, hopeless eyes" (263). Overcome by the frenzied emotional pitch of this experience with real death, Narcissa is, in some way, sexually awakened. In a scene which is somewhat out of character for the placid, serene, and ever unruffled Narcissa (unless one is aware of the illusions which dominate her consciousness), we read that "she clung to him, moving her hands crazily about his face . . . and then her crazed hands were on his face and she was sobbing wildly against his mouth" (263). Although the promise of ecstasy in dying through sex is contained in this

scene, it is the reality of the physical fact of death which keeps intruding into Narcissa's marriage with Bayard. After their marriage, she accompanies him on a possum hunt, and for the first time, looks death squarely in the face. We are told that

Narcissa saw the creature, the dead possum . . . lying on its side in a grinning curve, its eyes closed and its pink, babylike hands doubled against its breast. She looked at the motionless thing with pity and distinct loathing -- such a paradox, its vulpine, skull-like grin and those tiny, human looking hands, and the long rat-like tail of it (285).

Although she could bear this much, she could not tolerate watching Caspey disfigure it. When this is about to happen, her characteristic response appears again, for she "turned and fled, her hand to her mouth" (285).

This event marks some kind of turning point in their marriage. After this, she refuses to go hunting with Bayard, preferring to pretend that this part of life does not exist. Bayard, however, cannot pretend and he continues to go alone. We are told that, after he returned from hunting, they would lie together, "holding to one another in the darkness and the temporary abeyance of his despair and the isolation of that doom he could not escape" (289). Bayard's illusion about death has been irrevocably shattered, and the truth which has replaced it has imprinted itself so firmly upon his consciousness that he cannot escape it. If nothing else, his marriage to Narcissa has taught him that somehow this new truth must be met

and grappled with; the dilemma cannot be solved by running away as Narcissa does.

In spite of her repeated forced confrontations with violent action and death, Narcissa clings to her illusions and, at the end of the novel, has regained the composure of serenity which Bayard had temporarily ruffled. The intervening experiences have taught her nothing about life or herself. She maintains a fixed opinion of herself and what life should and must give her.

One very telling incident in the novel conveys Narcissa's vision of what life should be like. It is a gesture which, divorced from the context in which it occurs, expresses the finest and highest sentiments of romantic love. In this case, however, the context is given the major emphasis. The result is that, while Narcissa can gloss over the actual facts of the situation, the reader cannot, and the discrepancy becomes a tool by which Narcissa's position is ridiculed. She receives a number of anonymous letters from a secret admirer. For her, there is something romantic about being the recipient of love letters, and it is this idea that is so appealing to her. In reality, the letters are practically illiterate and actually obscene in their connotations, so much so that even Miss Jenny (who enjoys reading the lurid Memphis newspaper) handles one with a "gesture of fine and delicate distaste" (68). Although Narcissa declares that they make her feel filthy, she is secretly flattered by the gesture itself. Even though the content of the letters is distasteful to her, she can overlook this. She makes

the appropriate response to such a gesture by tying the letters in ribbon and keeping them in her lingerie drawer, just as if they were the highest and most beautiful expressions of love written to her by some famous poet or knight.

The reader, of course, is aware of the fact that the sender of the letters is the unromantic and rat-like Byron Snopes. In spite of the connotations of his first name, Byron is not equal to the burden which his secret love imposes upon him. His every act parodies the role of the ideal romantic lover, with the most ludicrous of consequences. As if suffering the agony of unrequited love is not enough, Byron must submit to being blackmailed to avoid exposure by Virgil Beard, the sadistic child prodigy who actually writes the letters. When he is finally so overcome with his all-consuming passion as to break into Narcissa's bedroom to fondle her lingerie and lie upon her bed, his hasty retreat ends in a pathetic disaster. He crashes through the glass covering of a shallow flower pit and painfully injures his knee.

Narcissa is unaware that Byron is the letter writer, and this makes their one encounter of extreme interest to the reader. Ironically, she is totally repelled by him. We are told that

she remarked the reddish hair which clothed his arms down to the second joints of his fingers, and remarked with a faint, yet distinct, distaste, and a little curiosity since it was not particularly warm, the fact that his hands and arms were beaded with perspiration (105).

In spite of this, we sense that even if Narcissa did know that this repulsive individual is her secret admirer, her attitude toward the letters would remain unchanged. She would turn away from this truth just as she turned away from the truth about death and shield herself in the safety of her illusions.

In Sartoris, Faulkner has juxtaposed two approaches to life, one based upon passionate illusions about life and death, and the other upon an almost existential perception of the insignificance and absurdity of life when it is devoid of such illusions. Although Bayard's despair is the focal point of the novel, we are not given sufficient insight into it as it stands by itself to fully understand it. It is as though Faulkner wanted to surround it with ambiguity, for taken by themselves, Bayard's motivations are never entirely clear. When they are seen against the background of the theme of passion, however, the rationale behind his actions becomes more accessible to the reader. The concepts of passion and dying which are held by Narcissa and Horace contribute to our understanding of his motivations, and make us aware of the full burden of the dilemma which faces him.

In this novel, the reader is made aware of several of the rituals through which passion is manifested. Sanctuary, originally written in the same year as Sartoris, explores the nature of these and other of passion's rituals, as will be seen in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 3

1. Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), p. 233.
2. William Faulkner, Sartoris, 1929, rpt. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), p. 374. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and are included in the text.
3. Olga M. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 21.
4. See especially Melvin Backman, Faulkner: The Major Years (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Kenneth Richardson, Force and Faith in the Novels of William Faulkner (The Hague: Mouton, 1967); Olga M. Vickery, op. cit., and Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964).
5. See Richardson, op. cit., p. 23, and Vickery, op. cit., p. 20.
6. Walter Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Literature and Art (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 238.
7. Denis de Rougemont, The Myths of Love, trans. Richard Howard (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 41.
8. Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 106.
9. See Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), Chapter 4, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," especially p. 205. Praz feels that Swinburne and Pater reintroduced the Faal Woman theme into English Literature and added new dimensions to her nature.

C H A P T E R 4

SANCTUARY: PASSION AND RITUAL

Sanctuary treats yet another aspect of passion and the effects of its domination of twentieth century values. In this novel, Faulkner is concerned with the ritual forms of behaviour by which passion is manifested in the modern era. These rituals are but pathetic parodies of their archetypal counterparts in the myth of passion. All sense of their original purpose and meaning have been lost. The result of this loss is evidenced in the hollow gestures and absurd posturing which marks the behaviour of the novel's major characters. In Sanctuary, Faulkner also reveals the far-reaching effects which an adherence to their rituals can produce. The story's sorrowful denouement results from the protagonists' inability to understand the nature of the absurd posturing which characterizes their behaviour.

Faulkner's portrayal of Temple Drake serves at once to illustrate these points. When she first appears in the novel, Temple's behaviour epitomizes that of the 1920's flapper. At college, her life was a mad social whirl in which boys and football games were the only things of importance. Her whole life revolved around her evenings out, which were so frequent that "she kept the dates written down in her Latin 'pony,' so she didn't have to bother

about who it was. She'd just dress, and after a while, somebody would call for her." Like Cecily Saunders in Soldiers' Pay, Temple dresses and behaves in a deliberately provocative manner in accordance with the then popular fashions. Any relationships with a young man became a game in which there were predetermined rules for each player. Temple's role in the game may be interpreted as a parody of the courtly ideal of the unattainable woman. The love which the troubadors sang did not look forward to the possession of their lady. Instead, as has already been noted, their love was a transcendent love, a love for an ideal woman rather than a woman of flesh and blood. The sexual instinct was present only in that the troubadors desired to spiritually transcend it.

"Unattainable" in Temple's case means something vastly different than for her courtly predecessors. At this point in time, the ideal of the courtly lady has been degraded to mean merely sexually unattainable. Sexual desires are intensified by the postponing of sexual gratification, and the greatest degree of intensity is what is sought. Consequently, Temple's role is to tease her partner with her sexuality, while refraining from allowing him to possess her. For both players in the game, the denial of sexual gratification serves to heighten, rather than destroy, the game's pleasure.

Temple is so accustomed to the rituals imposed by this role that she cannot adapt to the vastly different environment of the old Frenchman place. She is repelled by the people who live there. To her, they seem to represent the commonplace in life. Their day to

day existence appears as too ordinary, too mundane. She does not like to confront this aspect of life, choosing instead to ignore its existence. Although she is repelled by the people who live at the Old Frenchman place, she continues to respond to them in the context of her game-playing, just as though she were in her college environment and these were average college men. This becomes evident when we consider the manner in which she asks Popeye to return her and Gowan to town. The scene is as follows:

Popeye was leaning against a post, lighting a cigarette. Temple ran on up the broken steps. "Say," she said, "don't you want to drive us to town?"
 He turned his head, the cigarette in his mouth, the match cupped between his hands. Temple's mouth was fixed in that cringing grimace. Popeye leaned the cigarette to the match.
 "No," he said.
 "Come on," Temple said. "It won't take you any time in that Packard. How about it? We'll pay you" (57-58).

The reader knows that Ruby has already warned Temple to leave, and presumably has given her at least an implied understanding of why she should go. As well, Temple is instinctively repelled or frightened by Popeye. In spite of this, the "grimace of taut, toothed coquetry" (56) which she made in her first encounter with Popeye, reappears in this scene and she proceeds as if he were one of her "barbershop jellies" (43), Gowan's name for her dates. Temple's actions are not deliberately designed to provoke Popeye, but her responses have become so automatic, in keeping with the ritual of

sexual teasing, that she is unable to effect a change in them.

It is also significant that, in spite of the drastic change in her environment, Temple continues to attend to her clothes and make-up just as if she were still at the university. When she goes to the bedroom and prepares to go to bed, her actions reveal another of the empty rituals which comprise her life. She senses that some-² time during the night, one of the men will come to her. She is afraid, of course, but her fear adds to the sense of excited anticipation which is mingled with her fear. Hence, she prepares herself so that she will suit the role of a lady submitting at last to her lover. The scene is rendered through the eyes of the novel's 'peeping tom,' appropriately named Tommy.

She didn't lie down at once. She sat upright, quite still, the hat tilted rakishly upon the back of her head. Then she moved the canteen, the dress and the slippers beside her head and drew the raincoat about her legs and lay down, drawing the quilt up, then she sat up and removed the hat and shook her hair out and laid the hat with the other garments and prepared to lie down again. Again she paused. She opened the raincoat and produced a compact from somewhere and, watching her motions in the tiny mirror, she spread and fluffed her hair with her fingers and powdered her face and replaced the compact. . . (83-84).

Temple is so caught up in performing the ritual of the loved one waiting the arrival of her lover, that she fails to see the absurdity of her actions.

Later in the novel Temple's responses repeat in a more perverse manner the sensations she experienced with her former game-playing at college. Having been initiated into full sexual knowledge with Red, she discovers that consummation deprives her game of its essential excitement. It is not until she believes that Red has been murdered that she feels the ecstasy and passion of her approach-and-retreat game of teasing, and now in a much more overtly sexual way.

She was overcome by a sense of bereavement and of physical desire. She thought, "It will never be again," and she sat in a floating swoon of agonized sorrow and erotic longing, thinking of Red's body, watching her hand folding the empty bottle over the glass (286).

When Red does appear, she begs him to go with her to the room she has hired. "I'm on fire. I'm dying" (289) she tells him. Clearly, Temple's responses are diametrically opposed to those of the courtly ideal which she parodies. She longs for the exquisite physical sensations of the actual experience of sexual intercourse. This yearning is how she perceives passion. She is totally incapable of finding in sexual consummation any vestige of a mystical or transfiguring experience.

With an awareness of the motivating forces behind Temple's behaviour, the reader is better prepared for her responses during Goodwin's trial and afterward with her father in Europe. Faulkner makes it clear that two codes of conduct operate in creating her reactions. One, as has been noted, is a parodied form of the code

of courtly love. The other is the code of the society in which she lives, a code which ostensibly appears to ostracize a 'fallen woman.' While she is in the Memphis brothel, Temple can completely disregard society's rules of conduct and give herself up to complete domination by the courtly code. Thus, she can embellish her purely physical relationship with Red so that it is invested with all the outward trappings of a great love affair. While she is in the courtroom, however, society's rules must prevail, and the knowledge that she enjoyed her experiences in the brothel must be her's alone. However, it is quite acceptable for Temple to reveal the circumstances of the rape. These make her a tragic victim of circumstances from the perspective of the people gathered in the courtroom. For them she is as the District Attorney says, a "ruined, defenseless child" (346). Such a reading as this seems to eliminate the difficulty which some critics have had in understanding the motivating force behind Temple's perjury.

It is ironical that Popeye should be responsible for Temple's initiation into passion. For, while Temple is incapable of experiencing passion in any way other than sexually, Popeye is denied access to such exquisite physical sensations. He is sexually impotent, but in spite of this, he wants his life to be full of passion. Hence, the rituals of passion are also present in his life. Although the reader can discern the presence of the rituals, it becomes apparent that each is an inversion of the original upon which it is

modelled.

Consider, for example, Popeye's murdering Tommy. This is an inversion of a typical act of knightly prowess, for Tommy is defending rather than persecuting his lady. As well, Popeye keeps Temple as if she were actually his mistress. In accordance with the role he is playing, he pays for her keep and as well provides her with the luxuries of clothes, perfume, cigarettes and gin. This, too, contains an inversion of the keeper-of-a-mistress role, for Temple is literally a kept woman in that she is more or less imprisoned by Popeye in Miss Reba's brothel. The most obvious inversion of the ritual which Popeye is pretending to enact is, of course, his sexual impotence. The accepted ritual says that a man needs a mistress when he is unusually virile and has an unusually voracious sexual appetite. Popeye satisfies neither of these requirements. As Temple reminds him, "You're not even a man! . . . You, a man, a bold bad man, when you can't even -- when you had to bring a real man in to -- And you hanging over the bed, moaning and slobbering" (278). Throughout the novel, Popeye's behaviour provides a severe indictment of following the empty rituals which are the legacy of the myth of passion.

In Sanctuary, Faulkner explores other forms of these rituals as they pertain to other characters. In addition to showing these modes of behaviour against the extraordinary backdrop of the experiences of a gangster and his 'mistress,' these rituals are

also shown in the context of more routine and ordinary life. Faulkner's treatment of Horace and Narcissa Benbow reveals how courtly gesturing can produce equally harmful consequences in a less dramatic setting. The Benbows first appeared in Sartoris, where they were shown to have a natural propensity to embellish the day to day events of their lives to bring them into line with their exalted self images. Their lives are dominated by rituals which appear to give substance to their illusions about themselves. In Sanctuary, their approach to life is a continuation of that presented in the former novel. Yet, the reader's response to both Horace and Narcissa is apt to differ greatly from the first to the second novel. This difference in reaction may be attributed to the change which occurs in Faulkner's treatment of these characters.

Narcissa, even more than Horace, has passed the ten year interval between the time of each novel without perceptible changes. She continues in her self-created role as the lady of position whom all young men are anxious to court, and is totally satisfied with the picture of herself which this illusion provides. In Sanctuary, as well, she continues to make concerted efforts to prevent the facts of the external world from crowding in upon her inner comfortable and ordered world.

However, in Sanctuary, Faulkner's attitude towards her is clarified for the reader, and she is treated in a radically different manner. Here, the absurdity of her approach to life is revealed without the slightest trace of ambiguity. Even the descriptive

passages reveal Faulkner's position, for whereas Narcissa's serene tranquility was never derided in Sartoris, it is blatantly ridiculed in Sanctuary. In this novel, she has "a broad, stupid, serene face," and her gaze speaks of "that serene and stupid impregnability of heroic statuary" (127). Her retreat from life is more explicitly criticized than previously when Faulkner comments, for example, that "She had never been given to talking, living a life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field" (127). The "air of tranquil and faintly ludicrous tragic disapproval" (127) with which she responds to Horace's involvement in the Goodwin case, typifies the manner in which Faulkner evokes the reader's disapproval of Narcissa.

Her stance as the courtly lady is also put in its proper perspective in this novel. Here, Narcissa knows who her 'lovers' are, and we can no longer so readily excuse her as in the Byron Snopes incident in Sartoris. In Sanctuary, all of her suitors are boys, more than ten years younger than she. This, in itself, effectively distances the reader from Narcissa, for it is difficult to identify with the pleasure she derives from being courted by these immature youths. As well in Sartoris, we were accustomed to Horace's instinctive approval of anything his sister chose to do; but here, Horace makes snide and caustic remarks to Miss Jenny about Narcissa's suitors.

Youth is not the only matter which Narcissa's suitors have in common. The two who are mentioned specifically in the novel,

Gowan Stevens and Herschell Jones, are also dashing examples of the Southern gentleman who was supposed to have flourished in the pre-war South. Gowan especially knows the expectations placed upon him by his role and responds accordingly, sending Narcissa roses and bestowing lavish (and outlandish) compliments upon her and Miss Jenny. By contrast with the gestures of these boys, Eustace Graham's overtures to Narcissa become important in the revelation of her character.

Ostensibly, Eustace is a more suitable man for her to know, by virtue of his age and social position. Yet, his guarded overtures to Narcissa are totally rejected mainly because he is not familiar with the gestures appropriate for a lover. Eustace is in tune with the facts of a situation and has the ability to assess and use these facts to his advantage. Because he is so pragmatic and realistic, he has no time for the subtleties of courtship and does not understand at first that he must take these into account if he wishes to appeal to Narcissa's romantic sensibility. As well, Eustace has a deformity -- a club foot -- which mars the appearance appropriate to a lover. Narcissa makes it quite clear that his attentions are unwelcome, watching him with a "blank enveloping look" (316) as he makes a feeble effort to be witty for her benefit. When he gallantly moves to open the door for her departure, his clumsy, hobbling steps cause her to "put that cold, still unfathomable gaze upon him as though he were a dog or a cow and she waited for it to be out of her path" (318). Eventually, he moves toward her as if to seal the complicity between them, but "her blank calculating gaze was like a wall

surrounding him' (318). Without saying a word, Narcissa lets him know exactly how she feels about his attentions.

Narcissa's illusory self-image completely dominates her life, and enhances it with meaning and significance which it would otherwise lack. Seeing herself as a genteel lady, respectable and pure, she cannot allow her brother to involve their family name in any kind of gossip. The taint of blackness which would mar Horace's reputation would eventually tarnish her's, and this would be intolerable for her. Hence, she nags him to return to Belle so that he will not reawaken the town's interest in their relationship. Horace's motives for leaving are unimportant to her, but at all costs, she must keep the town's gossips from speculating about him. Similarly, it is unimportant to her that Horace is innocent of an illicit affair with Ruby Lamar. She says:

I don't think anything about it.
I don't care. That's what people
in town think. So it doesn't
matter whether it's true or not . . .
The question is, are you going to
stay mixed up with it? When people
already believe you and she are
slipping into my house at night (221).

For Narcissa, the appearance is more important than the truth, and it is the appearance which she is determined to preserve, for as she tells Horace,

. . . this is my home, where I must
spend the rest of my life. . . I don't
care where else you go nor what you
do. I don't care how many women you
have nor who they are. But I cannot

have my brother mixed up with a
woman people are talking about (220).

Narcissa sees herself as a kind of victim of Horace's activities. As well, to the townspeople, she is a genteel and noble lady whose intervention in such disreputable activities is not even to be suspected. Ironically enough, her interference is the catalyst which leads ultimately to Goodwin's death.

Although it is never explicitly stated, all the evidence points to Narcissa as the informer who arouses the interest and indignation of the Baptist church ladies against Ruby and her illegitimate child. When this proves inadequate to persuade Horace to return to his wife in Kinston and leave her good name intact, Narcissa provides the District Attorney with the information he needs to lead him to Temple. This, of course, renders Horace's trump card ineffective at the trial, and presumably allows for Temple's perjury. Ultimately then, it is Narcissa's concern with the rituals by which she lives which results in Horace's despair and Goodwin's death.

An equally strong indictment against Narcissa is made in a short story called "There Was a Queen."⁴ The action in this story occurs during the same year as that of Sanctuary, and Narcissa is treated as possessing the same imperviousness to the facts of experience as in the novel. In this story, Narcissa ruins her own reputation privately so that she can maintain her public image. When she discovers that the obscene letters she had received from Byron Snopes

still exist, she prostitutes herself to a Federal agent for their return. Hence, to preserve her innocence in the face of the world, she destroys it, believing that because no one will ever know, her reputation is safe.

Again, Faulkner's disapproval of Narcissa's behaviour is implicit in his portrayal of her. As in the two novels, the faintly ludicrous and totally inadequate approach to life which she clings to, is exposed in its true worth. Interestingly enough, her character traits have changed very little since they were first presented in Sartoris. She retains the same self-image, and persists in clinging to the same illusions which have shaped her life. The difference lies almost entirely in Faulkner's presentation of these two aspects of her character. In Sartoris, they were seen to be absurd only after a careful reading and then, by implication. In Sanctuary, all traces of this somewhat ambiguous treatment have disappeared and the worthlessness and meaninglessness of Narcissa's values are revealed explicitly.

Just as Faulkner's presentation of Narcissa in the second novel throws a new light upon the values and rituals which comprise her approach to life, his treatment of Horace changes to produce corresponding effects. In Sanctuary, as if to preserve his vision of his own significance and the value of his life, Horace casts himself in a new role. While his new role demands a different ritual, his responses and decisions remain as absurd as formerly, because the

new ritual creates the same illusions for him as the one he has discarded. Blinded by his illusions, he is ill-equipped to be effective in his new role.

Horace's last appearance in Sartoris suggested that his disillusionment with Belle was inevitable. This suggestion is proven true in Sanctuary. Here, Belle is so immersed in mundanity that she cannot appreciate the need in Horace's sensitive nature to transcend the limits of the mundane world and enhance it with significance and meaning. As a Femme fatale, she is a total failure, and Horace becomes more and more dissatisfied with the role her worldly nature forces upon him. The cause of his discontent is neatly depicted in his explanation of why he left Belle. Not surprisingly, it involves a routine task which he performed for her once a week for years. Although he merely carried shrimp from the train station to his home, Horace saw in this act, a highly significant symbolic meaning. As he explains to Ruby Lamar,

I wouldn't mind the carrying it home so much. I could stand that. It's because the package drips. All the way home it drips and drips, until after a while I follow myself to the station and stand aside and watch Horace Benbow take that box off the train and start home with it, changing hands every hundred steps, and I following him, thinking Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk (19).

Horace cannot accept this as the worth of his existence. The thought that life is passing him by (already he is forty-three) without re-

vealing any of the transcendent qualities he believed it to possess is unacceptable to him at this point. Belle has gradually led him to live in her mundane world of rouged faces and Friday shrimp, and his desertion represents an attempt to re-enter the noble and tragic world of his illusions far removed from their routine and boring existence.

Again, his quest is very much related to his concept of what his role should be. In Sanctuary, he is portrayed as a kind of aspiring knight errant, desirous of doing the kinds of deeds that would win the approval of a worthy lady. The problem is that no one sees him in this light. The most he could do for Belle was to carry shrimp. Although he also wants to be admired and respected by his stepdaughter, she totally disregards him. "She would never say, 'Horace, this is Louis or Paul or Whoever' but 'It's just Horace.' Just, you see. . . " (14). Dissatisfied with being "just -- just --" (15) nothing but Horace, he sets out from home in search of adventure in the way of the knights of the Arthurian romances.

Immediately, Ruby Lamar inspires in him the desire to aid her in what he sees as her hopeless situation. Horace is terribly impressed with Ruby, seeing her existence through a romantic haze. As he tells (and retells) his story to Narcissa and Miss Jenny, he emphasizes the fact that "She's out there, doing a nigger's work, that's owned diamonds and automobiles too in her day, and bought them with a harder currency than cash" (130). Moved by her rough and apparently thankless life on the old Frenchman place, Horace

offers to help her if he can, perhaps by sending her something she needs from Jefferson. His gallant gesture is reduced to a parody of the noble deed of a Sir Lancelot or a Sir Tristan, for Ruby asks not for Horace to somehow rid them of the "black and nameless threat" (143) of the monster Popeye, but only for an orange-stick! Still posturing as a knight errant, Horace does, in fact, purchase an orange-stick for her.

This episode is significant for several reasons. First of all, it allows the reader to understand the manner in which Horace alters the actual facts to enhance his vision of reality. We first see this incident through the eyes of an objective narrator who, we presume, is reporting what actually happened. Horace goes to thank Ruby for supper before leaving. Intending to offer her hope that he might return the favour, he does not finish his sentence, for "she was watching him, her face not sullen so much, as cold, still" (20), as if she sees through to the pointlessness of his gesture. Then, joining in his game,

She removed her hands from the fold
of the dress in a turning, flicking
motion; jerked them hidden again.
"With all this dishwater and washing
. . . You might send me an orange-
stick," she said (20).

There is more wryness than seriousness in her request, the reader suspects, but Horace takes it at face value. Later, as he recounts this same scene, we see his vision of Ruby. In his memory, his own stumbling gesture is omitted, and we read only

"Oh," said Horace, "you have a son."

Then she showed him her hands,
flung them out in a gesture at
once spontaneous and diffident
and self-conscious and proud, and
told him he might bring her an
orange-stick (143).

Here, we see the process by which Horace transfigures experience, embellishing it until it meets his expectations. Through this process, Horace has elevated Ruby to a worthy position, and by serving her, has thereby invested his own role with dignity and meaning.

In addition to functioning in character revelation, the orange-stick incident is also used as a foreshadowing device, for it parallels in miniature Horace's involvement in the Goodwin murder case. We are not told for sure that Horace approached Ruby and Lee and offered his services. However, it seems fair to assume that he did so, for here was a magnificent opportunity to aid a damsel in distress. Indeed, his interest and concern seems greater for Ruby and her child than for Lee, as he quickly makes her comfortable in his former home, losing sight of the technically legal aspects of doing so. It is Miss Jenny who reminds him

Ain't that what the lawyers call
collusion? Connivance? It seems
to me you've already had a little
more to do with these folks than
the lawyer in the case should have.
You were out there where it happened
yourself not long ago. Folks might
begin to think you know more than
you've told (140).

Horace wisely accepts her suggestion to move Ruby and the baby to

the hotel, but insists upon taking her all the way there and registering them properly, all the while ignoring the fact that his 'helpfulness' will cause gossip among the townspeople which might eventually affect the outcome of Lee's trial. Horace blatantly persists in taking care of Ruby even when the town has made its feelings known. It is he who pays her hotel bill and spends three days searching for a new place for her to stay, contemplating having her return to his house, even after the Baptist church ladies have so forcibly expressed their views. Had Horace been objectively handling the case as a lawyer should, he would never have permitted this aspect to enter and prejudice beforehand the town and jury against his client.

However, there is more at stake in this issue than the question of Lee's guilt or innocence. The outcome of Horace's involvement has the potential of justifying his approach to life, of showing clearly that it is possible for one's actions to have meaning and to be effectively directed to a grand and noble purpose. Because this aspect of the whole issue drives Horace, he continues to overlook the actual facts of the situation and proceeds on the basis of his own preconceptions. Hence, he continues to trust Narcissa even after he must suspect her of being the informant to the Baptist church ladies. Similarly, it never occurs to him that Clarence Snopes might still be interested in 'dickering with the other party' to resell his important information. As well, when he interviews Temple, he completely ignores the depravity she so obviously flaunts. He automatically assumes that when she is called upon to testify at the trial, she

will tell the truth. All of these oversights mitigate against Horace and combine to reveal the hollowness of the ideals he had trusted so completely.

Temple's perjury and the jury's decision force Horace to confront the events which have taken place from a more objective point of view. While striving to justify the ideals of honour, fairness, and truth which are embodied in his perception of the role of a knight errant, he has succeeded only in exposing their hollowness and inadequacy. While they can operate successfully in his private world, they do not work effectively in the external world. When Temple appears in court, Horace cannot comprehend that his carefully ordered picture of the trial's progress is now incorrect. He sits in stunned bewilderment, making little effort to intervene in the District Attorney's questioning of Temple, and no attempt to cross-examine her or prevent her father from taking her from the courtroom.

Earlier in the novel, while attempting to assimilate the facts of Temple's story, Horace had pondered the knowledge he had acquired through it, thinking

Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realize, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil that we die . . . thinking of the expression he had once seen in the eyes of a dead child, and of other dead: the cooling indignation, the shocked despair fading, leaving two empty globes in which the motionless world lurked profoundly in miniature (265-266).

Although these are Horace's thoughts, the reader suspects that, at

this time, they are only words to him and he does not yet understand their meaning. It is not until Temple's perjury and Lee's death that their truth is fully impressed upon him. He is left in an incoherent, almost comatose state, apparently immune to the life around him. In his last appearance in the novel, he attempts to disprove the realization about evil and his ideals which he has been forced to make by proving to himself that there is no similarity between Temple and his stepdaughter. His final disillusionment comes when his phone call clearly shows that he is wrong. Little Belle's conversation is reminiscent of his photograph of her: on the surface, she is "sweet, inscrutable" (199), but underneath, her face is "older in sin than he would ever be, a face more blurred than sweet" (200). Horace watches the transformation in the picture with "a kind of horror and despair" (200), a response which is echoed in their telephone conversation.

It is at this point that the novel ends, and the reader is left to conjecture how Horace will cope with the terrible knowledge he has acquired. From what we know of him, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that, once the initial shock has worn off, he will accommodate himself to this new truth by retreating once again from life into his inner world of illusions. Most likely, he will find there another role and another ritual which will promise to fulfill his desire for some meaningful action that is in keeping with his exalted self-image. While his previous behaviour implies that he will again replace one ritual and one illusion by others

equally as futile, the reader can here only hypothesize about this matter.

Sanctuary suggests man's propensity to cling to illusions and his need to impose order upon his life by structuring it around ritualized modes of behaviour. A later novel, The Wild Palms, deals more directly with these ideas. In this novel, as in the three which have been discussed above, the major protagonists appear to behave in accordance with certain rules of conduct which are derived from the myth of passion. However, in The Wild Palms, in addition to detailing the rituals and the illusions they create, Faulkner seems concerned with the problem of why the myth of passion wields so much power in the modern era.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 4

1. William Faulkner, Sanctuary, 1931, rpt. (New York: Modern Library, 1932), p. 182. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and are contained in the text.

2. While the reader is not permitted access to Temple's thoughts at this point in the novel, her actions seem to spell out her thoughts.

Temple's head began to move. It turned slowly, as if it were following the passage of someone beyond the wall. It turned on to an excruciating degree, though no other muscle moved, . . . and became motionless in that reverted position. Then it turned back slowly, as though pacing invisible feet beyond the wall, back to the chair against the door (81).

The presence of the chair against the door implies that she expected that someone would try to enter her room. Later, when she recounts her thoughts during these events, there is no doubt that she anticipated that she would not spend the night alone.

3. See, for example, Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 126.

4. The story is contained in William Faulkner, Dr. Martino and Other Stories (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp. 207-224.

CHAPTER 5

THE WILD PALMS: PASSION AND ILLUSION

Of all Faulkner's novels, none has been treated with such critical disdain as The Wild Palms. Since its first appearance in 1939, the difficulty with the novel appears to be caused by its two-part construction. The joining of two apparently unrelated stories, "Wild Palms" and "Old Man," in alternating chapters at first seemed to serve no purpose, appearing to the earliest critics as "a meaningless contrivance or, at best, a Faulknerian joke." Because they have been unable to discern a major theme which would lend an overall unity to the novel, the critics have handled it generally in two ways: either they have treated each story as a separate entity, or they have ignored the novel altogether. It is my view that the theme which gives each story its structure and unites both to form a novel is the theme of passion. However, an interpretation from this new perspective stands to gain from a discussion of the critics' reactions to the novel, for most often the problems which they have encountered can be resolved without difficulty by relating them to various aspects of passion.

The most influential treatment of The Wild Palms has been that of Malcolm Cowley. In his 1946 The Portable Faulkner, he published "Old Man" separately. In his introductory notes, Cowley

wrote that this story is more effective than "Wild Palms" and "gains² by standing alone." Until the late 1950's, Faulkner's original arrangement of the two stories was ignored, and they were published³ separately.

Irving Howe became the first critic to question the view expressed by Cowley and reinforced by Faulkner's publishers. By a detailed examination of the plots of the two stories, he attempted to show that "the two parts of the book are genuinely bound together⁴ through theme and atmosphere." Howe's somewhat revolutionary approach to the novel was given credence when Faulkner made himself available for interviews several years later. On the subject of the interrelationship of "Wild Palms" and "Old Man," Faulkner has been most explicit and consistent in his remarks. He has explained the reasoning behind the novel's curious structure as follows:

To tell the story I wanted to tell, which was the one of the intern and the woman who gave up her family and husband to run off with him. To tell it like that, somehow I had to discover counterpoint for it, so I invented the other story, its complete antithesis, to use as counterpoint. And I did not write those two stories and then cut one into the other. I wrote them as you read it, as the chapters. The chapter of the "Wild Palms," chapter of "River Story," another chapter of the "Wild Palms" and then I used the counterpoint of another chapter of the River Story. Imagined as a musician would do to compose a piece of music in which he needed a balance, a counterpoint.⁵

For the past decade, critical interest in The Wild Palms has focused upon Faulkner's counterpointing technique in attempts to delineate which elements are being counterpointed and to assess the success of this innovative technique. Generally, critics have seen the novel as juxtaposing two antithetical worlds, men, and kinds of love in a society-versus-nature debate in which nature is the victor.⁶ While the contrapuntal technique is felt to be successful to a certain extent, most critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the novel, regarding it as well beneath the standard of excellence set in Faulkner's major works. Most often, their dissatisfaction stems from their interpretation of the "Wild Palms" section. In their view, "Wild Palms" is unsuitable as a companion piece for the far superior "Old Man" because of the treatment accorded its subject -- romantic love.

Such critics usually begin their interpretations from an incorrect assumption. They assume without question, that Faulkner intended the story of Harry and Charlotte to be viewed tragically. They read "Wild Palms" seriously rather than as satire. William Van O'Connor, for example, sees this section as "the tragedy of love in the modern world,"⁷ and Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Peter Swiggart interpret the story as a tragedy brought on by the restrictive influence of Harry's puritan upbringing.⁸ Olga Vickery, too, takes the lovers seriously, seeing "their repudiation of society and their obsessive concern with the individual, however romantic, [as constituting] a necessary and valuable effort to restore the balance between man and society."⁹ Often, these critics see the excesses

in the concept of love being depicted in "Wild Palms," but they do not investigate the implications of these excesses. For some unexplained reason, they insist upon investing this story with tragic proportions, and when it cannot bear such a heavy burden, they say that it fails.¹⁰

If "Wild Palms" is read as a critique of romantic love rather than as a celebration of it, the problems created by the above interpretations no longer exist. Seen from this new perspective, the story of Harry and Charlotte gains in stature and makes an excellent companion piece for "Old Man." In addition, the counterpointing effects become a much more organic part of the novel and reveal the true merits of Faulkner's innovative technique.

Several critics have already dealt with this kind of approach to "Wild Palms," but in both cases, the investigations have been incomplete. Edmond Volpe has stated that the genesis of the novel as a whole "may have been an annoyed reaction to the tendency in literature to romanticize love excessively;" for him, The Wild Palms is an attempt to undercut the idealized romantic love prevalent in novels of the day, especially in those of Faulkner's contemporary, Ernest Hemingway.¹² Indeed, his intention is to show how the events in "Wild Palms" are specifically designed to be inversions of similar events in Hemingway's love stories (notably, A Farewell to Arms). As a result, his discussion tends to approach a mere explication of differences in plotting used by the two authors. Volpe fails to investigate why such differences are present, and thus

fails to contend with the more universal implications posed by Faulkner's treatment of the love theme. The chief merit of Volpe's article is that it leads the reader to approach the story from a new perspective.

A later critic, Walter Brylowski, has made use of this new perspective in his examination of "Wild Palms." Like Volpe, Brylowski interprets the story as a critique of romantic love, but extends this approach by delineating in the story the presence of Rougemont's myth of passion. He uses Rougemont's concept of the myth to account for the romantic excesses of Charlotte's and Harry's love, seeing the two as archetypal lovers in the style of Tristan and Iseult. But Brylowski's investigation ends with his seeing the presence of the myth as "more evidence of Faulkner's tendency toward mythic forms as analogues for his works."¹³ His investigation fails to examine why the passion myth is present in the story and like Volpe, Brylowski fails to explore the implications of the approach he has taken. Yet, it is only by understanding the broader ramifications of Faulkner's disparagement of romantic love and the passion which is its essence that one can understand the meaning of the novel as a whole. Only then can its so-called "failings" be seen in the proper light.¹⁴ I should like to extend the beginnings made by Volpe and Brylowski to first of all examine the "Wild Palms" section, and then show how it functions in relation to "Old Man" to make the novel a unified entity.

As Brylowski has noted, the love story of Charlotte and

Harry closely parallels the archetypal passion of Tristan and Iseult, revealing by implication, all the debilitating effects of a love which has passion as its source. Indeed, it is in this story that Faulkner's previously somewhat muted notices of passion and references to its consequences seem to finally coalesce and give the reader a complete picture of Faulkner's view of the myth which dominates so much of western thought.

According to the legend, the passion of Tristan and Iseult originated in a love potion which banished their will and made them subject to their fate. Faulkner has somewhat updated this same idea, but even in its new form, it appeals to our romantic sensibilities. While Charlotte and Harry do not swallow any such potent elixer, their love begins as suddenly and as mysteriously as if they had. Both abandon themselves to the dramatic effects of love at first sight. Harry has, for all of his twenty-seven years, lived a kind of monastic existence, sacrificing his youth to the pursuit of his dream of being a doctor. At the outset of the story, we are led to believe that he has resigned himself to this virginal way of life, for he says

I have repudiated money and hence love.
Not abjured it, repudiated. I do not
need it; by next year or two years or
five years, I will know to be true what
I now believe to be true: I will not
even need to want it.¹⁵

Yet, when a party invitation appears like a stroke of Fate and opposing the way of life he has chosen, his ambivalence about his

decision is revealed. We read that

he could almost see the guardian of
the old trained peace and resignation
rise to arms, the grim Moses not al-
armed, impervious to alarm, just
gauntly and fanatically interdicting:
No. You will not go. Let well enough
alone. You have peace now; you want no
more (135).

For Harry, peace is not enough, as his inner nature cries out for the
transfiguring experience of the passion which his life has so far
missed. He attends the party, meets Charlotte, and quickly comes
under her spell "drowning, volition and will, in her yellow stare"
(39). Completely captivated by Charlotte, Harry accepts a dinner
invitation for two evenings later at which their love is professed
with all the drama and urgency of a grand passion. After her husband
has gone to bed and left them alone, Charlotte

crushed out the cigarette and rose and
came to where he stood before the cold
hearth and stopped, facing him. "What
to -- Do they call you Harry? What to
do about it, Harry?"
"I don't know. I never was in love
before" (42).

The rapidity of these events, together with the absence of any need
to explain them, is indicative of the mysterious nature of passion
which Faulkner is suggesting. For Harry and Charlotte, as well as
for the majority of Faulkner's readers though, no explanation is
necessary, for this irrational behaviour is entirely appropriate
within the context of the myth of passion from which it is derived.
It is part of the rules of conduct for falling in love and, as such,

at once engages our sympathy, becoming the first step by which the lovers are singled out from the humdrum world and initiated into an exalted section of mankind among whom social barriers cease to exist.

The rules of conduct imposed by the passion myth, become the framework of the story's plot from this point. The concern throughout, is with obstructing the fulfillment of the passion which the lovers feel and again, after the fashion of the Tristan legend, the lovers become the creators of these obstructions so that, through suffering, their love may be intensified and transfigured. There is, for example, the hotel room episode, anxiously planned and anticipated by both as the moment when all of their most exquisite feelings can be expressed in the physical consummation of their love. Not surprisingly to those aware of the myth of passion, Charlotte decides at the last moment, "Not like this. Jesus, not like this" (46) and prolongs and intensifies their longing for each other by leaving before they even take their coats off.

"Don't touch me!" she whispered in a kind of tense fury. "Don't touch me!" Yet, for an instant, he believed she was coming to him; she seemed to sway forward, she turned her head and looked toward the bed with an expression of distraction and despair. Then the key clicked, the door opened, and she was out of the room (50).

While Charlotte's decision seems ostensibly to be based on a rational consideration of her marital obligations, it later becomes clear that it is the promise of the transfiguring experience of passion which

propells her from the room. This whole episode at once typifies how the lovers conduct their relationship from this point to its conclusion.

In fact, the plot moves forward on a series of incidents which are designed specifically (though unconsciously so) by the lovers to obstruct and, therefore, intensify and render more precious, their great passion. Hence, in Chicago Harry decides not to seek new employment; he chooses instead, to sit idly in the park waiting for all of their money to be gone. Then, when they are forced to move on, he can blame Fate rather than himself for this suffering. After this happens, the lovers move on to Wisconsin where they again create a haven for love, but again, one which is doomed by them to be temporary. When their reserves of food are exhausted, they will be forced to move on. But rather than spending their numbered days delighting in each other's company and their good fortune in being alone together, the lovers pursue separate interests. Harry becomes obsessed with a morbid fixation about time, measuring the days remaining in their "idyllic" existence in terms of cans of food.

It seemed to him that he could see the actual numeral, incontrovertible and solitary, in the anonymous identical hierarchy of the lost days; he seemed to see the row of cans on the shelf a half mile away, the dynamic torpedo-like solid shapes which, up to now, had merely dropped one by one, silently and without weight, into that stagnant time which did not advance and which would somehow find for its two

victims, food as it found them
 breath, now in reverse to time,
 time now the mover, advancing
 slow and irrestable blotting the
 cans one by one in steady pro-
 gression as a moving cloud shadow
 blots (114).

The alert reader senses that, as their food supply diminishes, Harry's vision of Charlotte and him as victims of a cruel Fate increases proportionately. A dimension of sorrow and grief imbues their love with an imaginary tragedy which raises it and their lives above the level of ordinary daily life. Harry's solution to the problem of marching time, underlines at once his need to heighten this sense of tragedy. He says to Charlotte, "I wired Mac to come and get you . . . I thought I'd just keep half the twenty-five dollars and stay on here" (118). Again, the solution is perfectly in accord with the Tristan legend, as it is the lover who is attempting to arrange the separation. The myth of passion which glorifies obstructions to love rather than its fulfillment, is operative deep in Harry's subconscious. His choice of separation as the solution to their problem nonetheless suggests an awareness of the rituals by which the myth manifests itself.

The second Chicago interlude is marked by a new kind of forced separation. Charlotte takes a night job, while Harry chooses to do his writing (ironically, always on the subject of unhappy love) during the daytime. True to his previous behaviour, he bemoans the fact that "he was awake mostly while she slept and vice versa" (122). Yet, it never occurs to him that his working day is not strictly scheduled by an employer as Charlotte's is and that he could rearrange

his hours to correspond with her's. Indeed, instead of making this logical change in his own schedule, they decide to desert this potentially comfortable existence for one which has more potential for fatality and doom. In Chicago, Harry makes a discovery which provides the impetus for them to move on: he had

turned into a husband . . . exactly like
any husband . . . the doomed worm blind
to all passion and dead to all hope and
not even knowing it, oblivious and un-
aware in the face of all darkness. . . . (132).

As he explains to McCord about their new-found comfort, he could finally appreciate the difference between their way of life in the Wisconsin retreat and in Chicago.

. . . the starving was nothing, it could
have done nothing but kill us, while this
was worse than death or division even: it
was the mausoleum of love, it was the
stinking catafalque of the dead corpse
borne between the olfactoryless walking
shapes of the immortal unsentient demand-
ing ancient meat (139).

Once again, Harry sees himself as a victim, believing that the world has no place left in it for love: "Of course, we can't beat Them; we are doomed of course" (141). Harry envisages a certain role for himself, which elevates him above the common lot. We see this when he explains to McCord that

crows and sparrows get shot out of trees
or drowned by floods or killed by hurri-
canes and fires, but not hawks. And maybe
I can be the consort of a falcon, even if
I am a sparrow (141).

It is his determination to maintain this exalted position which

impels Harry to accept the job in Utah.

In Brylowski's investigation of the analogous plot structures of "Wild Palms" and the Romance of Tristan and Iseult, certain similar elements which are essential to a comprehensive understanding of why the passion myth figures so prominently in Faulkner's tale are not mentioned. Central to Rougemont's observations and certainly applicable to "Wild Palms," but lacking in Brylowski's analysis, is the idea that Tristan and Iseult are in love with love rather than with each other.

What they love is love and being in love. . . . Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving, far more than he loves Iseult the Fair. And Iseult does nothing to hold Tristan. All she needs is her passionate dream. Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are.¹⁶

This is precisely the case with Charlotte and Harry. Charlotte especially, has a passionate dream about love, for as she tells Harry

. . . the second time I ever saw you, I learned what I had read in books but I had never actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it cheap, you have cheated yourself (48).

Charlotte has made of love, an absolute; she has given an existent form to the abstraction and sees love as something which enters the

lives of a chosen few. Her aim is to be one of the chosen, and Harry functions only as a kind of accessory.

Michael Millgate has put Charlotte's vision of love in its proper perspective by saying that she

has an ideal conception of love as a kind of Holy Grail which only the worthy are permitted to see and hold, and the restless journeys which she and Willbourne make about the face of the continent are for them, a dedicated search for the Grail, an increasingly desperate attempt to seize and perpetuate the quintessential experience and condition of love.¹⁷

At first, Harry does not share Charlotte's dedication to this concept. Not until the second Chicago episode, does he awaken to an understanding of her vision. But although they then have the same idea of love, they do not love each other in the way that they love the idea of being in love. As one critic has pointed out, "when they are not talking about love or making love, they move on parallel but separate tracks."¹⁸ At all other times, they are like strangers who have nothing in common. Charlotte always seems to be active, taking advantage of their situation to pursue her own interests, while Harry does nothing; he is "merely existing in a drowsy and foetus-like state, passive and almost un sentient, in the womb of solitude and peace" (110). Yet, this is all Charlotte wants, for as she says to Harry at one point

My God, I never in my life saw anybody try as hard to be a husband as you do. Listen to me, you lug. If it was just

a successful husband and food and a
 bed I wanted, why the hell do you
 think I am here instead of back there
 where I had them? (116-117)

What Charlotte wants is love and being in love -- not Harry.

Further evidence of this is present in the manner in which the physical aspect of their relationship is treated by Faulkner. Like Tristan and Iseult, Harry and Charlotte prefer to postpone sexual consummation of their love rather than to take advantage of the situation which they have sacrificed everything for, namely, being alone together. There is the hotel room episode already discussed, for example. This incident is typical of the way they treat physical love. The attitude expressed in it, recurs throughout their relationship but is underlined near the end of the story when Charlotte attempts to persuade Harry to perform an abortion. At this point, they would argue and "then they would lie, holding one another, fully dressed now, in a sort of peace for a time. . .Not touching otherwise, they kissed as brother and sister might" (218-219).

The compact which Charlotte forces Harry to agree to, becomes the most telling obstruction of all to the fulfillment of their passion, when it is considered in the light of the Romance of Tristan and Iseult. In the Romance, Tristan at one point, places his drawn sword between himself and Iseult, even though they are lying down fully clothed. In this case, the obstruction cannot even obliquely be blamed on society or circumstance or Fate. Tristan himself has set the obstacle, significantly, at his own cost. As

Rougemont observes, "Since Tristan himself sets up the obstruction, it is no longer one that he can overcome! . . . The most serious obstruction is thus the one preferred above all. It is the one most suited to intensifying passion."¹⁹ The most serious obstruction, the greatest obstruction of all, is of course, death. As Rougemont concludes, "Tristan's inclination for a deliberate obstruction turns out to be a desire for death and an advance in the direction of death!"²⁰

Charlotte's responses and decisions during the incident involving the douche bag seem to be indicative of her desire for death. Throughout this episode, her rational capacities appear to have capitulated entirely to the irrationality of the passion myth. This is particularly evident when she recounts her thoughts for Harry:

I remember somebody telling me once, I was young then, that when people loved, hard, really loved each other, they didn't have children, the seed got burned up in the love, the passion. Maybe I believed it. . . . Or maybe I just hoped (205).

As if overwhelmed by the dictates of her subconscious, Charlotte invokes this new obstruction -- a pregnancy which, in turn, necessitates an abortion which, considering Harry's attitude, involves a tremendous risk to her life. Her behaviour lends itself quite readily to being interpreted as an advance in the direction of death. It is as if she sees her dying for love in this fashion as an opportunity for a kind of transfiguration which will redeem her destiny and will ensure that her life has had meaning.

My interpretation of these events is of course, a hypothetical one. Yet it becomes necessary to offer such a hypothesis in the case of this particular turn of events in the story. Without the analogy to the passion myth, the rationale behind Charlotte's responses and decisions are lost to the reader. Her choices then appear as mere romantic excesses which make her a ridiculous rather than a pathetic and potentially tragic figure. The impact of the story is greatly diminished and one comes to appreciate the difficulty which earlier critics have had in giving these choices a purely literal interpretation.

While Charlotte plays the archetypal role established by Iseult in the Romance through to its disastrous conclusion, Harry chooses not to follow the pattern set by his earlier counterpart. Hence, he deliberately destroys the cyanide capsule which Rat brings him. Brylowski evades the implications of this significant deviation from the Romance. For him, "Faulkner has gone the Romance one better in insisting on the meaning of passion after the death of Charlotte . . . at the end there is only Harry Wilbourne's final affirmation of his wish to enjoy the full pain of punishment."²¹ However, close analysis of the final pages of "Wild Palms" disproves Brylowski's interpretation and reveals the reason for this disparity with the Romance which it otherwise so closely parallels.

During the first days of imprisonment before his trial, Harry moves in an indistinct blur, trying to make some sense of the jumbled feelings which clog his brain. Rat's appearance clari-

fies and yet confuses these, for Harry is left to ponder why he rejected Rat's offer of bail and a railroad ticket so that he could jump that bail. In his effort to persuade Harry to accept his generous offer, Rat tells him to think of Charlotte, and Harry quickly replies

I wish I could stop. I wish I could.
No I don't. Maybe that's it. Maybe
that's the reason -- "Maybe that was;
that was the first time when he almost
touched it. But not yet; and that was
alright too; it would return; he would
find it, hold it, when the time was
ready" (312).

This brief and passing insight into his own thoughts is adumbrated by his wish to understand why Rat wants him to be gone, as if he senses but cannot explain some inherent relationship between the two ideas. Eventually, both questions disappear from his mind and the previous foggy blur of his days returns.

. . . he had even learned to sleep again,
finding sometimes that he had slept be-
tween shiftings of his hands upon the
sweating bars . . . he did not even remember
that Rittenmeyer's visit had gone com-
pletely out of his mind (313).

By comparison with these hazy reactions, he emerges quite suddenly from his dreamlike state noticing something in the view from his cell which had previously escaped his attention, yet "how he failed to see it before, he did not know" (314). The object which catches his eye is the concrete hull of one of the emergency ships built in 1918 and never finished. This abandoned and rotting ship becomes associated with Charlotte and their love in his mind when he thinks

"If we had known about it, we could probably have lived there for the four days and saved ten dollars" (314). Later, after the ordeal of Charlotte's funeral, his previous thoughts about the old ship and his dead lover again come together in his mind. His insight is sudden and penetrating, as is evidenced in the involuted manner in which his thoughts are expressed.

Only that can't be all of it. . . . It can't be. The waste. Not of meat . . . They found that out twenty years ago, preserving nations and justifying mottoes -- granted the nations the meat preserved, are worth the preserving with the meat it took gone (316).

"Twenty years ago" would, of course, be 1918, the year in which World War I ended, and the old ship became useless and was abandoned to rot. As Volpe observes about this passage

This strange and startling reference to the war to end all wars, to the war that revealed to a generation the hollowness of its ideals, places Charlotte's death on a par with the death of those who died in vain.²²

Charlotte's shining ideal -- a passionate love which is denied fulfillment in life -- has proved as false as those which led so many men to their death in the Great War. Its falseness and hollowness makes her life and death as much a waste as theirs. The reader, especially the reader of 1939, can make this association quite easily. Yet, Harry is still not ready to accept this startling new thought.

In an effort to justify what has happened in his life and invest it with meaning, he rationalizes that "Surely memory exists

independent of the flesh" (316). But he knows all the while that this is a logical impossibility. "Because it wouldn't know it was memory. . . . It wouldn't know what it was it remembered. So there's got to be the old meat, the old frail eradicable meat" (316). The central truth toward which his mind is working still eludes him, however, for "That was the second time he almost got it. But it escaped him again" (316).

Not surprisingly, it is with Rat's second visit, this time after his trial, that he comes to understand why he has to go on living. This time, Rat encourages him to choose suicide as an alternative to fifty years of imprisonment. As before, Harry considers why he must refuse and, at the same time, why Rat has bothered to make this alternative possible. He thinks at first that Rat has brought the cyanide capsule because he is honouring a promise to Charlotte, but eventually he senses that something more than this is motivating Rat. "I'm not doing it for you. . . . Get that out of your damned head" (323), Rat tells him before he leaves.

Rat, himself, believes that he is acting purely in response to Charlotte's wishes. Yet, subconsciously this is not the case. For, like Charlotte and Harry, Rat, too, has a vision of the proper course and conclusion for the love story which has filled his life. With Harry no longer present as an ever constant reminder of his wife's adultery, he is free to make of her memory whatever he chooses, even to thinking that she would have returned to him eventually, just as he had always hoped she would.

Rat's need to have Harry out of the picture becomes the catalyst by which Harry comes to understand why he must endure his sentence rather than commit suicide. After Rat leaves, Harry stares again at the rotting ship and there is finally a "simple falling of a jumbled pattern" (323) in his mind. His sudden insight tells him that

. . . it wasn't just memory. Memory was just half of it, it wasn't enough . . . So it was the old meat after all, no matter how old. Because if memory exists outside of the flesh, it won't be memory because it won't know what it remembers so when she became not then half of memory became not and if I become not then all of remembering will cease to be. -- Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief (324).

At the end, Harry realizes that the love for which he has sacrificed everything has amounted to nothing. All of the exquisite suffering of his passion has had no real meaning; as soon as he is dead, it will be as if it had never existed. The grand and noble passion which Harry believed had the power to enhance his petty existence with significance and make his life meaningful, has failed. Volpe feels that Harry's insight is, in effect, a refutation of Charlotte's concept of love as an absolute which does not die, but leaves you if you are not worthy of it. "Neither the love nor the mere reflection of it in memory exists without the living human flesh that created it." ²³ But Volpe misses the point that Harry refuses to accept his newly found knowledge in spite of the fact that he recognizes the truth it contains. This is why Harry thinks he has chosen to serve

his sentence rather than to commit suicide. For him, grief is better than nothing.

Harry's realization of the failure of his efforts to attach some kind of central meaning to his life is relevant in another context in "Wild Palms," which anticipates and acts as a comment upon Harry's story. The first chapter of "Wild Palms" is narrated through the consciousness of a doctor who otherwise is only a minor character in the story. Hindsight enables the reader to see, however, that he is an excellent reflector to Harry in that they are of similar backgrounds, have similar aspirations, and most important, come to similar realizations. Indeed, the techniques and language of the story's first chapter anticipates that of the final one.

The doctor is introduced as a man who has never experienced passion himself, but who has looked to passion as the source which invests life with beauty and meaning. In a way, he is what Harry might have become, had he not met Charlotte. Even though he has not sought passion, he, too, believes in its potential to enrich life and sees it as something "bright" and "wild"

which had somehow passed him up when
he had been young enough, worthy
enough, and to whose loss he believed
he had not only become reconciled, but
had been both fortunate and right in
having been elected to lose (279).

Consciously, the doctor sees passion as a kind of malignant disease which he is lucky to have escaped the ravages of. But unconsciously, his feelings display the same ambivalence toward a passionless life as Harry's.

At forty-eight, the doctor feels that life has passed him by. He has spent all of his years in the same small town, "including the four years at the State University's medical school and the two years as an intern in New Orleans" (4) when he was still there in spirit. His life has followed a neat routine, made more neat and more routine by his marriage to a woman of his father's choosing. Their life together has been anything but full of passion, and he has never felt the divine transport to the realm of ecstasy promised in the sexual experience. But he holds fast to his belief that such blissful ecstasy is possible and sees in this passion between the sexes the potential of a life enriched with meaning. As a landlord, he deliberately feeds this illusion. His description of Cofer, the rental agent, is equally applicable to himself, for he too

is apparently in the business of renting beach cottages for the same reason or under the same compulsion, vicarious need, which drives certain people in cities to equip and supply rooms to clandestine and fictitious names. . . (11)

As with his other tenants, the doctor is quick to surmise the set of circumstances which has brought Charlotte and Harry to his cottages. Even without Cofer's opinion, he knows that the two are not married. Yet, he also senses that Charlotte has borne children and that she has deserted them and her real husband for her lover. He romanticizes about the strong feelings which might have resulted in such a drastic course of action, but his vision is somehow incomplete, for something is different about these lovers.

Say she had come to hate the race of men

enough to desert her husband and children; good. Yet, to have gone not only to another man, but to live apparently in penury, and herself sick, really sick. Or to have deserted husband and children for another man and poverty, and then to have -- to have -- to -- (11)

Something about the lovers, in spite of the fact that they have had the courage to forsake the world for their love, disturbs the doctor. There is a foreboding aura around them, and although it arouses his curiosity and stirs his romanticism, it seems, at the same time, to warn him that he will be happier without knowing the lovers' secret. He realizes this when he goes with Harry to assist Charlotte, but it is too late then, for

the veil which separated him from the truth was going now, dissolving now, it was about to part now and now he did not want to see what was behind it; he knew that, for the sake of his peace of mind forever afterward, he did not dare and he knew that it was too late now and that he could not help himself (16).

When the veil which has hidden the truth is lifted and he knows that Charlotte is dying of a bungled abortion, his emotional state reveals that this knowledge cannot be tossed away. His illusion about the potential of passionate love to invest one's life with significance must be discarded, for it is false.

Because this was it, this the anger and outrage which would alternate with the despair tomorrow and tomorrow. Why did you have to tell me? he thought. The others didn't tell me, upset me, didn't bring here what you brought, though I don't know what they might have taken away (19).

Such love, in this case, has not brought the transfiguring experience thought to be embodied in passion, but has brought death, and not a grand and noble death, but an absurd and suffering one which belittles rather than enhances the affair which it culminates. The old doctor, like Harry, comes to realize that his illusion about passion and life and death is false. Midway through the novel, Harry is ironically chosen to mouth the view the "you can live a pretty happy a long time on illusion. Maybe you aren't happy any other time" (198). It seems that "Wild Palms" dramatizes this statement in showing the despair which results when the illusion of passion is removed from life.

By examining "Wild Palms" in the light of the myth of passion, the reader comes to understand this section of Faulkner's novel as a kind of dramatization of the effects of choosing to live in accordance with the 'rules' dictated by passionate illusions. The lovers imagine themselves as chosen by Fate to undergo great suffering for love. Yet, as has been pointed out, they have created their own suffering destinies in an effort to extricate themselves from the multitudes of human beings whose lives are of no consequence. It is from this point of view that the love story makes a fitting companion piece for "Old Man," and it is from this perspective that Faulkner's technique of counterpoint becomes more meaningful in the context of the novel as a whole.

To date, most criticism has concentrated upon the differences between the two stories, perhaps taking their cue from Faulk-

ner himself, who has said

To me, it seemed necessary to counterpoint the story of Harry and Charlotte, which I did with the complete anti-thesis -- a man that had a woman he didn't want and was going into infinite trouble even as far as going into jail to get rid of her.²⁴

Certainly there are many differences between the two stories, but it is my view that these differences are not as startling as they may first appear. In fact, for the most part, they are merely new twists given to the treatment of the same basic theme. Consequently, it is best to approach "Old Man" from the point of view of its similarities to "Wild Palms" in its treatment of the role of passionate illusions.

These similarities are most clearly delineated if the visions of their respective protagonists are considered. Although the circumstances of each story are markedly different, the reader can appreciate that essentially, both Harry and the tall convict are doomed by their self-conceived ideas about what life should be. Thus, Harry is susceptible to Charlotte's charms because his life of poverty and drudgery has compelled him to believe that there must be something more to youth than he has experienced.

He seemed to see them: the empty years in which his youth had vanished -- the years for wild oats and for daring, for the passionate tragic ephemeral loves of adolescence, the girl- and boy-white, the wild importunate fumbling flesh, which had not been for him (34).

Hence, Harry envisages the possibility of an ideal youth which he has missed, and it is this illusory ideal which makes him easy prey for the passionate Charlotte. Although the tall convict is not lured by a vision of things which might have been, his idealization of a glorious future produces similar disastrous results for him. In his teens, he had been an avid reader of detective stories about the "Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such" (23). Their life of perpetual excitement was far removed from the dull life at "his Mississippi hill home, working hard all day long and drinking a little corn whiskey on Saturday nights and gambling." ²⁵ Yet, this dreamy youth comes to see himself as somehow better than these fantastic individuals, for he eventually believes that he can commit the perfect crime. At first, this image of himself as the successful train robber is a private one, and no one else knows he has

saved the paperbacks for two years, reading and rereading them, memorizing them, comparing and weighing story and method against story and method, taking the good from each and discarding the dross as his workable plan emerged (24).

Indeed, he later had the feeling that, all along, he never really intended to put this plan into actual use. But he fancied himself in love with a girl who had a passionate dream of her destiny and a fate "in which a fast car, filled with authentic coloured glass and machine guns" (338) could fit beautifully. Seeking to impress her with his worthiness, the tall convict divulged his plan to her. Spurred on by her encouragement, he attempted to put his plan into

action, so that he could prove himself to be the kind of man his sweetheart desired in a lover. Like Harry, then, he is led astray by an illusory ideal of what his life could be. His decision to act upon his plan, stems like Harry's decision to quit his internship and run away with Charlotte, from his vision of a fuller and richer life in which he is the daring hero in the eyes of his lady love.

The failure of his plan disillusiones the tall convict, and he is grateful to be secure from the world. He regards prison rather as a refuge from the real world and appreciates the feelings of security which the monotonous routine of his days in jail provide. Here, there is no need to prove himself and nothing is expected of him, except that he work hard. Everything is in the hands of the authorities. The tall convict wants to believe that he need only exist and follow instructions and all will be well, for he has become afraid of life.

It is with the second "Wild Palms" episode that the reader begins to understand the operation of Faulkner's countrapuntal technique in the two stories. At this point, one is struck by the totally antithetical aspirations of their respective protagonists. While the lovers are at last giving full vent to their pent up longing for a passionate life, the convict wants only that the uncomplicated routine of prison life should continue for him. The lovers have demanded and ostensibly obtained the freedom to shape their own destinies, while the convict wants no part of such freedom. This

observation serves as the basis from which the reader is led to construct a series of contrapuntal relationships between the two stories.

Central to these relationships is the idea of the flood. In "Old Man," the flood is a very real presence. From the newspaper accounts of its progress downstream, the prisoners come to feel as though they are doomed. They are helpless to stop its approach; their fate seems fore-ordained by the flood which draws nearer daily. The lovers of "Wild Palms" are also caught in a "flood." In their case, however, the flood is a metaphorical one, a flood of passion, created by the lovers themselves to give substance to their passionate illusions about life. The flood of passion motif which recurs throughout "Wild Palms" is introduced when Harry and Charlotte first meet. Significantly, Charlotte's eyes are yellow, identical in colour to the flooded Mississippi. Immediately, Harry feels himself "drowning, volition and will, in [her] yellow stare." (39). Such images forcefully bring to the reader's mind that other more tangible yellow flood in which people really are being drowned. When the two floods are considered together, the lovers' plight is greatly diminished by mere contrast. Harry's initiation into the flood of passion, coming as it does directly after descriptions of the literal flood of "Old Man" can then be seen in its proper light. From this perspective, it lacks the dimension of tragedy which most critics have wanted to give it. The constant repetition of "yellow" whenever Charlotte's eyes are mentioned, further strengthens the

reader's awareness of the great disparities between the "floods" of the two stories, and serve as a vehicle by which Faulkner's intentions are revealed.

The attitudes toward real floods and drowning which the lovers express also function as part of the contrapuntal technique. For example, Charlotte gazes over a peaceful lake from the train and comments

I love water. . . . That's where to die.
Not in the hot air, above the hot
ground, to wait hours for your blood
to get cool enough to let you sleep
and even weeks for your hair to stop
growing. The water, the cool, to cool
you quick so you can sleep, to wash out
of your brain and out of your eyes and
out of your blood, all you ever saw and
thought and felt and wanted and denied (58).

Clearly, her vision of death by water is very different from the actuality of drowning. Her poetic language invests drowning with a certain beauty and glamour. But the reader sees this attitude and the language by which it is expressed as very typical of Charlotte. This particular instance serves to further alert the reader to Charlotte's determination to find something glamorous and exciting in death as well as in life. Coming as it does before descriptions of the real flood and the hardships it is causing, Charlotte's romantic vision of drowning is effectively undercut. Faulkner achieves similar results in the next episode of "Wild Palms" in the context of Charlotte's romantic vision of love. She tells Harry

They say love dies between two people.
That's wrong. It doesn't die. It just

leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn't die; you're the one that dies. It's like the ocean; if you' no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die. You die anyway, but I had rather drown in the ocean than be burned up unto a strip of dead beach and be dried away by the sun into a little foul smear with no name to it (83).

Through such scenes as this, the reader comes to understand the values which dictate Charlotte's life style. Just as she gives to "Love" the ability to differentiate between the worthy and unworthy, she invests the ocean with a sentient capacity. The sheer ridiculousness of this notion is underlined in the following "Old Man" section where Faulkner concentrates on the totally irrational behaviour of the flood water as it twice reverses direction on the bewildered convict. The terrifying chaos of the flood is made clear to the reader in the following passage where the convict watches the beginning of the second current reversal:

he glared over his shoulder at it for a full minute out of that attenuation far beyond the point of outrage where even suffering, the capability of being further affronted, had ceased, from which he now contemplated with savage and invulnerable curiosity, the further extent to which his now anesthetised nerves could bear, what next could be invented for them to bear (175).

Once again, the pressing reality of this scene allows Charlotte's romantic view of drowning and by extension, of love, to be seen in its proper perspective. The irony of Charlotte's references to drowning reaches its peak when she finally does die by drowning --

in her own blood. Her death becomes Faulkner's most telling comment upon the utter falseness of her romantic ideals.

Faulkner uses the "floods" of both stories to bring into relief, certain aspects of the concept of personal freedom which is central to the novel as a whole. Harry and Charlotte belonged to the generation which believed in the individual's right to choose his own values and create his own destiny. The lovers believe they are controlling the events which overtake them. But the reader sees that their freedom is illusory; they are prisoners of the whole set of cultural responses imposed by the myth of passion. Consequently, their behaviour is as predictable as that of the characters in the thrashy romances which Harry writes.

Although Harry and Charlotte believe they are truly free and pride themselves in avoiding all things bourgeois, neither of them ever experiences freedom as it exists for the convict in "Old Man." The flood sweeps him out of the sheltered world of prison into the real world again, where he is a free man. This time, however, he is forced to contend with a different aspect of that world. Instead of being pitted against the romantic ideas which writers feed upon and use to prey upon their readers' longings for a fuller life, he is pitted against elemental nature. His only weapons to deal with his adversary are his instincts, as conditions are reduced to such an extreme that there is no time to romanticize or idealize, but only to react instinctively. Passionate illusions have no role in this episode, as all illusions -- even the convict's dearly held

one about the possibility of a safe orderly existence based on the cyclical and orderly pattern in Nature is swept away in the flood.

The reader moves from the "Wild Palms" episode in which the lovers have decided to leave their comfortable and easily rearrangeable life in Chicago where they are in control of the situation to "Old Man" in which a raging flooded river renders the protagonist totally helpless in controlling his destiny. A sense of impotence against Nature pervades the descriptions of the tall convict's plight, and serves to create in the reader's mind, a picture of the uncertain and chaotic nature of real freedom. It is this frightening picture of freedom which allows one to understand why the convict is relieved to return to prison after his ordeal.

For the tall convict, prison offers security against the irrational and chaotic forces which characterize life in the natural world. The lovers in "Wild Palms" derive a similar sense of security from their illusions. These illusions protect them from life by seeming to give it a sense of order and purpose which it would not otherwise possess. The terrifying nature of existence when it is viewed without the protective guise of illusions (as it appears in "Old Man"), leads the reader to understand why man is so often victimized by illusion and why he clings to the illusions which he creates.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 5

1. Melvin Backman, William Faulkner: The Major Years (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 127.

2. Malcolm Cowley, ed., The Portable Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 540.

3. These editions were: The Wild Palms (New York: New American Library, 1948), and The Old Man (New York: New American Library, 1948), both Signet paperbacks. In 1954, the two stories were printed together by New American Library, but without the alteration of the chapters. Also, in 1958, Modern Library reprinted "Old Man" with "Spotted Horses" and "The Bear" in one volume. See William Faulkner, Three Famous Short Stories (New York: Random House, 1958).

4. Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 233.

5. Faulkner at Nagano, ed. Robert A. Jelliffe (Tokyo: Kenkyusha Press, 1956), pp. 79-80. This same view is reiterated in Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: An Interview," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), pages 75 to 76, and in Faulkner in the University, eds. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (New York: Random House, 1959), pp. 8, 171, 176.

6. Edmond L. Volpe may be considered a spokesman for this view in his statement that:

By juxtaposing a tale of a man in nature with one in society, Faulkner sets into relief, those characteristics of the modern world that make society unnatural and alienate modern man from his own nature and from the natural conditions of existence.

See Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 213.

7. William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 109.

8. See Joseph J. Modenhauer, "Unity of Structure and Theme in The Wild Palms," in Hoffman and Vickery, op. cit., pp. 305-322, and Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 52-57.

9. Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1964), p. 158.

10. In spite of his penetrating insight into the purpose of the novel's two-part construction, Irving Howe has failed to understand what Faulkner is showing in "Wild Palms" for he noted that it "cannot reach the tragic limit toward which it strains." See Howe, op. cit., p. 242. Michael Millgate blamed the failure of the story upon the dramatic situation presented in it, saying that the problem arises with "the extraordinary painfulness of the central story, the infliction upon Charlotte and, more especially, upon Wilbourne, of a degree of suffering that seems grossly in excess of what the situation might be thought to demand." See Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (London: Constable and Company, 1966), p. 179. Backman attributes the failure of the story to achieve its tragic potential as being "bound up with the author's underlying antagonism to what he was trying to create. The antagonism . . . seems to stem ultimately from the abhorrence of sex . . ." See Backman, op. cit., p. 136.

11. Volpe, op. cit., p. 214.

12. Several articles have also appeared which point out how Faulkner twists Hemingway's ideal love around to its proper perspective. In addition to Volpe's comments (Ibid, pp. 214-215), see W. R. Moses, "Water, Water Everywhere: 'Old Man' and A Farewell to Arms," Modern Fiction Studies, V(Summer, 1959), pp. 172-174, and H. Edward Richardson, "The 'Hemingwaves' in Faulkner's 'Wild Palms'," Modern Fiction Studies, IV(Winter, 1958-59), pp. 357-360.

13. Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), p. 135.

14. Cleanth Brooks once indicated his intentions of investigating this theme, saying that he would treat The Wild Palms, "Faulkner's version of the 'world well lost for love' in a later volume." However, such a volume has never appeared. See Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 205.

15. William Faulkner, The Wild Palms (New York: Random House, Inc., 1939), p. 11. Subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition and are included in the text.

16. Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), pp. 41-42.

17. Millgate, op. cit., p. 177.

18. Volpe, op. cit., p. 177.

19. Rougemont, op. cit., p. 44.

20. Ibid., p. 45.

21. Brylowski, op. cit., p. 134.

22. Volpe, op. cit., p. 229.

23. Ibid.

24. Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 8.

25. Ibid., p. 173.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have focused upon the myth of passion as a means of gaining a new insight into several of Faulkner's lesser known, but often misread novels. It is felt that such an insight increases the stature of these works, relative to those of Faulkner's major period. In the meantime, it has not been my intention to limit Faulkner's use of the passion myth to the lesser novels. Indeed, the illusions which men choose to shape their destinies, especially those dictated to their romantic sensibilities by the myth of passion, are prevalent in all of his novels and most notably, in the so-called "major" novels.

This is true, particularly in The Sound and the Fury, where the rules of conduct imposed by the myth of passion, operate with respect to all of the Compson family, but dominate altogether the Quentin section of the novel. Almost all of the characters are either actively engaged in creating a destiny for themselves, founded on the love experience, or are lamenting the fact that they have failed in their efforts to do so. This is true, even for Uncle Maurie who is involved in an adulterous romance with a woman who is beneath him in both dignity and social standing, and whom he can never marry. Being victimized this way by the god of love and being

found out and threatened by his mistress's husband, adds to the significance which he attaches to himself and attempts to prove in other ways -- the great business "deals" which are always needing his support, for example.

Mr. Compson, Jason III, is another of this novel's characters who has not escaped the ravages of the myth of passion. Life has failed to mete to him his rightful share of significant experiences. None of his expectations have been fulfilled. Compared to his ancestors -- one, the "son of a brilliant and gallant statesman," a second, the "battleleader of brave and gallant men," Jason III is "a sort of privileged pseudo-Daniel Boone-Robinson Crusoe, who had not returned to juvenility because actually he had never left it." He displays his disappointment by his cynicism and by his retreat into an alcoholic oblivion.

Just as passion has failed to consume Jason III, it has passed by his whining wife, and his antidote of liquor has its counterpart in her self-pitying hypochondria. Together, these two Compsons form a pathetic pair who have expected much from life and have received nothing.

Their son, Jason, is yet another of the novel's characters who has been victimized by the prevailing notion of passion. Jason IV is ruled by his private delusions of grandeur. He sees himself as the last of the great business tycoons. To complement his self-image, he is involved in troublesome speculations in futures in the cotton market and keeps a mistress. Indeed, it is the dis-

crepancy between the way he envisages himself and the way he actually is which leads the reader to feel a measure of sympathy -- however, small for him.

Caddy also appears to be suffering from the intoxicating effects of the passion myth which irreparably damages her life. In her search for a passionate and all-consuming love, she loses her sexual innocence, which loss, contrary to what the myth suggests, ruins, rather than enhances, her life. She is deprived of her family and is forced out into the world to play the role of mistress to a series of men who seek an insult for the idea of passion which is associated with her. She becomes an object of passion for them, and thus is prevented from ever finding the alternative to passion-love, which seems to be the object of her quest.

Caddy's daughter, Quentin, is another character who seeks the Holy Grail of passion as a means by which to escape the drabness of her life. All of these characters are seeking to create their destiny along tragic and consequential lines, which are bound up with their ideas about the transfiguring potential of passion.

However, nowhere is this idea more clear than in the Quentin section, where its presence dominates and dictates the course of the action. Quentin sees his main function in life as being the protector of his sister's virtue. In a way, he envisages himself as one of the gallant knights of the courtly love era. He, himself, is like a courtly lover in that, although he knows he can never possess his ideal woman, his sister, he wants her to remain chaste

and true to him as proof of her love for him. He defends Caddy's non-existent honour as if he were Sir Galahad. He attempts to duel with Dalton Ames once in actuality, and again later at Cambridge when he hallucinates that Spoade is Ames. Caddy's fall from virtue and subsequent hasty marriage dooms to eternal failure, Quentin's vision of his role. It is this realization which prompts his imaginary confession of incest to his father. For him, there is no better way than incest to achieve the kind of life he wants. The world would shun his sister and him for their sins, and yet, brother and sister would be isolated together from the world. In their isolation, they could contemplate the tragedy of their fate and pass their days in sorrowful acquiescence to the suffering imposed upon them. When Quentin knows that the incest idea cannot succeed, he gives in to the inevitable solution -- suicide. But, of course, his death must be of a certain kind, lacking all traces of the disorder and chaos which often accompanies dying. Quentin plans very carefully, exactly how he will die. Then he courts death as he would a real lover, while every tantalizing part of his plan is put into action. Yet, in spite of his determination that his death will be the last act of a highly polished performance, a chain of circumstances enters to upset his plans. The episode with the lost girl and the incidents which occur in Mrs. Bland's car, rob his death of the significance and tragedy which he had intended it to have. Contrary to Quentin's intentions, what impresses one about his death is not the sense of tragedy in the fact that this was the only solution

to the situation. Instead, one is struck by the tragic waste of human potential in his rejection of life.

As I Lay Dying develops a different aspect of the theme of living according to the demands of passionate illusions. Addie Bundren, the "I" of the title, proceeds through life as if on a voyage of discovery about the illusions which result in certain accepted modes of behaviour. The course of her whole life is profoundly affected by her father's view of the process of living --² "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time." He, presumably, is speaking in Christian terms, seeing a man's life in terms of the life of all living things -- a man is born, he grows up, in due course he produces offspring to carry on the species, and finally he dies and his body returns to the earth to nurture new life. She "believes that man must assert himself through some unique³ gesture to show that he has lived." Like so many of Faulkner's deluded characters, she attempts to find the true meaning of life in the experience of passionate love. Marriage with Anse seems to promise the kind of fulfillment she seeks, but she soon suffers disillusionment. Her affair with Whitfield represents her inability, at this point, to completely discard her illusions about life and love. But this affair, too, fails to settle the doubts raised in her mind by what her father had said. More willing now to reconcile herself to his point of view, however, Addie renounces her lover and resolves to accept her role as Anse's wife. However, the reader understands that, in effect, she is exchanging one set of illusions

for another because, what she appears to be saying at the end of her section of the novel is, that she is preparing herself for the life after death. "And so I have cleaned up my house" (168), she says, speaking of the manner in which she has atoned for her sins. As well, implicit in the closing paragraph of this section, is the notion that Addie believes that she has received the grace of salvation and that, in dying, she will go on to her final reward. The importance which she attaches to dying is manifested in her supervision of the construction of her coffin and her strong desire to be buried among her relatives in Jefferson. Throughout the journey from the Bundren's farm to town, the stench of Addie's decaying corpse is all that is necessary to point out that death is final and man is finite. Of all the members of the Bundren family, only Darl senses the futile and farcical nature of their undertaking. Ironically, he is rewarded for his insight by being committed to the state insane asylum by his family.

Addie's daughter, Dewey Dell, though not as articulate as her mother, is pictured in the novel as longing also for something significant to happen to her. Her response to this longing expresses itself in such a way as to suggest how deeply entrenched the passion myth has become in Western patterns of thought. Dewey Dell seeks fulfillment to her longing in the promise of passion-love, as surely as if she had read numerous romantic novels and seen the many movies whose plots are derived from the myth of passion. Very cleverly, she manages to blame Fate, rather than her own desires for

her affair with Rafe. Her thinking works in this way:

. . . if the sack is full when we get to the woods, it won't be me. . . if it don't mean for me to do it, the sack will not be full and I will turn up the next row, but if the sack is full, I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it (26).

By making this promise, she removes the burden of the decision from herself and ostensibly subjects the course of her destiny to a power outside herself. Faulkner adds an ironic twist to Dewey Dell's promise for Rafe himself becomes an instrument of Fate when he fills her cotton bag. Significantly, Dewey Dell herself, is not at all disconcerted by this fact.

In this novel, Anse emerges as the character with the solution to the dilemma posed by the need in man to enforce a pattern of meaning upon his life. Anse fares very well without dreams. Possessed of a kind of calm practicality, he can assess each new turn in a given situation and twist it so that it works to his advantage. He is the only character to profit from the experience of the trip to Jefferson. Yet, his ability to capitalize upon the misfortune of others prevents the reader from seeing his way as a viable alternative approach to life. In this novel, a life style dictated by illusions seems preferable to Anse's.

Absalom, Absalom! can also be interpreted from the perspective of the passion myth and its concomitant illusions about life. One's understanding of the novel is increased if one keeps

in mind that the motivating force behind the characters is their need to construct a configuration of reality which can accommodate their vision of themselves. Hence, we have Miss Rosa Coldfield's earnestly expressed disapproval of Thomas Sutpen not because of what he is or what he has done in any other terms than those which involve her. Her outrage stems not from the fact that such a man had the nerve to propose to her, but rather from her disappointment that the manner in which he proposed fell so far short of what she considered befitting a lady of her position. Her niece, too, wishes to see the events which have overtaken her from her own private perspective. Judith Sutpen dedicates her spinsterhood to raising the illegitimate child of her former betrothed lover and his mistress as a means of keeping before her always the great tragedy which has darkened her life.

But it is Judith's father, Thomas Sutpen, who goes to the farthest extreme to ensure that his lofty aspirations for himself are transformed into realities. The tragedy here is that the transformation takes place only at the cost of much suffering to his family and himself. He never learns to appreciate the senselessness and futility of his dreams, although the manner in which he dies has the effect of reducing them in the reader's eyes. Here again, a character's private configuration of his own life, based upon illusions about its significance and meaning, works to deny that life of whatever value it might have had, had it been approached more realistically.

This same idea prevails in the stories of Go Down Moses, especially as it pertains to young Isaac MacCaslin. He cannot accept as true a fact of existence which he discovers in his family's records. He refuses his rightful inheritance because it is tainted by miscegenation. His refusal prevents him from participating in what would have been his role in life, and he loses his wife as a result. He drifts through life a picture of tragedy but does not see that it is his own idealistic tendencies which have created this tragedy. Finally, in "Delta Autumn," he is directly confronted with the fact that mere repudiation of human nature does nothing to alter it. Human folly is a fact of existence which must be faced and dealt with on its own terms, rather than being ignored. Isaac atones for his previous repudiation in a kind of symbolic gesture of presenting a family heirloom to another of his family's products of miscegenation but clearly, this one feeble gesture cannot compensate for his wasted life.

With the Snopes Trilogy, Faulkner's treatment of men who live by illusions and try to invest their life with meaning by building a life style on illusions, undergoes a slight mutation. Here, this kind of approach to life is unmistakably parodied so that the beliefs and actions of the gallant Gavin Stevens lend an air of comedy, rather than tragedy to the novel's events. In the manner of Quentin Compson, Gavin romanticizes himself and his situation so that he becomes a knight in shining armour whose task it is to slay the "dragon," Snopes, and restore the town of Jefferson to its pre-

Snopesian innocence. More specifically, he sees his role as protector of the chief victim of Flem Snopes -- Eula Varner. For Gavin, Eula is a composite of all the essences of womanhood through the ages. As such, she becomes an ideal for him and ceases to exist as a living person. He does not see her as a suffering human being who is forced to play the role of adulteress to satisfy the townspeople's vicarious needs. Hence, he cannot be of help to her in any real or meaningful way. Because of his concept of her, her suicide (which he may have been able to prevent) comes as a total shock to him. Like so many of Faulkner's characters, Gavin participates in a set of tragic circumstances which he helped to create by virtue of his inability to see beyond his illusions.

In all of these works, various aspects of the myth of passion are pervasive elements. We can only assume then, that the recurring presence of the myth must be indicative of the areas of experience which interested Faulkner. By examining the implications of the presence of the passion theme, we can gain a better understanding of some of the forces which are operative in Faulkner's world and his vision of how man responds to these forces.

For Faulkner, the menacing aspect of the myth is most clearly present in the expectations which its victims place upon passionate experiences. For them, passion seems to promise self-understanding and a knowledge of the true meaning of life; furthermore, passion offers entrance to a richer existence where one is free to live life to the full. The implications of these expectations

are of great significance in the world which Faulkner has created. Ultimately, they must accept the largest share of the responsibility for the atmosphere of confusion and bewilderment which envelopes most of his passionate characters. The expectations which they have of passionate experiences create the kind of world in which man is rendered impotent to deal with circumstances, and the kind of world where the only love present is the love of self. Neither a missionary, an idealist, nor a prophet, Faulkner offers the reader imitations of the real world. The novels incisively diagnose a world gone wrong, yet always present is the implication that, within certain limits, it can be set to right again. A closer examination of this aspect of the passion myth establishes the validity of these assertions.

Consider, for example, the first of the three expectations of passion mentioned above -- the experience of passion guarantees self-knowledge and self-understanding. In Faulkner's world, a deep understanding of self must precede any meaningful response to the world outside the self.

From this perspective, the glorification of passion in our century interferes with one's ability to come to a sense of personal identity. Rougemont's discussion of passion provides insight into the relationship between passion and identity.

Both passion and the longing for death
which passion disguises, are connected
with, and fostered by, a particular
notion of how to reach understanding . . .

Why does Western man wish to suffer this passion which lacerates him and which all his common sense rejects? Why does he yearn after this particular kind of love notwithstanding that its effulgence must coincide with his self-destruction? The answer is that he reaches self-awareness and tests himself, only by risking his life -- in suffering and on the verge of death (51).

In Rougemont's analysis, the experience of passion promises a new understanding of self. But he goes on to conclude that passion is something undergone, something suffered, which immediately implies passivity on the part of the person involved. The individual cannot be an active participant; his role is to be titillated by the event. We see this process operating in the lives of Horace Benbow and Gavin Stevens, for example. However, in Faulkner's world, passivity can never produce self-understanding.

While the need for self-understanding may be initiated by an event in the external world (as with Isaac MacCaslin's discovery of the miscegenation in his family), the search itself is an internal thing. As such, it may take various cues from the events which take place during its course, but no final answers are ever expected from the events themselves. Rather, Faulkner presents the necessity of understanding these events and the responses which were made to them. Such understanding requires that one be actively engaged in working out the significance of what has happened in all its aspects. From this perspective, we can see one way in which passion thwarts one's ability to exert influence on the circumstances which comprise his

life.

The experience of passion also promises transport to a new and richer life which is void of the perennial drabness which typifies our existence. According to Rougemont's observations,

what we pursue is what promises to uplift and excite us, so that, in spite of ourselves, we shall be transported into the 'real life' spoken of by poets.⁴

One looks upon the experience of passion as

something that will alter my life and enrich it with the unexpected, with thrilling chances and with enjoyment ever more violent and gratifying. The whole of possibility opens before me, a future that assents to desire! I am to enter into it, I shall rise to it, I shall reach it in 'transports.'⁵

Such a future seems to offer release from the ordinary world into a realm where one can know absolute freedom, beyond all social and moral codes. But this promise of passion is never fulfilled, for this kind of freedom is only an illusion. From Faulkner's point of view, freedom comes with self-mastery, and passion denies self-mastery. Rather, "a man of passion seeks . . . to be defeated, to lose all self-control, to be beside himself and in ecstasy." In effect, he forfeits forever his ability to influence his destiny. As we have seen, the course and outcome of the passion myth are predetermined. To succumb to the myth is to become imprisoned by the instinct of death. Those characters who are overpowered by the myth

also forfeit their ability to learn from experience. Instead, to preserve their self-image, they deny the facts of experience, distorting these facts to correspond with the way they envisage their destiny. In Faulkner's world, to deny the facts of experience, is to deny one's humanity, and this constitutes an unpardonable offense. Here again, we can see how our expectations of passion tend to produce negativistic attitudes and behaviour which make us impotent in the face of the circumstances which overtake us.

The most crushing blow dealt by the myth of passion to its victims, from Faulkner's perspective, is that the suffering of passion makes them totally self-centered. Ostensibly, one's own life is being enriched by passion; one's own destiny is being exalted. Hence, there is a definite turning inward away from the world at large. All one's powers of concentration are devoted to experiencing each moment of one's own passionate suffering. As a result, these characters cease to have a meaningful role in anything that happens outside of themselves. Worse still, they lose sight of the harmful effects of their selfish behaviour upon others. To love with passion-love means really to love oneself. There is no active giving love of the other, for passion implies being in love, rather than loving, and being in love implies passivity on the part of the lover. He wants to reap the exhilaration of the experience for himself; that is his sole aim. In this way, Faulkner's passionate characters divorce themselves entirely from any meaningful participation in the human community, an intolerable offense within the confines of Faulkner's

world.

Faulknerian scholars have long been interested in love, or better said, the lack of love in the novels. The critics contend that happy mutual love in Faulkner is a rarity, perhaps because, in the wasteland of modern society, man has been rendered incapable of love.⁷ Such observations have contributed significantly to the prevailing belief that generally, Faulkner saw few possibilities for happiness in life, that generally his world was a barren and bleak one.

Certainly, Faulkner's world is characterized by this aspect of barrenness and even despair. However, much of the pessimism in his novels seems to stem from the unchecked spread of passion which they depict. But there is always the implication that this need not be the case. If the true nature of passion can be understood, there is the possibility of a reconciliation with the facts of experience in ordinary life. When this occurs, life becomes worthy of something more than despair.

FOOTNOTESChapter 6

1. William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, Vintage Books Edition, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1956), p. 409.

2. William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Random House, Inc., 1957), p. 161. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition.

3. Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 153.

4. Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc.), p. 51.

5. Ibid., p. 282.

6. Ibid.

7. For a short summary of such critical views, see Brooks, op. cit., p. 206. See also Edmond Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girour, 1964), p. 21.

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