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Faulkner after the War

by

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Introduction

Although William Faulkner's novels now seem like an integral part of the canon of American literature, the author did not find much in the way of scholarly or commercial success until years after he published his greatest works. *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and nearly all of Faulkner's other classic novels sold poorly upon their publications in the late 1920s and 1930s (McGurl, 148). To support himself while producing a decade's worth of flops, Faulkner spent long portions of the thirties working as a Hollywood screenwriter – a job he hated, partially because it took him away from his family and his home in Mississippi. By the end of the Second World War, Faulkner was done with Hollywood, and only one of the author's novels remained in print (Blotner, 466). After nearly disappearing into obscurity, Faulkner's career-making moment came when Malcolm Cowley published *The Portable Faulkner* for the Modern Library in 1946. By compiling excerpts from Faulkner's novels and selected short stories, Cowley reconstructed Faulkner's literary world to make it more palatable to the common reader. Within three years of the publication of Cowley's book, Faulkner achieved complete financial independence. Shortly thereafter, the author's major works received renewed critical interest. As a result of this newfound notoriety, Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950 – twenty-one years after *The Sound and the Fury* initially failed to capture the literary world's attention. Though contemporary critics have attacked Cowley for softening Faulkner's critiques on social norms and diminishing the author's powerful narrative voice, those same critics might never have heard of Faulkner if not for Cowley's efforts (Urgo, 6).

The turn-around that took place in the author's career after *The Portable Faulkner* directly led to the creation of the literary juggernaut that Faulkner appears as today. While Cowley should be credited for resurrecting Faulkner's career, the legacy of Cowley's book seems to be a pervasive view of Faulkner's world that conflicts with the content of his novels. As Joseph Urgo notes in his book *Faulkner's Apocrypha: A Fable, Snopes, and the Spirit of Human Rebellion*, Cowley's presentation of Faulkner as a harmless moralist became the standard scholarly view of the author for decades:

> As a result of Cowley's efforts, there indeed arose a chorus of critical voices singing the praises for William Faulkner – but they were, as can be expected, almost to a voice singing Cowley's tune. Due to the breadth and coherence of Cowley's reading of Faulkner, emblematically packaged in *The Portable Faulkner*, the chorus produced an author who would come to be understood as a Southern mythmaker, the clearest voice in the Southern literary renaissance, a gentle, pipe-smoking conservative and a brooding, self-educated, moralist anomaly in American letters who was sadly neglected in his own country and badly treated by those people in Hollywood who took advantage of his need for money. (Urgo, 6)

This construction of Faulkner as "a Southern mythmaker" endured after Cowley in scholarly works by the likes of Cleanth Brooks, Olga Vickery, and John T. Irwin. While these scholars provided valuable insights into the formal, psychological, and symbolic meanings behind many of Faulkner's greatest novels, they largely ignored the harsh social criticisms that fill every one of his books. By reading the formal inventions in novels like *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom, Absalom!* as techniques used towards the creation of a mythic Southern past, Cowley and his followers pulled Yoknapatawpha County out of American history, dulling Faulkner's critiques on racial, sexual, and economic issues.

In the same year that *The Portable Faulkner* was published, a young Ralph Ellison echoed Cowley's sentiments by writing that "for all his concern with the South, Faulkner was actually seeking out the nature of man" (Minter, 278). Implicit in Ellison's critical work is the idea that "the nature of man" can only be seen outside of the context of an author's unique historical moment. This notion follows from a view of Modernist literature which Cowley 's book promotes, as both Ellison and Cowley value aesthetic invention over historical realism. In their way of thinking, universal truths about the eternal nature of human existence can be expressed by divorcing characters' actions from the material worlds they inhabit. By placing Faulkner's stories into a mythic past, these scholars try to read universal significances into Faulkner's novels by divorcing them from the author's historical present.

Though his novels overtly concern themselves with the history of the South, Faulkner hinted that he subscribed to this Modernist view. In reference to the form of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner said that he framed the antebellum story of Thomas Sutpen's design through the consciousness of Quentin Compson in order to "keep the hoop skirts and plug hats out" (*Letters,* 79). By dismissing the clichés seen in escapist Civil War novels, Faulkner values his own complex formal inventions over detail-oriented reconstructions of the past. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the author works to focus the reader's attention on the ritual retelling of Sutpen's story, and he seeks to obscure the genteel world of the antebellum South imagined in more sentimental works. Though Faulkner takes a highly aesthetic approach to the composition of *Absalom, Absalom!*, contemporary critics have shown that the narrative of the novel effectively constructs a new understanding of American history that depends on Faulkner's own

historical moment. Though he avoids the "hoop skirts and plug hats," the author depends on the historical novel's ability to solve the troubles of the present by projecting them into the past.

The most revealing reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* which considers Faulkner's complicated relationship with history was carried out by the contemporary critic Walter Benn Michaels. In his essay "*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Difference between White Men and White Men," Michaels argues that the novel dramatizes Faulkner's understanding of the stain of miscegenation on Southern history. After being forced to use the slaves' entrance the first time he visits a plantation, Sutpen swears to gain the finances and power to enter the class of men that snubbed him. Sutpen buys a tract of land in Yoknapatawpha County from Native Americans, and he imports his own slaves from Haiti to work his new plantation. With this symbolic reenactment of the founding of America, Faulkner ties Sutpen's story to the history of the nation that makes his rise possible. When Sutpen's son Henry murders his black half-brother Charles Bon, Sutpen's fate is sealed. Though Sutpen's sexual encounter with a woman of mixed blood occurs long before the self-made man comes to Mississippi, Sutpen's dalliance with miscegenation destroys any chance his family has of prospering in Faulkner's world.

Michaels' essay alludes to a critique of America present in *Absalom, Absalom!* that stands at the center of Faulkner's work in the thirties. With the advent of slavery, the promise of an America where "all men are created equal" was denied. For Faulkner, this inequality did not stem from the suffering of blacks or any moral concerns surrounding the institution of slavery. Instead, the fundamental trouble of

slavery appears in its creation of a class division within white society. Because some whites owned slaves and others did not, plantation owners entered an economic class above those whites who worked smaller farms. In Faulkner's agrarian ideal, all whites should have existed in natural relationships with the land they cultivated. Slavery destroyed this ideal, since some whites became able to separate themselves from the earth by exploiting black labor. These rich whites failed to enter into the natural reproductive cycle that fuels agricultural development and instead began a long history of miscegenation in the South. By placing black bodies in between themselves and the soil they should have been cultivating, upper-class whites in the antebellum period deflected their sexual desires onto the race of people who did their farming for them. Where sex should have united the totality of American white men with the land they cultivated, it separated an elite group of upper-class whites from the common people by binding them to their financial investments.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, this formulation appears to Quentin as an inescapable truth about the nature of Southern history. For Faulkner, however, this understanding of miscegenation in has a different resonance. Because Quentin hears a story in 1910 that Faulkner writes in 1935, the author's relationship to the content of his novel is informed by a different set of historical circumstances then he admits to in the text. Considering the author's own place in history, *Absalom, Absalom!* looks like Faulkner's explanation for the suffering Mississippians faced at the peak of the Great Depression. By reconstructing the beginning of Southern history, Faulkner finds a reason behind the economic turmoil that tormented the South in the thirties. Faulkner

deals with the troubles of his own historical moment by placing them in a fictive past, and he finds miscegenation to be the original sin that caused his region's troubles.

Michaels' essay on *Absalom, Absalom!* serves as one example of the work now being done by a new generation of Faulkner scholars that focuses on the author's relationship to his own historical moment. These new Faulkner scholars, including Michaels, Eric Sundquist, and Richard Godden, can be seen as fundamentally opposed to the view of Faulkner which Cowley created. Cowley, attempting to garner attention for an overlooked genius, worked to suspend Yoknapatawpha County in a mythic past. In contrast, these contemporary scholars use poststructuralist methods to cement the importance of Faulkner's historical moment in scholarly readings of his novels. Instead of contending that the author was seeking "the nature of man," these scholars have shown that Faulkner's novels from the thirties are fundamentally concerned with problems faced by the Depression-era South.

While Michaels' essay deals only with *Absalom, Absalom,* Richard Godden lays out a broader account of the historical implications in Faulkner's stories about Yoknapatawpha County. In his books *Fictions of Labor* and *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words,* Godden evaluates two different sets of Faulkner's novels using a Marxist lens. In both works, Godden promotes a single view of Faulkner's fiction that centers on the author's responses to changes that took place in the South's economy with the expansion of the New Deal. When the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed in 1933, white landowners in Mississippi were paid to plow under their crops instead of harvesting them. This led to the end of sharecropping, which had allowed for the continued subjugation of blacks in the

South long after the end of slavery. In Godden's understanding, Faulkner's work in the thirties shows the author responding to shifts in his region's social structures as whites no longer depended on the exploitation of black labor:

> The years from *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) to *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939) contain the New Deal-induced labor revolution that southern planters had been deferring since Radical Reconstruction (1867-77). Consequently, they contain the dramatic transformation of those planters from lords of bound labor to payers of wage…The long decade of Faulkner's greatest work is best understood through a generative social trauma constituting its formal core. That trauma is a labor trauma, centered on a primal scene of recognition during which white passes into black and black passes into white along perceptual tracks necessitated by a singular and pervasively coercive system of production. (Godden, 1)

The "trauma" that Godden sees in Faulkner's work manifests itself in the fragmented formal structures that the author frequently uses in his novel's from the thirties. *The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying,* and *Absalom, Absalom!* all consist of stories told in pieces from divergent points of view. In these novels, Faulkner can not effectively create a coherent account of his world, since the separation of black from white pulls apart the fundamental story of Southern history that began with European colonization. In order for the South to continue on after this period of fragmentation, some new order must replace that which has been destroyed. In Faulkner's works after World War II, the author attempts to create a new sort of Southern society in Yoknapatawpha County. Over the last twenty years of his life, Faulkner did so to varying degrees of success.

Throughout the history of Faulkner criticism, scholars have generally agreed that the author's output after 1942 does not stand up to that which preceded it in the thirties (Towner, 4). As the story goes, Faulkner's genius first manifested in his prose

during the composition of *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929. After a series of failed attempts at writing a novel, Faulkner somehow tapped into a well of talent that lasted him through the composition of *Go Down, Moses* thirteen years later. In between, the author penned half a dozen classic novels that sketched the entire scope of life in his fictional county. Afterwards, Faulkner's novels became more conventional and less profound. Yoknapatawpha was brought into the present in novels like *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, but the New South lacked the magic and meaning of the old. Where the work of the thirties had introduced flawed, mythic figures like Quentin Compson and Ike McCaslin, the later Faulkner focused on the irritatingly cosmopolitan Gavin Stevens. The success that came with Cowley's book seemingly ruined the author's talent, and worldly concerns turned Faulkner's attention away from seeking out "the nature of man" and led him to less meaningful modes of artistic expression.

Godden, Michaels, and other contemporary scholars doing socio-historical work on Faulkner's novels have shown this conception of the author's career to be seriously flawed, but they have yet to sufficiently account for the differences between Faulkner's works in the thirties and those he wrote after the war. The novels that came after *The Portable Faulkner* look fundamentally different from those that came before, and they never reach the heights of literary achievement Faulkner attained in his major period. Still, they are by no means simpler books than Faulkner's more respected novels. With the rise of the contemporary critics' new method of scholarly inquiry, Faulkner's novels from the forties and fifties demand reinterpretation. These later works openly address social issues crucial to the postwar South without the

complex formal inventions that defined Faulkner's major period. After stepping outside of Cowley's mythic past and bringing Faulkner into the thirties, the new method of socio-historical Faulkner criticism must address the period in the author's career when he directly confronts the problems faced by his society.

While the Great Migration moved vast numbers of blacks out of the South at the beginning of the forties, the war effort rebuilt the nation's economy. The painful separation of black from white that Godden outlines in his books ended with the war, yet Faulkner continued to write until his death in 1962. Left to rebuild Yoknapatawpha's society as best he can, Faulkner's writings after World War II become prescriptive for the first time in his career. After receiving overdue acclaim for novels that depicted a society being torn apart, the author suddenly found answers to the problems of race, sex, and class that had devastated his earlier work.

This fundamental difference between Faulkner's major period and his later work might best be understood by looking at two major characters from those eras: Quentin Compson and Gavin Stevens. Though Gavin and Quentin grew up in the same fictive town, came from similar upper-class backgrounds, and even attended Harvard at the same time, the author's treatment of these two characters could not be more different. In Faulkner's novels from the thirties, Quentin Compson kills himself after an existential crisis conflates the inescapable history of miscegenation with Quentin's desire to have sex with his sister. In 1948, Faulkner writes a story where the middle-aged virgin Gavin Stevens saves an innocent black man from being lynched. Quentin is doomed by his sister's sexuality, cursed by his family's dependence on the exploitation of black labor, and eventually destroyed by his own

inability to adapt an antiquated value system to a modernized world. Gavin, however, practices pragmatism, condescends towards blacks, and totally divorces himself from any sort of sexual drive. By escaping the threats of sexuality and race, Gavin becomes able to act as a paternal figure in a way never before seen in Faulkner's literature.

The creation of Gavin Stevens after the death of Quentin Compson reflects a change in Faulkner's attitude towards class in American society. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, class divisions destroyed the possibility of America, since slavery denied some whites from being equal to others. After the Second World War, however, Faulkner reevaluates his distrust of class divisions, and the author aligns himself with a rising middle class. As urbanization ends Southerners' dependence on agriculture, the need to naturally connect with the land through sexual activity disappears in Faulkner's work. This allows Faulkner to separate the threats of sex and race from one another, since white production no longer depends on black labor. In Faulkner's postwar works like *Intruder in the Dust* and *Snopes*, the problem of racism appears only amongst lower-class whites, while the threat of female sexuality exists only for upper-class whites. By accepting the class divisions that denied the possibility of America in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner solves the problem of miscegenation that had stood at the center of his earlier works.

Chapter One: Economic Changes and Sexual Desires in *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses*

The publications of *The Hamlet* in 1940 and *Go Down, Moses* in 1942 came at the end of Faulkner's major period of aesthetic creation and literary innovation. These novels appear as the final additions to the Faulkner canon of the thirties that started with *The Sound and the Fury* and ran through *As I Lay Dying, Light in August,* and *Absalom! Absalom!*. Because *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses* appear as the last two pieces in Faulkner's major period, these novels can be seen as the culmination of Faulkner's work on the end of white dependence on black labor. In *The Hamlet*, Faulkner delivers his fullest working out of the implications of the changing economic landscape for the white tenant farmers who populate the hills of Yoknapatawpha County. In *Go Down, Moses,* the author offers an account of those same economic changes' impact on the white plantation owners and black sharecroppers who live in the county's lowlands. Though these novels first appear unrelated to one another, further consideration shows that both works depict the citizens of Yoknapatawpha County responding to socioeconomic change through the renegotiation of sexual desires.

The Hamlet follows Flem Snopes' rise through the society of lower class white farmers in the hill community of Frenchman's Bend. Pieced together from short stories and tall tales which Faulkner had been working on since the middle of the 1920's, the novel sketches the entirety of the socioeconomic world of tenant farming and the damage done to that world by the arrival of the Snopeses. A small society in the hills of Yoknapatawpha County, the Bend's population is fairly homogonous and

isolated from the rest of civilization. Faulkner's narrator describes the citizens of the Bend in the novel's first chapter by writing:

> They supported their own churches and schools, they married and committed infrequent adulteries and more frequent homicides amongst themselves and were their own courts judges and executioners. They were Protestants and Democrats and prolific; there was not one Negro landowner in the entire section. Strange Negroes would absolutely refuse to pass through it after dark. (*Snopes*, 9)

At the novel's beginning, Ab Snopes arrives with his family at the Bend's general store to enter into a sharecropping agreement with Jody Varner, the son of the hamlet's principle land owner. After making the deal, Jody learns from the traveling sewing machine salesman V.K. Ratliff that Ab has come to the Bend because he has twice been accused of burning down barns owned by his previous employers. In order to secure some sort of barn insurance against the Snopes, Jody hires Ab's son Flem to be a clerk in his family's store. Because of Jody's upper-class fears surrounding the history of Ab's radical violence, Flem gains his first entry into the Varner's sphere of financial power.

The majority of scholarship on *The Hamlet* deals with the implications and meanings behind Flem's ascent to the peak of wealth and power in the Bend following this first minor success in the Varner's store. In his review titled "The Snopes World," Robert Penn Warren lays out a straight forward account of Flem's rise that will be useful in understanding Faulkner's interest in the Snopeses. Penn Warren writes:

> Flem and Ab…arrive in Frenchman's Bend, become tenants of one of the Old Varner's farms, and begin to devour the country. Flem forces Varner's son to take him on as a clerk; other members of the Snopes tribe arrive and take over the blacksmith shop and school; the Varners fall under the domination of Flem; Flem marries Eula Varner, a kind

> of stupid, beautiful fertility goddess, who has set the youth of the community on fire, and whose seducer has skipped the country; and we already know that Flem, after eating up Frenchman's Bend, will go to Jefferson to become president of the Sartoris bank. (Penn Warren, 517)

Though Penn Warren omits some of the major events of the novel's ending, his discussion of the introduction of the Snopeses into the Bend highlights how Flem's economic prosperity has nothing to do with his abilities as a farmer. Despite the fact that Ab has agreed to use his family to work the Varner's land, Flem never once engages in any sort of agricultural activity. Turning away from his roots as a tenant farmer, Flem seems to see his every action as an opportunity for financial gain, including his marriage to Eula. Flem marries the disgraced girl in exchange for Will Varner's deed to the Old Frenchman's Place – a dilapidated mansion rumored to be the home of buried treasure.

Flem's greatest successes in his work outside of the agricultural realm come in the final book of the novel titled "The Peasants." After a quick marriage, Flem takes a sudden trip with his wife to Texas to hide Eula's pregnancy. When they return, Flem brings with him a Texan horse trader and a yard full of spotted horses. These horses turn out to be the materials for an elaborate con played by Flem on the men of Frenchman's Bend. The trader manages to auction off every one of the animals before the buyers realize the horses are too wild to be caught. Flem's financial gains from this endeavor are implied to be considerable, but they are outweighed by what he gains from his next con. After hiding fake treasure in the soil surrounding the Old Frenchman's Place, Flem tricks Ratliff, Bookwright and Henry Armstid into buying the land he had received as Eula's marriage portion. By doing so, Flem gains

possession of Ratliff's share in a restaurant in Jefferson, which secures the Snopes family a way out of Frenchman's Bend.

Because Flem's class ambitions are matched by a set of business methods that lack congeniality, he has often been characterized by scholars as an embodiment of modern capitalism. Cleanth Brooks offers one such reading of Flem in his book *William Faulkner: First Encounters*. Brooks writes:

> Flem Snopes…is a man so completely committed to making money that one feels he is almost too good – or rather, too bad – to be true. A caricature of him would be a dollar sign walking around on two hind legs, quietly seeking who it might devour. Though he grinds away interminably on his little wad of gum, his only appetite seems to be for money. We never have a scene in which he seems to be enjoying a meal or savoring a drink or listening to someone tell a good story. His lust is a cold and almost abstract craving for money and nothing else. (Brooks, 97)

Brooks goes on to describe Flem's actions in the novel as an introduction of "modern business methods" into the Bend, and he accuses Flem of "bringing the area under the sway of finance-capitalism" (Brooks, 100). Brooks' assertion is mirrored in a claim from the critic T.Y. Greet that Flem's greatest threat to the Bend comes from his "utter lack of sensibility, his irresistible and amoral logic" (Greet, 526). In both authors' views, the trouble of Flem's implied philosophy (what Brooks comes to call "Snopesism") is the cold application of rationality with disregard toward social obligations (Brooks, 98). Through this lens, Flem's marriage with Eula appears despicable, because Flem ignores the responsibility to maintain his own honor in order to make a financial gain.

Implicit in Brooks' revulsion with "Snopesism" is an endorsement of the society which Flem's actions eventually unmake. Because Flem's financial gains

seem contingent on a commitment to amorality, a reader can come to view the Bend as a community of innocents torn apart by the fugitive Snopes family. Faulkner repudiates this reading earlier in the novel, when he describes the Bend as a so dangerous a place that "strange Negroes would absolutely refuse to pass through it after dark" (*Snopes*, 9). Though no black characters actually appear in the novel, the exploitative nature of relations between whites and blacks in Faulkner's time plays into the interactions between Flem and the member's of the Bend's community. As a society of sharecropping whites, the population of the hamlet deals with the same economic system that oppressed blacks in Mississippi for hundreds of years. By removing the traditional victims of white exploitation from the picture, Faulkner tries to reconnect white society with the natural world. Flem's rise merely works to highlight the failures of yeoman farmers to escape the subjection of land owners in a capitalist society. Importantly, Flem does not destroy any agrarian ideal that was not already ruined by the legacy of slavery.

In Richard Godden's book *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words*, the critic lays out a reading of *The Hamlet* that investigates the interactions of the natural and economic worlds of Faulkner's work. Godden's reading centers around an understanding of the category of autochthony, though it demands a fair amount of reconstruction in order to be easily understood. As Godden defines it, an "autochthon" is "one who springs from the soil which he/she inhabits" (Godden, 26). Autochthons appear throughout Faulkner's text, including Ike Snopes, Eula Varner, and Henry Armstid. These characters' relationships to the soil allow for a reading of *The Hamlet* where Flem's upward class trajectory stands opposed to the residents of

Frenchman's Bend need to sink back into the earth. This view of the novel moves past previous scholarly understandings of *The Hamlet* because its focus on autochthony renegotiates the relationship between the Bend's society and Flem's economic ascent. In Godden's work, Flem no longer appears as the embodiment of a destructive modern capitalism. Instead, Flem's achievements seem indebted to good luck and his father's class resentments. The people of Frenchman's Bend also appear in a new relation to Flem, as they can no longer be seen as innocents who fall victim to a ruthless con man. Opposed to Flem's rise, the highly sexualized pull of the soil on those within Faulkner's imagined community can be seen as both a rebuke to Flem's disconnection with the land and the reason behind his material gains. Although Flem's acquisition of Eula and the Old Frenchman's place eventually spoils anyone's chances at reentering the earth, Godden's inclusion of the category of autochthony into his scholarship allows for a new understanding of *The Hamlet* where the economic structures and reproductive desires of Faulkner's society are inextricably bound together.

The novel dramatizes a series of sexual encounters between autochthons and stand-ins for the Bend's soil, beginning with the story of Ike Snopes and his love for Houston's cow. Ike's penetration of the cow serves as a "prelude to a second penetration of the earth: ergo, his *true* love is the soil" (Godden, 51, emphasis in original). Godden describes Ike's relationship with the earth by writing:

> Since Ike penetrates a cow to sow white spirits in the earth, he may be thought of as autochthonic, or as one who springs from the soil which he or she inhabits. Ike has other earthy credentials: he falls down a lot, and the suggestion that he does not like "the taste…of certain kinds of soil" at least implies that he is partial to other kinds of dirt. He is an herbivore who eats "what his upright kind…call filth." My point is that

> Ike's cow grants him access to his true love – the soil, which both nourishes him and is the object of his passion. (Godden, 52)

Ike's idiocy allows him a uniquely uncomplicated version of autochthony, since Ike lives almost entirely outside of the exchanges of human society. Because Ike can not easily communicate or interact with the other citizens of Frenchman's Bend, Ike does not understand the social ramifications of bestiality. This lack of understanding of social norms is made clear in Ratliff's appeal to Reverend Whitfield for a solution to Ike's trouble, as neither man can easily determine how to get a person without language to conform to common morality.

Ike's desire for intimacy with the soil appears symptomatic of larger autochthonic urges amongst the men of Frenchman's Bend. Ike's love for the cow is noteworthy because it is so plain. Free from the moralizing constraints inherent in living in a human society, Ike's desire to rejoin the earth can be seen more easily than similar desires in socially accepted men. Within the context of the novel as a whole, the significance of Ike's lust for Houston's cow can be seen in its relation to the sexual desire the men of Frenchman's Bend exhibit toward the body of Eula Varner.

Eula appears in *The Hamlet* as both bovine and autochthonous. While her laziness and constant stasis tie her to the Bend's soil, her Junoesque beauty turns her into a place where others might be able to reenter the earth. Over the course of the novel, Ratliff calls Eula a "heifer," several men seem overly concerned with smells lingering in places she has sat, and three men dig into the land given away for her marriage. These acts by sexually potent men come to define Eula's character, and they secure her position as a fundamentally autochthonous entity in the Bend

(Godden, 56). Godden elaborates on the importance of Eula's bovine and autochthonous traits by writing:

> Just as Ike has sex not primarily with a cow, but with a hole in the ground, so, by association, one strand of the hamlet's obsession with Eula involves a desire for intimacy with the soil, focused through the Frenchman's place. It follows that… Faulkner casts the bovine as earth's orifice, not to sexualize the earth but to earth sexuality. He gives body to the earth, so that place shall be read as the materialization of what bodies do to the earth at that place…. Ike's passage into the cow casts the Bend's shared desire for Eula as an erotic autochthony in which the earth is animate and held in common. That structure of feeling, inflected through Ike's defense of his yearling, may be said to originate in the practices of subsistence production, and in the life-work of a class for whom the earth remains human – a "commonwealth" resistant to enclosure, to large means, and to speculation. (Godden, 56)

The men's desire for Eula reflects their places in the economic structure of Frenchman's Bend. Faulkner's work to "earth sexuality" effectively ties sexual activity to the natural (and not the economic) world. The autochthons who see Eula as entry point into the soil are tenant farmers whose livelihoods depend on the reproductive abilities of the hamlet's dirt. The damage that Flem's economic success does to Frenchman's Bend now becomes clear: when Flem acquires possession of Eula and the Old Frenchman's place in one shrewd trade, he ruins the possibility for the tenant farmers to reenter the soil upon which they depend.

Flem's acquisition of the object of the tenant farmer's sexual desire points to the complex relationship between sex and economics in *The Hamlet.* In order to describe the interactions between urges of autochthony and class mobility on the residents of the Bend, it will be helpful to look at the actions of three of the novels major players: Flem, Ratliff, and Mink Snopes.

Flem' separation from the soil of the Bend provides him a unique place within the male population of the hamlet. The Snopeses appear at the beginning of the novel as strangers to the Bend, and Flem is never linked to the dirt on which the rest of Varner's sharecroppers depend. Instead, Flem's sexuality is tied to the realm of economic exchange. Faulkner makes this clear when describes Ratliff and a group of tenant farmers sitting on Mrs. Littlejohn's porch at the end of Flem's first day of work:

> They would have been there on any other night, but this evening they were gathered even before the sun was completely gone, looking now and then toward the dark front of Varner's store as people will gather to look quietly at the cold embers of a lynching or at the propped ladder and open window of an elopement, since the presence of a hired white clerk in the store of man still able to walk and with intellect still sound enough to make money mistakes at least in his own favor, was as unheard of as the presence of a hired white woman in one of their own kitchens. (*Snopes*, 31)

By bringing together "the cold embers of a lynching" and the category of the "hired white woman" in the community's perception of Flem's employment, Faulkner ties commercial activity to racial violence and prostitution. By receiving a wage instead of working the land, Flem refuses to engage in the natural activities of the tenantry. In the eyes of the community, this looks equal to the highest possible racial and sexual indiscretions. Because Flem does not engage in autochthony, he appears in some way to be racially other, as he does not fit in with his own people. Similarly, his refusal to work in the dirt deflects his sexual virility into the economic sphere. In this short passage, Faulkner turns the threat of miscegenation into the threat of Flem Snopes. Years after completing *The Hamlet*, Faulkner would complete two sequels to the novel that would pick up on Flem's story and resolve the issues of his major period.

By being unable to copulate with the earth, Flem's characterization eventually allows for the reconstruction of the entirety of Faulkner's society.

Though Flem lacks autochthony, he maintains his father's class resentment. In this sense, Faulkner's construction of Flem is more complicated than Brooks sees him to be. Flem's refusal of credit upon his installation in Varner's store does not fit in with the view of Flem as the ideal capitalist. Instead, Flem's action can be read as either an inept financial blunder or a radical political stand against Varner's land-owning class. Because Varner depends on debt to maintain financial control of the Bend, Flem's refusal to accept credit looks like a twisted form of Ab's barn-burning. Though Jody has tried to buy off Flem with the job in the store in order to protect the elder Varner from Ab's arson, Jody falters in his assumption that Flem's work in the store will turn him to the owners' point of view (Godden, 18). Flem's continued contempt towards the Varner's through out the novel – seen in his rise past Jody and his eventual sale of the Old Frenchman's place – can be seen as a remnant of his inherited class resentment.

If one sees Flem as pulled upward by his contempt for the land-owning class unburdened by any autochthonous urges, then one can understand Ratliff as Flem's opposite. Though both Flem and Ratliff are born to the tenant farming class, each one rises beyond his economic birthright. In doing so, Flem and Ratliff take opposed positions toward the land-owning class which supports their climb. Where Flem maintains his father's radical attitude towards the Varners, Ratliff perpetuates the control of the upper class by selling sewing machines on credit (Godden, 22). The portrait of Flem as the embodiment of the evils of capitalism stems from the

narrator's alignment with Ratliff's perspective. In this novel, Faulkner begins an alignment with narrators from Ratliff's economic class that comes to structure his output in later novels. By telling this story from a single point of view that validates Ratliff's responses to Flem, Faulkner looks toward unifying Yoknapatawpha's society in a way that his earlier novels did not. Only by acknowledging this change in formal technique can one reconsider the role of Flem in the novel as a whole

. Ratliff's implicit sexual interest in Eula allows for another reading of the relationship between Flem and Ratliff, as Ratliff appears connected to the natural world of the Bend in a way Flem does not. Though Ratliff is able to repress the resentment for the Varners that is his right as a born tenant farmer, Ratliff's sexual desire for Eula shows that his validation of the land owners' system of credit has not completely robbed him of his autochthony. To show Ratliff's unconscious interest in reentering the soil, Godden deconstructs several instances of Ratliff's speech to show his attention to any of Eula's "points of contact with or near the ground, be they buggy seat, school bench, or earth" (Godden, 56). More persuasively, Godden appeals to the end of the novel, where Ratliff digs into the piece of earth which has served as Eula's dowry:

> What Ratliff excavates and buys is precious to him in a contradictory sense: he buys for speculative profit and to defeat a speculator, but he also buys Eula's dowry or marriage portion, purchasing, at one level, the body of Eula. Standing close to the foolish autochthon, Armstid, in a hole desirable to Ike, on property dedicated to Eula's earthy orifices – Ratliff cannot but partake of the residual bovine stories which disrupt the narrative of *The Hamlet.* For a moment he too digs back into the earth, perceivable as much more than price: part of Ratliff digs for the Frenchman's coin, but another part digs for the sweat of the tenantry, for that which his class of origin had literally buried in the earth. (Godden, 59)

Just as Flem's refusal of credit looks like a muted form of Ab's politics, Ratliff's interest in the soil of Eula's marriage portion draws on his autochthonous connection to the natural world of the Bend. Though Ratliff consciously buys the property in order to outmaneuver Flem, his fiscal loss allows him to reconnect with the earthly and sexual attributes of the tenant farmer's class. Moreover, Ratliff's share of the restaurant in Jefferson which he trades to Flem for the land successfully removes Flem from the Bend, seemingly putting an end to the rule of Snopesism. However, Ratliff's purchase of the land towards which he is pulled validates Flem's previous ownership of it and its symbolic point of entry (Eula). Though Ratliff tries to dig with the same ferocity as Armstid, he sees that Flem has ruined the soil. By putting fake treasure into the ground and taking Eula with him to Jefferson, Flem destroys the tenant farmers' chances of autochthonous escape from their class' economic oppression.

Given the narrator's close connection to Ratliff's consciousness and its total divorce from Flem's, the novel seems to choose sides in this conflict between natural/autochthonous impulses and sexless class mobility. However, the novel's position is complicated by Faulkner's inclusion of the story of Mink Snopes' murder of Jack Houston. At first glance, Mink's act appears as a violent retread of Ab's anti-land-owner politics. By shooting a member of the Bend's land-owning class, Mink lashes out against the economic structure that has guaranteed his poverty:

> The point at issue between Mink Snopes and Jack Houston is a fence. Unfenced or open range represented for Mink, and the southern tenantry, access to common use rights….In the late 1880s fencing was the linchpin of the owners' determination to control labor: a cropper or small renter who lacked common grazing rights had to hire a mule from the landowner, buy butter and bacon from the owner's

> commissary, and above all, plant the cash crop in order to cover costs, thereby upping the owner's "share" while ensuring the owner's control. Stock law disputes understandably became crucial for petty producers struggling against dependency. (Godden, 42)

Cornered by the system of debt protected by Varner and implicit in Houston's fence, Mink shoots down Houston in an effort to free himself from the bonds of sharecropping. Ironically, Mink's murder of Houston only perpetuates his ties to the owner and his land.

The relationship between Mink and Houston can be best seen in the terms of a Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Because Houston owns everything upon which Mink depends to live, Houston effectively owns Mink. By murdering Houston, Mink plays into the ancient narrative of the slave revolt. Since the slave cannot exist without a master to define itself against, Mink's murder of Houston serves as symbolic suicide (Godden, 47). This newfound bond between Mink and Houston takes a notably natural register in the novel's narration:

> [Houston looked] into [Mink's] face which with his own was wedded and twinned forever now by the explosion of that ten-gauge shell – the dead who would carry the living into the ground with him; the living who must bear about the repudiating earth with him forever, the deathless slain…(Faulkner, 208-9)

As Mink and Houston appear linked together, they do so within an unexpectedly autochthonic relationship. Houston takes Mink "into the ground with him," while Mink "must bear about the repudiating earth with [Houston] forever." Faulkner's description implies that the class resentment Mink draws on to kill Houston is somehow paired with both men's autochthony. This interaction between the economic and the natural is equally important to Houston's perception of the pain from Mink's bullet:

> [Houston] seemed to feel the shock of the ground while he knew he was still falling and had not yet reached it, then he was on the ground, he had stopped falling…[the pain came] not from himself outward, but inward toward himself out of all the identifiable lost earth. (Faulkner, 208)

Oddly, the ground seems to hit Houston before he has fully fallen on to it, and Houston perceives the earth as the origin of his pain. In Faulkner's telling, the soil looks as if it is an active participant in Houston's murder. If this is the case, the soil's motive seems tied to Mink's. If the economic power Varner holds over the tenantry through the accumulation of debt undoes the possibility for the poor farmers to maintain self-sustaining, reproductive relationships with the earth, then the earth has no option but to fight back against the land-owning class. Still, the earth (like Mink) remains a possession of the owner's class. Because the land also exists within a master-slave dialectic with Houston, its revolt also appears as a sort of suicide.

The homicidal combination of autochthony and class resentment as seen in the actions of Mink Snopes casts new light on the conflict between economic and natural worlds in *The Hamlet*. If Mink's violence can be seen as the result of autochthony mixed with slave-revolt, then Houston's murder appears tied Faulkner's concern with the legacy of miscegenation. As a sharecropper engaged in a natural relationship with the earth, Mink works as a stand-in for the sexually virile black men Faulkner later purges from his society. In a sense, *The Hamlet* shows the author's first attempt at creating a unified Yoknapatawpha County, as Frenchman's Bend allows him a setting free of the obvious signs of racial difference. Despite the author's best efforts, sex remains too tied to race in the characterizations of Flem and Mink, meaning that even a community without black people can not escape miscegenation.

Appearing two years after the publication of *The Hamlet*, Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* sees the author using characters in the lowlands of Yoknapatawpha County to engage with a set of concerns related to those he had encountered in the hills of Frenchman's Bend. The forms of the two novels give some explanation of their relationship to one another – whereas *The Hamlet* consists of a series tall tales bound together by a fixed chronology, *Go Down, Moses* is made up of seven separated stories that jump between different historical periods. Though both books might be described as episodic, *The Hamlet* finds a structural center in the story of Flem's rise, which makes it appear immediately novelistic. *Go Down, Moses'* genre, however, has been questioned since the book's release (Trilling, 647). The novel ultimately looks like a genealogy of the McCaslin family, which focuses on Ike McCaslin and his inheritance. By using this complicated formal construction, Faulkner shows his desire to find a cohesive view of the society which he had previously torn apart. As a novel made up of several stories about the same family, *Go Down, Moses* recalls the form of *The Sound and the Fury*, but it does so without the fragmentation caused by the Compsons' distinct perspectives. The brilliance of *Go Down, Moses* appears its inability to separate any of the component pieces of the McCaslin family's history. Though Ike wishes to remove himself from his family's legacy of slavery and miscegenation, the novel refuses to let him do so. At the core of the book stands a troubled binary between the world of hunting and the world of agriculture, though each appears bound to the other.

The seven stories that make up *Go Down, Moses* cover nearly a hundred years of history, beginning with Ike's father chasing Ike's enslaved half-uncle in "Was" and

ending with Ike encountering the object of his nephew's incest in "Delta Autumn." To do so, Faulkner begins with a trilogy of stories surrounding the plantation that Ike gives away. "Was" is the first of these – a comedy describing Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy's follies in slave ownership. The second of the trilogy is "The Fire and the Hearth," a story of Lucas Beauchamp and his battles with the land owning Edmondses, all of whom are Ike's relatives. The final part of the plantation trilogy relates the events surrounding the death of Rider, a black sawmill worker who lived on McCaslin property. In "Pantaloon in Black," the sudden death of Rider's wife Mannie drives the new widower to bring about his own lynching. Seen together, these first three stories show moments of racial conflict on the plantation ranging from a comic chase after the slave Tomey's Turl to outpourings of violence from and against Rider's subjugated black body. In all three cases, the racially mixed world of agriculture is presented as tainted by the omnipresence of miscegenation.

The next three sections of *Go Down, Moses* consider Ike's internal development as he learns to hunt. Though they do not allow for the escape from society that Ike hopes to find in the wilderness, "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn" chronicle Ike's encounters with the natural world and serve as a basis for Ike's repudiation of his inheritance. These stories center on a series of annual hunting trips taken by the wealthiest inhabitants of Jefferson on Major de Spain's property. In "The Old People," the twelve-year old Ike becomes "a hunter and a man" when he is baptized in the blood of his first kill by the noble savage Sam Fathers (*GDM*, 171). In the lauded fifth story of the novel, "The Bear," the legend of the hunting party's long standing battle with Old Ben is conveyed in highly poetic

language. “Delta Autumn” then sees the elderly Ike on a less prestigious hunting trip with some of his descendants, and it ends with the novel’s climax. When confronted by his nephew Roth Edmonds’ pregnant lover, Ike sees that the McCaslin legacy of miscegenation and incest has continued in spite of his efforts to escape cultivated society. Though Ike wishes to see hunting as a world of men like Sam Fathers living in harmony with the totality of nature, his nephew’s indiscretions destroy the ability to escape from the taint of miscegenation that stands at the center of Faulkner’s constructed society.

As seen divided into the plantation trilogy and the hunting trilogy (ignoring for now the less easily categorized seventh section of the novel), *Go Down, Moses*, like *The Hamlet* before it, appears to be concerned with interactions between the natural world and the civilized world. Though the illusory division between these two spheres drives Ike to live his whole life owning “but one object more than he could carry in his pockets and his hands at one time,” Faulkner’s artistic prowess saves his fiction from endorsing the escapist view of nature that Ike adopts (*GDM*, 3). Ike decides to abandon the agriculture world after he reads his family’s ledgers in “The Bear.” When Ike finds evidence that his ancestor Carothers McCaslin not only slept with his slaves but also with his own daughter, Ike encounters the ugly reality of the McCaslin legacy. Ike gives up his inheritance in an attempt to enter the world of hunting and become a descendant of the primitive and racially pure Native Americans.

The difference between the world of hunting and the world of agriculture appears in Ike’s preference for a homogonous society over one containing racial,

gender, and economic diversity. By leaving the world of the hunt for the world of agriculture, Ike's ancestors became dependant on the labor of the Beauchamps. After Carothers' incestuous sex with his daughter, heterosexuality is forever stained by its ability to mix races, and reproduction (both human and agricultural) can not be separated from this dependence of the white on the black. The implicit appeal of the legacy of Sam Fathers is the possibility for an asexual reproduction outside of agriculture – Ike wishes that Sam could be his father, and that by repudiating his inheritance he can escape the racially mixed world of civilization. Though Ike does his best to follow in the footsteps of the noble savage, the novel undermines any chance Ike might have of eluding his family's exploitative past. Notably, Sam exhibits a "visible trace of negro blood" (*GDM*, 161). Consequently, even Ike's relationship with the embodiment of the primitive ideal requires his dependence on a black body. Though Ike tries to evade his family's legacy by leaving the plantation for the wilderness, he can not escape from his ancestor's miscegenation.

By carrying out his own reading of the McCaslin family ledgers, Godden offers an interpretation of *Go Down, Moses* unlike any seen before him. Importantly, Godden focuses on the portion of the ledgers which Ike ignores. Before finding the evidence for Carothers' incest, Ike reads several entries in the ledgers regarding the slave Percival Brownlee. Though Ike refuses to consider the meaning behind these entries, Godden finds a story of homosexual sex hidden within Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy's argument over the usefulness of their slave.

Percival Brownlee first appears in the ledgers on March 3, 1856. Uncle Buck buys Brownlee from Nathan Bedford Forrest, when the future leader of the Ku Klux

Klan "was still only a slave-dealer and not yet a general" (*GDM*, 252). Over the next few months, Uncle Buck reveals that Brownlee is totally useless on the farm, since Brownlee can neither plough nor lead livestock to water. Uncle Buddy tells Uncle Buck to free Brownlee, but Uncle Buck refuses to do so until October. After seven months of ownership, Uncle Buck admits that purchasing Brownlee was a mistake when Brownlee causes a mule to break its leg while in its stall.

As Godden sees it, Uncle Buck bought Brownlee to be used for homosexual sex. Though Brownlee fails to do any work on the farm, Uncle Buck's defense of Brownlee over seven months of ownership shows that the slave must have offered some other utility to his owner. Prior to Ike's birth, both Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy had remained bachelors well into their fifties. Uncle Buddy never marries, and Uncle Buck only marries Ike's mother when it is demanded of him. While these facts corroborate Godden's reading, the proof of Brownlee's role on the plantation appears when the slave causes a mule to break its leg in its own stall. Because Uncle Buck wants to keep Brownlee far away from his brother, he uses the stable as a place to meet with his slave at night. While Uncle Buck waits in an empty stall for his lover, Brownlee enters the "wrong stall" and attempts to have sex with the mule (*GDM, 253)*. The mule responds to Brownlee by trying to kick him, but the mule misses and breaks it leg. Waiting in a nearby stall, Uncle Buck is able to immediately respond to the mule's distress, and he shoots it (Godden, 123-4).

This significance of the story of Percival Brownlee can only be understood within the context of the novel's historical moment in 1942. The time of the novel's composition saw the existence of historical conditions suitable "for the extraction of

black from white" (Godden, 87). Brownlee's appearance in the McCaslin family ledgers works in the novel to help negotiate the end of white exploitation of black labor. In Godden's argument, white men replace dependency on black labor with homoerotic desire for black bodies. This new desire at once allows for white and black to continue to define themselves against each other while forcing a separation between the two. Ike's refusal to confront the story of Percival Brownlee shows that while whites can come to terms with the end of their dependence on black labor, they can not acknowledge the homosexual desires they feel for black bodies. Every understanding of the world that Ike comes to in the novel depends on his ability to repress conflicting evidence. Whether ignoring his father's homosexuality or forgetting about Sam Father's mixed blood, Ike protects himself from the existential crises that killed Quentin Compson by simplifying the world around him. Though homosexual inklings might hide under characters' actions, Yoknapatawpha's society demands for the repression of homosexual desire. By hiding white desires for black bodies, the novel works to sever the newly renegotiated relationship between white and black.

Notably, homosexual undertones only emerge in *Go Down, Moses* when connected with economic and racial differences. Ike's homosocial world of the hunt seems separated from the sexual activities brought on by the reproductive nature of agriculture. The escape to the natural world of the hunt appears not to be compelled by homosexuality, but instead by an interest in asexuality. Since homosexuality seems linked to miscegenation for Faulkner, Ike's inability to escape from his family's past by entering a homosocial world requires further explanation. The

pervasiveness of miscegenation in Faulkner's world relates directly to the author's understanding of the work referenced in the novel's title - the Old Testament.

The critic Eleanor Cook shows the importance of the Old Testament to the story of *Go Down, Moses* in her essay "Reading Typologically, For Example, Faulkner." Resurrecting the practice of biblical typology, Cook relates Isaac McCaslin to his biblical namesake. In Cook's view, the central conflict of the novel stems from Ike's refusal to act like the Isaac for whom he was named, and the implications of his choice for the generations that follow him:

> When Ike repudiates his patrimony, he does so in order to purify himself of a tainted inheritance. In one sense he repudiates his own name. He wants to live like the rejected brothers: like Ishmael (in the wilderness), like Esau (the skillful hunter). He has been born on the winning side, so to speak, the late child of older parents, an Isaac and not an Ishmael. By his own act of repudiation, he intends to bring himself closer to the losing side, to the black McCaslin line rather than the white, the Ishmaels to his Isaac. His own acknowledged pattern for acting this way is the Nazarene, Christ. (Cook, 703)

This biblical understanding of Faulkner's work helps to pull the disparate pieces of the novel together, since the Old Testament also consists of a series of stories that anticipate a new society yet to come. Miscegenation appears as the original sin of Ike's society, as its stain seems to be inborn in every Southerner. Though Ike sacrifices his own wealth in order to act in a Christ-like manner, he fails to redeem his society. Despite Ike's best wishes, Ike's sacrifice does not do any good for his black relatives – it only protects Ike from facing the reality of his family's legacy.

When confronted with his nephew's lover at the end of "Delta Autumn," Ike confronts his own failure to save his world from miscegenation. Faced with a jilted, impregnated descendant, Ike pays off Roth's lover and tells her to find a black man to

marry (*GDM*, 346). Sex has become an economic concern for Ike, as it did for his father. Where Uncle Buck had to buy a slave to indulge his sexual urges, Ike has to pay a woman for mothering his nephew's child. In a world where every sexual act is underscored by miscegenation, familial ties depend on economic transactions.

The importance of *Go Down, Moses* can be seen in Faulkner's ability to pull together disconnect stories in a way that breaks from his aesthetic inventions in the major period. For the first time in his career, the fragments of Faulkner's novel work together to construct a fully realized society. Though the separation of black from white continues to pull Yoknapatawpha apart, it no longer undoes the cohesiveness of Faulkner's story. This seems contrary to common reactions to the novel, as it initially appears as a collection of short stories. Upon further reading, however, each piece becomes vital to the work as a whole. In Faulkner' later novels, the author continues to construct fully realized societies, as he attempts to solve the problem of miscegenation that had underscored the entirety of his earlier career. In *Go Down, Moses*, however, the story of the McCaslin family appears fully realized precisely because it is torn apart.

Chapter Two: Paternalism in *Intruder in the Dust*

In the six years between the publication of *Go Down, Moses* and the release of Faulkner's next novel, *Intruder in the Dust*, great changes took place in the authors' personal life. As the United States escalated its involvement in the Second World War, Faulkner's troubled finances sent him back to Hollywood for another tour of duty on the Warner Brothers' back lot (Parini, 267). After two years of work on screenplays for war movies and Howard Hawks' productions, Faulkner went back to his home in Mississippi disgruntled and depressed by his time in the west (Blotner, 468). When the World War ended, Faulkner was back at Rowan Oak, the antebellum plantation outside Oxford that Faulkner had purchased years earlier to play the part of the southern patriarch. From there, he helped the Cowley compile *The Portable Faulkner*, which "precipitated a major reevaluation of Faulkner by American critics" (Parini, 291). Shortly thereafter, the Modern Library series reissued *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* in 1946, while RKO and Cagney Productions both paid the author for new short stories in that same year. After decades of publishing novels with little financial success, Faulkner managed to take in almost ten thousand dollars in the twelve months following the release of Cowley's book (Parini, 291). The author's complete financial security would come in 1948, when he sold the film rights to *Intruder in the Dust* to MGM for $50,000 (Blotner, 495).

Though the importance of *Intruder in the Dust* to Faulkner's biography may be largely financial, the novel's interests in contemporary politics and its relatively basic narrative form have afforded it a somewhat odd place in scholarly considerations. First appearing in the middle of Faulkner' critical resurgence, the

work garnered more of an immediate critical response than any book he had ever published. A critic at *Time* called *Intruder in the Dust* a "triumphant work" that offered hope for the South, while The New York *Herald Tribune* book section claimed that the novel was one of Faulkner's best. Following these raves, the novel became one of the author's most commercially successful works – it sold 15,000 copies at the time of its first publication (Blotner, 496-7). In the time since the book's initial release, however, scholars have come to see the novel as one of Faulkner's lesser works. Viewing the novel as a marker between the major and later periods of Faulkner's career, Ikuko Fujihira notes that "most critics will agree that *Intruder in the* Dust reveals the decline of William Faulkner's creative imagination" (Fujihira, 37). Since it lacks the formal invention and deep concerns about the nature of storytelling that characterized Faulkner's greater output in the thirties, *Intruder in the Dust* does appear as a lighter aesthetic enterprise than novels from the author's major period. However, the differences between *Intruder in the Dust* and the earlier novels reveals insights that lead towards an understanding of the post-war Faulkner, and they should not be dismissed as a decline in the writer's ability.

When viewed beside some of Faulkner's major works from the thirties, *Intruder in the Dust* looks like a more self-consciously political book than any Faulkner had ever written. As its narrative focuses on the possibility of a lynching, *Intruder in the Dust* can be seen alongside *Light in August* and *Go Down, Moses* as amongst Faulkner's most direct commentaries on race in his native Mississippi. Moreover, the novel marks one of the few times Faulkner set his fiction in his own historical present, placing it in the company of three sections of *The Sound and the*

Fury and the last two stories in *Go Down, Moses.* Whereas both of these earlier novels are broken into distinct fragments from various time periods, *Intruder in the Dust* appears as a single, linear narrative that resolves itself over the course of a few days. The effects of these two approaches seem especially important to an understanding of the difference between the Faulkner of the thirties and the postwar Faulkner. The formal experiments Faulkner used in his major period tended to attach the weight of the Southern past to its present. By using one of his most accessible narratives in his first post-war novel, Faulkner confronts the political issues of his time independent of their origins. Without the burden of Southern history, Faulkner argues that the complicated issues of race and class can be resolved.

Where uncertainty and ambiguity permeate the writings of the major period, the postwar Faulkner appears to have solved the troubles of race and history that occupied his writing for the entirety of his career. The solution that Faulkner prescribes in *Intruder in the Dust* comes directly out of the ideology of Southern Liberalism – the vision of gradual and restrained social reform that a small number of southern elites developed during the thirties and forties, as the south confronted the New Deal and the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement. Faulkner's novel offers a vivid rendition of that emerging ideology, which acknowledged some of the injustice of racism. The author casts racism as a lower class problem, and he asserts that a paternal elite who commands the respect of poor whites would offer the only way to avoid destructive violence. However, the author's implementation of that solution in his novel looks almost as complicated as his use of experimental form in *Go Down, Moses.* Although the novel appears to be a straightforward call for gains in Civil

Rights for African-Americans in Mississippi, a close reading of the novel's plot and its symbolism makes it clear that Faulkner's vision of the future of the South is deeply incoherent. In the end, Faulkner's attempts to resolve fundamental contradictions in his vision and in his society result in the writing of a book that does not make sense.

In order to make clear the inherent troubles in Faulkner's overtly political novel, some plot summary will be necessary. At the most basic level, *Intruder in the Dust* can be seen as a novel about a lynching that does not take place. Lucas Beauchamp, a black man who earlier appeared in "The Fire and the Hearth" portion of *Go Down, Moses*, is charged with the murder of Vinson Gowrie, a white man from the hills of Yoknapatawpha County. Gowrie is a resident of Beat 4 – the section of the county known for housing the poorest and most violently racist whites. Though Faulkner valorized this same group of tenant farmers in earlier novels like *As I Lay Dying*, the residents of Beat 4 now appear as nothing more than despicable rednecks. At the novel's beginning, Lucas is found holding a recently fired pistol over Gowrie's body. Imprisoned in Jefferson while the county waits for Beat 4 to rise up and lynch him, Lucas calls for Gavin Stevens, the county attorney. Gavin brings his nephew and assistant Chick Mallison along with him to visit Lucas, and after Gavin makes it clear that he believes Lucas to be guilty, it falls upon the sixteen year old white boy to save the elderly black man.

Faulkner combines two genres in *Intruder in the Dust* in order to construct a story that can solve the central problems of his society. By having the sixteen year old Chick Mallison investigate a murder, the author calls on the conventions of both the

detective story and the coming of age story. Because of Chick's youth, he has yet to be fully indoctrinated into the value system of his community. Free of adult responsibilities and complacency, Chick redeems his elders by confronting the injustice they ignore. In many ways, the novel looks like a Hardy Boys story.

This being a Faulkner novel, Chick's motivation to help Lucas does not stem from any sort of humanitarian impulse. Instead, Chick acts on Lucas' behalf in order to assuage a feeling of indebtedness the boy has felt towards Lucas for years. In a flashback, Faulkner dramatizes Chick falling into an icy creek on the Edmonds' property as a small boy. Lucas finds Chick, brings him into his house, and feeds Chick his own dinner. Lucas symbolically becomes a new father to the boy, since Chick's recovery from his fall in the creek plays like a rebirthing scene. Once Chick gathers himself, the boy feels embarrassed by his sudden dependence on a black man, and he attempts to pay Lucas for helping him. Chick implicitly wants to remove Lucas' paternal powers and turn him into a menial servant. When Lucas refuses to take his money, Chick becomes further embarrassed by Lucas' determination to act outside culturally inscribed racial dynamics. The white boy becomes determined to pay back the favor the black man does for him and to free himself from his connection to a black father. Lucas' imminent lynching in the novel's present offers Chick an opportunity to pay off his debt to Lucas and to replace him with a legitimate white father - Gavin.

Working to prove his own innocence, Lucas sends Chick to dig Vinson Gowrie's body out of its new grave in order to show that Lucas' pistol was not what caused the hole in Vinson's back. Chick does so at midnight with help from his black

companion Aleck Sander and an elderly white woman named Eunice Habersham. When the trio opens Vinson's coffin, they find a lumber trader named Jake Montgomery buried in his place. Vinson and Jake had been involved in the sale of lumber, which has deep resonances in Faulkner's canon. The lumber industry appears in *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Go Down, Moses* as central to the commercial destruction of agriculture. Faulkner's least socially acceptable characters tend to work in sawmills, and violence often breaks out amongst these mill workers. Since the sale of lumber looks like an unnatural activity to the author, characters who take part in the lumber industry seem particularly aberrant. Put bluntly, the lumber industry turns yeoman farmers into murderers.

After refilling the grave, Chick, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham return to town and wake Gavin. The next morning, Gavin, Sheriff Hampton, and Chick encounter Vinson's grieving father at the cemetery before they reopen the grave for a second time. They find the coffin newly empty. The murderer had not only dug up Vinson Gowrie to cover his murder of Jake Montgomery, but he had also removed the body of his second victim after Chick and his companions left the cemetery the previous night. All in all, Faulkner has Vinson's grave reopened four times within the twenty-four hours following the Beat 4 resident's initial burial. Notably, these burials and reburials do not look anything like the autochthonous activities carried out by the citizens of Frenchman's Bend in *The Hamlet*. Faulkner describes the opening of the graves without invoking a sexual register, since they are carried out by urban citizens of Jefferson who lack any connection to the soil.

The band of county officials and Gowries quickly find Jake's body dumped not far from the open grave, and they shortly thereafter pull Vinson's corpse from some quicksand beneath a nearby bridge. Vinson's wounds show that he was not murdered by Lucas' pistol, but that he had actually been killed by a Luger Buddy McCallum had brought back from World War I and then traded to Crawford Gowrie for "a pair of fox hounds" (*Intruder*, 175). Vinson Gowrie had been murdered by his own brother, and the boys' father is the first to learn of his children's fates.

Upon Gavin and Chick's return to town with the proof of Lucas' innocence, the crowd of whites gathered outside of the jail disperses. The rednecks of Beat 4 had never appeared to turn the crowd into a mob. Lucas eventually explains to Gavin that Crawford Gowrie had killed both Vinson and Jake to hide the fact that he had been stealing lumber from their employer. After Chick returns to his home with his uncle, the sheriff uses Lucas as bait to catch Crawford. The novel concludes with a twisted reenactment of Chick's encounter with Lucas after falling in the creek, wherein Lucas tries to pay Gavin for his services as an attorney. In effect, the black man unsuccessfully attempts to regain some power over the white lawyer by commercializing their relationship. After some argument, Gavin charges Lucas two dollars to pay for a pen Gavin had broken while working the case.

As this summary shows, the events which make up the plot of *Intruder in the Dust* are more than a little bit convoluted. Though the novel takes on the airs of a detective story, Faulkner reveals that Lucas knows the truth behind Vinson's murder all along. At a time when he could have been lynched, Lucas decides to send a sixteen year-old off to dig up a recently buried corpse instead of giving away the ending to

the murder mystery. Faulkner contrives this plot device because he needs Chick to encounter the dead bodies in order to call upon the conventions of the detective story. More importantly, Faulkner forces Chick to confront the Gowries. The author sends Chick out to the cemetery to show that the elite whites of Jefferson can solve the problems of the racist farmers in the hills.

Cleanth Brooks goes to some effort in his essay "The Community in Action" to show that "the murderer's motive for putting into the grave of his first victim, Vinson Gowrie, the body of Jake Montgomery, who he has just killed, does not make entire sense" (Brooks, 2). Brooks comment is a ridiculous understatement – the plot of the novel makes no sense at all. Crawford buries a body without any bullet holes in order to hide the fact that the body that has already been buried sports the wrong sorts of bullet holes. While these illogical moves within Faulkner's plot work to artificially complicate what would otherwise be a fairly straightforward whodunit, Faulkner's impulse to construct his story in this way appears to be inherently tied to his political beliefs as a Southern liberal.

Characterized by a desire to see blacks receive less abuse in the South without any help from a Northern federal government, southern liberals in the late forties found themselves in the crossfire between what they saw to be two warring forces: Harry Truman's administration and violent rednecks. Hodding Carter, a renowned Southern liberal who had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for editorials condemning racial inequality, visited Faulkner at Rowan Oak in February of 1948 (Hamblin, 61). The journalist would publish an essay entitled "The Civil Rights Issue as seen in the South" in *The New York Times* Magazine less than a month after leaving Faulkner's

restored plantation. In this essay, Carter described differing Southern opinions on Truman's proposals for Civil Rights legislation, which included anti-poll tax and anti-lynching bills. Carter's characterization of the Southern response to Truman was defined by a common distrust of federal action across class lines (Hamblin, 65). The scholar Robert W. Hamblin notes that:

> Carter concluded his essay with an alarmingly pessimistic view of the situation. The voices of the moderates and pragmatists (among whom Carter counted a significant number of Southern blacks) were being drowned out by extremists represented, on the one hand, by the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, who predicted bloodshed if the proposed civil rights legislation was enacted, and, on the other hand, by Northern black revolutionaries like P.L. Praddis, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier,* who equated Winston Churchill (because of Great Britain's policy in South Africa) with Hitler and Mussolini. Such incendiary positions, added to the long-standing antipathy between the white and black races, created a complex problem that defied easy and immediate solution. (Hamblin, 66)

At the time of Carter's visit to Rowan Oak, Faulkner was still in the process of composing *Intruder in the Dust.* Faulkner's sympathies towards Carter's political leanings have been noted throughout scholarly works on this period in the author's life. Notably, Faulkner and Carter shared a belief that the solutions to the problems surrounding race in Mississippi should belong to Southerners alone (Hamblin, 62). This liberal ideal drives the incoherent reasoning behind the events of Lucas' near lynching.

Though *Intruder in the Dust* centers on Lucas' salvation from rednecks, the novel refuses to give any sort of agency to its black characters. Though Lucas compels Chick to open Vinson Gowrie's grave, he is able to do so only because he had previously refused to accept Chick's payment for his help. When confronted with the anger of a white society larger than a single, scared child, Lucas is reduced to

depending on a sixteen year-old for his survival. The only black character that appears in the work other than Lucas is Aleck Sander, who constantly bends to Chick's will. Even though he knows that a trip to Beat 4 will be considerably more dangerous for him than it will be for his middle-class, white companion, Aleck Sander follows Chick to dig up the grave of a white man supposedly murdered by a black man in the heart of redneck country. In the logic of Faulkner's narrative, both Lucas and Aleck Sander depend on Chick and Gavin to secure a place for blacks in Yoknapatawpha society.

Importantly, this omission of any sort of black character with agency in *Intruder in the Dust* is not universal in Faulkner's literature. In *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner's last novel before *Intruder in the Dust*, the author had given a profound power to the character of Rider in "Pantaloon in Black." Consumed by rage and grief after the death of his wife, Rider murders his white superior at the lumber mill after being cheated at a dice game. Though Rider is lynched by a white mob, he appears pleased by his own murder, as he has willed it upon himself. In Rider, Faulkner constructed an image of a black man made powerful by his rage, and whose anger left him displaced in the complicated interactions of an interracial society. In the same way that Rider stands out in Faulkner's literature as a unique depiction of the angry black man, "Pantaloon in Black" stands alone in the middle of *Go Down, Moses* by not addressing the stories of any of the members of the McCaslin family. Faulkner appears unable to assimilate the powerful, angry black man into his county's society and into the formal structures of his own literature. From this interpretation of the displacement of Rider in *Go Down, Moses*, one can infer the logic behind the

depictions of the two black characters in *Intruder in the Dust*. Lucas, an elderly man, and Aleck Sander, a teenage boy, both lack the physical and emotional powers of the angry black man Faulkner had unleashed in Rider. Because Faulkner wants to create a novel that allows for the integration of white and black society through the good works of middle-class whites, he eliminates any sort of powerful black character that might look like Rider from his story.

Lucas avoids Rider's fate in *Intruder in the Dust* with the help of Chick and Gavin, but he ultimately survives largely because no mob from Beat 4 ever appears at the Jefferson jail to lynch him. Although crowds of whites who work in the town wait in the street for the citizens of Beat 4 to rally them into a mob, the lower-class white farmers from the hills of Yoknapatawpha never show up. In Faulkner's construction, the Gowries, Bundrens, and assorted other poor whites who make up the citizenry of Beat 4 represent the threat of redneck violence that would come with a forced racial integration of the South. From the twenties through the forties, these poor whites were represented in Mississippi politics by the white supremacist Theodore G. Bilbo. Serving as both Governor and Congressman over a two decade long political career, Bilbo garnered much of his support through populist appeals to the hill people of Mississippi. As the historian Robert L. Fleegler notes:

> Throughout his career, [Bilbo] appealed to the poor farmers of the hill country -attacking Wall Street, large corporations, and other forces that disrupted the isolated regions where his faithful lived. He called for more progressive taxation and increased state aid to education. Indeed, Bilbo's program of economic populism and white supremacy earned him the loyal support of the poor whites of rural Mississippi, which sustained him through a political life marked by a series of scandals and comebacks. (Fleegler, 5)

As a resident of Mississippi under the Bilbo administration, Faulkner's choice in placing the murder of Vinson Gowrie in the hill country seems tied to Bilbo's rampant support amongst poor whites. Faulkner's goes as far as to name one of the Gowrie brothers after Bilbo, though Bilbo Gowrie only appears in passing in the text of the novel (*Intruder*, 161). The citizenry of Beat 4 are implicitly tied to the racist views Bilbo himself recorded in his book *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization*. In it, the former governor writes:

> The South stands for blood, for the preservation of the white race. We shall not relax in any way whatsoever the social barriers which have been erected to maintain the purity of that blood. There is not enough power in all the world, not in all the mechanized armies of the Allies and Axis, including the atomic bomb, which could now force the white Southerners to abandon the policy of the social segregation of the white and black races. (Bilbo, quoted in Hamblin, 69)

The connection between the resident's of Beat 4 and Bilbo's white supremacist cry cements the role as the catalyst for Lucas' lynching. If there are men in Yoknapatawpha County willing to incite a mob in order to kill a black man for murdering a white man, Faulkner implies that they would certainly be from Beat 4. The fact that no one comes from Beat 4 to lead the lynch mob appears central to Faulkner's interest in creating a society where whites and blacks can coexist, though the reason behind the absence of a violent outburst from Beat 4 further shows the tortured logic of Faulkner's work.

The first inclination of the reason why Beat 4 did not appear to lynch Lucas comes to Chick during his second trip to the cemetery within twelve hours, as Sheriff Hampton reveals to Vinson Gowrie's father that his son's grave has been opened, and that he intends to open it again. The passage reads:

> And later, afterward, [Chick] realised that this was when he believed he knew not perhaps why Lucas had ever reached town alive because the reason for that was obvious: there happened to be no Gowrie present at the moment but the dead one: but at least how the old man and two of his sons happened to ride out of the woods behind the church almost as soon as he and the sheriff and his uncle reached the grave, and certainly why almost forty-eight hours afterward Lucas was still breathing. "It's Jake Montgomery down there," the sheriff said. (*Intruder*, 158-9)

Though Faulkner never specifically states it, the thought which seems to come to Chick when reexamining this moment at some point "later" appears to be tied to the fact that Mr. Gowrie does not appear particularly surprised by the sheriff's need to reopen the grave. The implication here is that Mr. Gowrie and his family knows that Lucas was not responsible for Vinson's death. Regardless of whether or not this may be, the fact remains that Mr. Gowrie has somehow kept the occupants of Beat 4 from storming the town jail and murdering Lucas. In Faulkner's construction, poor whites can be stopped from violently lashing out at blacks by strong patriarchs who issue orders. Mr. Gowrie, Gavin, the sheriff, and Chick all appear as influential white men who can protect helpless blacks against the rednecks of Yoknapatawpha County.

The critic Kevin Railey provides a basis for understanding Faulkner's paternalist interests in his book *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner*. In Railey's understanding, the entirety of Faulkner's fiction deals with a conflict between liberalism and paternalism. As the new South is forged out of the old with the rise of industry and the end of the New Deal, self-interested poor whites like the Snopeses gain power over the fading Southern aristocracy of the Compsons and the McCaslins. As Faulkner sees it, this change in

power signals then end of a Southern way of life that deserves protecting. In his argument, Railey positions Faulkner firmly on the paternalist side of the divide:

> As many of his comments about democracy and capitalism reveal, Faulkner was never completely at home in a world dominated by liberalism, and his fiction constantly explores his doubts and fears….Do the Jody and Will Varners lead to Flem Snopes? Do the De Spains lead to the selling of the South and the deaths of Eula Varners? Do Ike McCaslin and Gavin Stevens lead nowhere? Ultimately Faulkner was afraid of liberalism and its effects on the direction of the South and the country, and he was afraid that the death of paternalism's values would allow the hordes to sweep away all that was sacred. (Railey, 42-2)

Considering Railey's understanding of the nature of paternalism in Faulkner's work, the logic behind Faulkner's implausible narrative in *Intruder in the Dust* can be seen more clearly. If the South is to be integrated as Hodding Carter's morality demands that it must be, then strong white patriarchs must step forward to guide the population towards reconciliation across race lines. For this reconciliation to take place, angry black men like Rider must be erased from Faulkner' fictional County, since such physically powerful entities would natural opponents to the rule of the intellectual elite.

Railey questions Gavin Stevens' usefulness in the above passage, but he does so particularly in relation to Gavin's failure to protect the citizens of Jefferson from Flem Snopes in *The Town* and *The Mansion.* Gavin's ability to protect Lucas from lynching in *Intruder in the Dust* might also be called into question, since Mr. Gowrie ultimately appears to be the white man responsible for saving Lucas' life. Though Gavin does not actively do much to help Lucas in the novel without prodding from either Chick or Miss Habersham, Gavin does provide rather lengthy lectures as to the importance of Southern liberal values for the future of Mississippi. Gavin's speeches

on this matter have caused annoyance to scholars since the novel's publication. Brooks summed up the common response to the county attorney's lectures when he wrote that "most readers find it impossible not to condescend to Gavin Stevens. They can scarcely be blamed, and in itself the condescension does no harm to the novel" (Brooks, 1). Though Brooks wishes to draw attention away from the content of these speeches, Gavin's discussions of liberal values might be used to provide explanations for the strangeness of Faulkner's plot. Because Gavin preaches the same ideals which Faulkner attempts to encapsulate through narrative, Gavin's words can give unique incites into Faulkner's master plan. In a notable section of dialogue wherein uncle and nephew discuss the crowd leaving the street in front of the Jefferson jail, Chick asks Gavin a question surrounding the perceived differences between lynching and fratricide. Gavin responds by saying:

> "*Thou shalt not kill* in precept and even when you do, precept still remains unblemished and scarless: *Thou shalt not kill* and who knows, perhaps next time you won't. But *Gowrie must not kill Gowrie's brother:* no maybe about it, no next time to maybe not Gowrie kill Gowrie because there must be no first time….if we are not to hold to the belief that that point not just shall not but must not and *can*not come at which Gowrie or Ingrum or Stevens or Mallison may shed Gowrie or Ingrum or Stevens or Mallison blood, how hope ever to reach that one where *Thou shalt not kill at all*, where Lucas Beauchamp's life will be secure not despite the fact that he is Lucas Beauchamp but because he is?" (Faulkner, 195-6)

Gavin here lays out the trouble that seems to be at the center of Faulkner's novel, and the county attorney comes about as close to providing a succinct moral for this complicated mystery novel as one could hope to find in Faulkner: if a redneck can sink as low as to kill his own brother, how can a society hope to protect members of minorities from similar violent attacks? This question stems from Faulkner's deeply

paternalistic point of view, as the father is viewed to be responsible when one brother murder's another. Mr. Gowrie therefore appears complicit in Crawford's murder of Vinson, and Mr. Gowrie can only redeem himself by saving the life of Lucas. From this view, justice relates to familial connection, and it does not stem from any moral obligation.

Faulkner's solution to the problems of racial conflict and lynching as depicted in *Intruder in the Dust* seems to be to let blacks into subordinate positions within powerful white families. If paternalism can be used to combat racism as Faulkner wishes to show that it can, then blacks must be treated as the sons of white fathers. Importantly, Faulkner presents this familial response to racial strife in one of his least sexually charged works. Whereas miscegenation appeared to be the original sin of Southern society in Faulkner's work in the thirties, he presents in *Intruder in the Dust* a joining of white and black brothers free of the possibility of interracial sex. Gone along with Rider's power and physicality is his sexual potency, since the only blacks that appear in this novel are a widower (Lucas) and a virgin (Aleck Sander). In the end, Faulkner creates a society where blacks and whites can coexist as long as blacks remain silent, complacent, and impotent.

Chapter Three: Faulkner's Middle Class in *The Town* and *The Mansion*

Seventeen years after publishing *The Hamlet,* Faulkner released the first of two sequels to the story of Flem Snopes' rise out of Frenchman's Bend. In 1957, *The Town* appeared, and *The Mansion* followed it two years later in 1959. Together, these three novels make up *Snopes*, which the Modern Library published as a single tome for the first time in 1994. After completing the three pieces of the trilogy, Faulkner would only write one more novel before his death in 1962. Though that final novel, *The Reivers,* would win Faulkner a posthumous Pulitzer Prize, *The Town* and *The Mansion* represent the culmination of twenty-five years worth of the author's work on the Snopes family. Covering nearly fifty years of history in Yoknapatawpha's county seat of Jefferson, these later novels chronicle the urbanization and modernization of the rural South which took place over the first half of the twentieth century. As the story follows Flem's exit from the rural uplands into city life, Faulkner's interests appear more domestic and civilized than they did at any point in his major period. *The Town* in particular comes as close as Faulkner ever came to writing a Victorian novel, as it centers on a set of bourgeois male rivals who fight for the favor of a classically beautiful woman. In Faulkner's world, this seemingly traditional domestic comedy is warped into a portrait of a society where paternal white men are destined to destroy the woman they should be obliged to protect. Just as Faulkner puts the life of Lucas Beauchamp into the hands of paternalistic whites in *Intruder in the Dust,* the author places Eula Snopes in a subservient relationship to a similar set of active males in *The Town.* In both novels, the actions of powerful white men in conflict with one another determine the fates of marginalized groups. Though the ruling whites save Lucas

Beauchamp from the rednecks of Beat 4, those same powerful white men can not save Eula Snopes from each other. A fundamental difference in Faulkner's attitudes towards blacks and women appears here, since racism appears to exist only amongst lower class whites while the threat of female sexuality is faced exclusively by the intellectual elite of the bourgeoisie. By accepting the class division brought on by miscegenation where some whites must be lower than others, Faulkner becomes able to separate issues of race and sex along class lines.

The beginning of *The Town* makes it clear that the novel's interests are with a different set of Mississippians than Faulkner had encountered in *The Hamlet.* Charles Mallison, the novel's first narrator, briefly walks through his familial connections to members of the State Department before describing the events of *The Hamlet* as seen through the eyes Ratliff, the middle-class sewing machine salesman. When the Snopes' arrive in Jefferson, Charles has not yet been born, and his uncle Gavin is at Harvard working on his M.A (*Snopes*, 354). Charles, Gavin, and Ratliff provide the narration over the course of the novel, as each new chapter finds a different one of them relating the Snopes' gains in Jefferson. As seen in the context of his own work, the form of *The Town* looks like a simpler version of that which Faulkner employed in *As I Lay Dying.* More specifically, *The Town* formally resembles a classical dialogue, as each narrator responds to the views and events described by the others in turn. Joseph Urgo outlines a particular understanding of the novel in relation to its form in his book *Faulkner's Apocrypha: A Fable, Snopes and the Spirit of Human Rebellion*:

> *The Town* is largely concerned with how things are known, how knowledge is communicated, and how human beings might change

> their environment intellectually and politically. Its epistemological thrust is toward what might be called the politics of knowledge. The emphasis is not so much on "how things are known" as it is on how known things are communicated and used. Although the novel may not necessarily be didactic, it is *about* didacticism. (Urgo, 184)

Urgo bases his reading of the novel on the ways in which the three narrators participate in the activity of "Snopes-watching." As Ratliff envisions it, "Snopes-watching" refers to a community service the trio takes part in by monitoring the Snopes clan's growth in Jefferson. Urgo sees the exchange of information between the different narrators' disparate perspectives as the central interest of the novel. In effect, the novel's central dialogue dramatizes the community's actions in its "eternal human effort to understand its environment, its place and time, and itself" (Urgo, 192). What Urgo misses, however, is the underlying class differences that color the perceptions of the narrators in their appraisals of the Snopeses. As shown in their previous appearances in *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Hamlet*, all three of the narrators of *The Town* enjoy middle-class lifestyles in Yoknapatawpha County. In contrast, Flem Snopes rises from the lowest tier of white society to one of the highest positions of power in Jefferson – the presidency of the De Spain family's bank. The narrators of *The Town* do not speak for the whole of Jefferson; they merely communicate bourgeois fears surrounding Flem's class mobility, his wife's rampant sexuality, and his wife's daughters' illegitimacy. Though all three of the narrators are eventually pulled down from their moral high ground by their obsessions with the Snopeses, none of them fall quite as far as the mayor of Jefferson, Manfred de Spain.

Charles foregrounds De Spain's connection to Eula in the first chapter of the novel, portraying the mayor as the town's choice of lover for a woman who is far too

ravishing to be married to a Snopes. Having been the first man in Jefferson to own a car and the young people's choice to lead the city, De Spain seems particularly suited to cuckold Flem. In one telling passage, Charles lays out what becomes the central narrative of the novel, as several powerful men act on the behalf of the community in their interactions with Eula:

> So when we [Jefferson] first saw Mrs. Snopes walking in the Square giving off that terrifying impression that in another second her flesh itself would burn her garments off, leaving not even a veil of ashes between her and the light of day, it seemed to us that we were watching Fate, a fate of which both she and Mayor de Spain were victims….We were his allies, his confederates; our whole town was accessory to that cuckolding – that cuckolding which for any proof we had, we had invented ourselves out of whole cloth; that same cuckoldry in which we would watch De Spain and Snopes walking amicably together while (though we didn't know it yet) De Spain was creating, planning how to create, that office of power-plant superintendent which we didn't even know we didn't have, let alone needed, and then get Mr. Snopes into it….We were simply in favor of De Spain and Eula Snopes, for what Uncle Gavin called the divinity of simple unadulterated uninhibited immortal lust which they represented. (*Snopes*, 362-3)

Charles immediately unites his own perspective with that of the town as a whole, and he sets up a division between the good people of Jefferson and the Snopeses. Specifically, the townspeople become De Spain's "allies," and therefore Flem's enemies. De Spain's relationship with Eula allows the former point of autochthonous entry into the soil of the county to be absorbed into the upper middle-class of Jefferson. Eula's husband, however, must be brought into the community in order for Eula's celebrated affair to seem acceptable, which leads De Spain to appoint Flem to the new position of power plant superintendent. Just as Flem married a pregnant Eula for his own financial gain in *The Hamlet*, he willingly pimps his wife to the mayor of Jefferson in exchange for a job and a place in the town's community. While Charles'

narration makes it clear that the town supports Flem's cuckolding, the passage implies that Flem is just as much of an accessory to his wife's affair as the community that has sided against him. In Gavin's view, the urban people of Jefferson find a connection to a natural and Dionysian notion of "uninhibited immortal lust" through their proximity to De Spain and Eula's affair. Flem, who wishes to leave the agricultural world and enter the civilized sphere of the bourgeoisie, sees his wife's relationship with the mayor as an opportunity for economic growth.

Though only a brief aside in the narrative of *The Town*, Flem's experience working as the superintendent of the power plant carries significant symbolic weight when seen in the context of Faulkner's later novels. Charles' story about Flem's attempt to con the city out of hundreds of dollars contains the only two black characters that appear in *The Town*. In Charles' anecdote, Tomey's Turl Beauchamp (Ike McCaslin's half-uncle, who runs from his white owners in order to be with his lover in "Was" from *Go Down, Moses*) and Tom Tom Bird shovel the coal that the city burns in its steam boilers. When Flem realizes that he can steal brass parts from the boilers and sell them for scraps, Flem convinces Tom Tom to hide the stolen goods for him. Flem then tricks Turl into breaking into Tom Tom's house to steal the brass back by telling Turl that Tom Tom wants to have him fired. Simply put, Flem hopes to cover his own theft by tricking his black employees into stealing the scraps of brass for him.

Flem's mistake comes when he forgets that Tom Tom has a young wife at home, and that Tomey's Turl has a reputation as a ladies man. Turl begins an affair with Tom Tom's wife which keeps Turl from finding the brass that Tom Tom has

hidden. When Tom Tom finally catches Turl sneaking into his bed, Tom Tom chases Turl out of his house with a butcher's knife. After a comic chase scene that ends with both Tom Tom and Turl falling into a ditch, the two black workers join together against their white employer:

> And Uncle Gavin explained that: a sanctuary, a rationality of perspective, which animals, humans too, not merely reach but earn by passing through unbearable emotional states like furious rage or furious fear, the two of them sitting there not only in Uncle Gavin's amicable cuckoldry but in mutual and complete federation too: Tom Tom's home violated not by Tomey's Turl but by Flem Snopes; Turl's life and limbs put into frantic jeopardy not by Tom Tom but by Flem Snopes. (*Snopes*, 373)

Realizing that they had both been conned by Flem, Tomey's Turl and Tom Tom dump the stolen brass into the town's water tank. Without any product to sell, Flem resigns from his position as plant superintendent and loses the two hundred and eighteen dollars he had paid to cover the cost missing brass safety valves. This story marks one of the few times in the whole of the trilogy when Flem's actions fail to produce the outcome he desires.

The differences between this story of infidelity within a black couple and *The Town*'s larger narrative about Eula's sexuality provide significant insights into Faulkner's changing views on race in the fifties. While Flem knowingly gives his wife over to De Spain for his own gains, he unknowingly sends Turl to sleep with Tom Tom's wife in hopes of retrieving the stolen brass. Tom Tom's acceptance of his wife's indiscretion contrasts with the ending of the novel's overarching plot, since Eula's infidelity leads her to suicide and forces her lover into exile. For Faulkner, sex between white people carries catastrophic consequences, while the wedding vows of a black couple appear almost meaningless. This formulation stems directly from

Faulkner's paternalistic ideology and its relation to the author's paralyzing fear of female sexuality. While the story about stolen brass at the power plant shows how Flem can manipulate his social inferiors, the larger plot surrounding Eula's affair conveys Flem's ability to manipulate those in the economic class above him. Over the course of the novel, only Flem and his foil Gavin appear able to maintain any sort of agency in Jefferson's society. Both men appear separated from De Spain, Eula, Tom Tom, and Turl because they can affect the social world of the town as they see fit. Notably, their ability to enact their wills onto society is fundamentally tied to another way in which they both differ from the other players in the novel: neither Flem nor Gavin ever has sex.

Faulkner's construction of society as seen in *The Town* ultimately celebrates the powers of middle-class white men who act as sexless paternal figures. While De Spain and Eula are ruined by their fated lust and Tom Tom and Turl lack the social standing to be responsible for others, Flem and Gavin appear as powerful figures who are not sullied by the sensual pull of female sexuality. In the logic of Faulkner's later period, this newly created role of the sexless paternal figure looks like Faulkner's most fully imagined solution to the threat of miscegenation. Flem and Gavin are protected from the threats of race and sex by their economic class and their common impotence.

These two characters come to separate themselves from lower-class men and sexually active women for distinctly different reasons. Flem is born poor and impotent, which forces the son of a barn-burner to con his way into the upper echelon of Jefferson society. Gavin is born into the exact opposite situation. Gavin's father,

the county attorney, taught Gavin to believe in the code of chivalry. Gavin's chosen virginity allows him to protect the middle-class of Jefferson just as Flem's inborn impotence and low social standing compels him to attack it. Over the course of the novel, Faulkner's chosen narrators all exhibit close ties to Gavin and the Jeffersonian bourgeoisie, and these ties make Gavin appear as the novel's protagonist.

At the moment of his first encounter with Eula, Gavin becomes just as enamored with the female manifestation of the natural world as the rest of the male population of Yoknapatawpha County. Whereas De Spain's physicality allows him to approach Eula, Gavin responds to his masculine urges through a societal outlet – he sends Eula a corsage to wear at the Cotillion Club's Christmas Dance. Because Eula is a married woman, Gavin's twin sister (and Charles' mother) compels Gavin to send a corsage to every upper crust woman that will attend the ball in order to conceal Gavin's intentions. When De Spain hears of Gavin's plan, he orders every woman in the Cotillion Club a second corsage for the dance. At the ball, De Spain stands between Gavin and the woman he idealizes, which leads Gavin to start a fist fight with De Spain. As a lanky intellectual challenging a rugged veteran of the Spanish-American War, Gavin humiliates himself in front of the whole town (*Snopes*, 410-6). Gavin's understanding of the workings of the upper class in Jefferson contrasts with De Spain's straightforward and liberalist mode of action in a fairly one-sided battle for Eula's affection. What the comedy of Faulkner's story hides is the total lack of agency Eula finds in this situation. Married to an impotent miser while being fought over by two powerful and flawed bachelors, Eula appears completely helpless to better her own circumstances. Ultimately, Eula's objectification stands at the heart of

the narrative of *The Town.* Her complete inability to act on the men who surround her becomes most apparent in her attempt to give herself to Gavin in order to protect Flem and De Spain.

After his humiliation at the Cotillion Club's dance, Gavin decides to pressure De Spain into resigning by exposing the mayor's complicity in Flem's attempt to rob from the city. Because the whole town knows that the stolen brass that Tom Tom and Turl refused to bring back to Flem was dumped into the town's water tank, Gavin reasons that emptying the tank will prove De Spain's failure to protect the town's resources. This move looks like an attack on both Flem and De Spain, but Flem's exploitation of his black employees keeps the superintendent's hands clean of the crime. The night before De Spain is to be tried, Eula comes to Gavin's office and offers her body to him. Gavin narrates the chapter containing his refusal to have sex with Eula:

> "Don't touch me!" I said. "So if I had only had sense enough to have stopped expecting, or better still, never expected at all, never hoped at all, dreamed at all…it might have been me instead of Manfred? But don't you see? Can't you see? I wouldn't have been me then?" No: she wasn't even listening: just looking at me: the unbearable and unfathomable blue, speculative and serene.
>
> "Maybe it's because you're a gentleman and I never knew one before." (*Snopes*, 431)

Eula's categorization of Gavin as a "gentleman" allows for an understanding of the complicated and quintessentially southern ideology that guides Faulkner through his work in the forties and fifties. As a born member of the upper class in Jefferson and a highly educated county attorney, Gavin's position in the town's society demands a considerable amount of respect. What separates him from the De Spain's of the world is his commitment to an antiquated, chivalric view of morality that compels him to

repress his sexual desires. Gavin's tendency to deal in abstraction, especially as shown in his metonymic description of Eula as "the unbearable and unfathomable blue," relates to his failure to indulge in sensory pleasures. With his thoughts so lifted toward metaphysical considerations, Gavin can not be pulled down into the earth. As a virgin, Gavin lacks the ability to reenter the soil of his homeland, making him one of few characters in *Snopes* without any trace of autochthony. In the modernized, urban world of the forties and fifties, this means that Gavin enjoys a freedom from the land unimaginable in any of Faulkner's output from the thirties.

Gavin enjoys his disconnection from the natural world of his county by doing what few others in Faulkner's works have been able to – he travels. Throughout the major period, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha appears claustrophobic, as those few who make it outside the borders tend to find terrible fates awaiting them. When Popeye kidnaps Temple Drake to a Memphis whorehouse in *Sanctuary*, her story ends in rape, murder, and an innocent man's lynching. Quentin Compson, who Gavin resembles in many ways, makes it to Harvard long enough to drown himself in the Charles River in *The Sound and the Fury*. Gavin, on the other hand, graduates from Harvard, returns to Mississippi, and then leaves for Heidelberg University after Eula convinces him not to force De Spain to retire (*Snopes*, 435-8). Gavin almost enters the first World War as a "stretcher bearer" for the German Army. He stops himself when realizes that he does not love "the Germany which had emerged between 1848 and the Belgian forts" because "it was no longer the Germany of Goethe and Bach and Beethoven and Schiller" (*Snopes*, 439). Such a thought could only occur to a character free of the autochthonic pull of the soil of Yoknapatawpha County. In the

major period, both Temple Drake and Quentin Compson were doomed by sexual acts in their native county before suffering greater indignities elsewhere. Temple was raped with a corn cob pipe, and Quentin lost his mind when he was confronted with his sister's promiscuity. For Gavin, however, a world can exist outside of the confines of Yoknapatawpha County, because Gavin never engages in either the agriculture or the intercourse that would bind him to his country.

In Gavin's refusal to have sex with Eula, Faulkner dramatizes the fundamental change that has taken place in his fictive county between the author's work in the thirties and the fifties. With the rise of a white middle-class after World War II that no longer depends upon the exploitation of black labor, a southern man in the fifties can no longer connect to the soil of his country. In *The Hamlet*, Eula's autochthony had allowed for yeoman farmers to escape the demands of a credit based economy by reentering a natural relationship with the earth. By the writing of *The Town*, however, lower-class whites have turned into rednecks, which results in their exclusion from Faulkner's new society. Pulled out of the lower class by an ambitious husband, Eula's beauty becomes a prize for middle-class bachelors like De Spain and Gavin after being sold off by Flem.

By buying Eula's sexuality from her father in *The Hamlet* and then selling it to De Spain for the bank presidency in *The Town*, Flem destroys any man's chance of reconnecting to the natural world of Yoknapatawpha. Flem does so by turning the point of entry to the soil into an item for economic consumption. If Gavin could have gotten to Eula before Flem had ruined her, his objectification of her would have forced her into a similar fate. Instead of turning her into a consumer item, Gavin

would have only addressed Eula's natural beauty through intellectual abstraction, and her physical connection to the earth would be equally unmade.

Where Faulkner had once seen tragedy in his character's disconnection from the soil through dependence on black labor, he now describes an urbanized Mississippi where reproduction can take place without sex. In *The Mansion*, Flem completes his project of repopulating Jefferson with Snopeses without fathering a single child. Before consumerism can overtake agriculture, however, the representatives of classical modes of reproduction have to be removed. By failing to have sex with the point of entry into the soil of the county, Flem and Gavin directly cause the suicide of Eula Snopes.

Within the plot of the novel, Eula's suicide results from Flem's self-serving financial dealings. Knowing that Eula would leave him if her daughter Linda finds out who her real father is, Flem sets a plan in motion to secure his own fortune in case he loses his familial ties to the Varners. After being taken under Gavin's wing, Linda wants to get out of Jefferson to go to college. Flem initially forbids her, but then allows her to do so if she signs over part of her inheritance to him. Flem goes out to the hamlet to speak to Will Varner with Linda's document, and he gives proof of Eula's affair to his father-in-law. Varner rushes to town to speak to De Spain, but De Spain refuses to give up his position in Jefferson without a trade from Flem: the presidency for Eula. Before any deal can be struck, Eula's body is found dead. Realizing that if she abandons Flem for De Spain, then scandal would follow Linda for the rest of her life, Eula "sacrifices herself on the altar of respectability, masculine power, and economic lust" (Railey, 160).

Four different paternal figures fail to act in Eula's best interests, though Flem and Gavin seem particularly culpable for her death. De Spain, the city's mayor and chosen leader, refuses to be beaten by Flem without retaining Eula as consolation. After Eula's suicide, De Spain leaves the county in shame. For engaging in sexual congress with the point of access to the soil of the county while staying in Jefferson's upper class, Faulkner exiles De Spain from Yoknapatawpha. Will Varner, Eula's father, fails as a paternal figure when he works to keep his own finances from Flem instead of protecting his daughter's reputation. Instead of giving up part of his granddaughter's inheritance, Varner winds up losing his own child. Flem's involvement is obvious, and he ends up gaining everything he ever wanted. Gavin's responsibility is only slightly more ambiguous, since he refuses what turns out to be Eula's final request. By not marrying Linda, Gavin fails to fulfill the paternalistic promise he had made when he first began to teach Eula's child. By aiding a daughter who was not his own, Gavin had begun to play the role of the virgin-father that Faulkner considers to be the solution to the problems of the New South. But when Gavin declines to marry Linda and free her of the Snopes name, he sets in motion the series of events that leads to Flem's death at the end of *The Mansion.* Educated and unwed, Linda leaves Jefferson to take on the attributes of the paternal figures who failed her. Eventually, she comes to orchestrate her false-father's murder.

Upon its first publication in 1959, Faulkner included a preface to *The Mansion* that declared the third piece of *The Snopes Trilogy* to be the authoritative chronicle of

life in Yoknapatawpha County. More than just a new story about Flem and Gavin, the plot of the *The Mansion* works to turn the entire population of Jefferson into honorary members of the Snopes clan, and the author's preface to the novel looks to give his later work validity beyond that of his earlier texts:

> Since the author likes to believe, hopes that his entire life's work is a part of a living literature, and since "living" is motion, and "motion" is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death, there will be found discrepancies and contradictions in the thirty-four year progress of this particular chronicle; the purpose of this note is simply to notify the reader that the author has already found more discrepancies and contradictions than he hopes the reader will – contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then. (*Snopes*, 677)

Though critics would come to view *The Town* and *The Mansion* as lesser works in Faulkner's canon, the author values his new understanding of life in Yoknapatawpha over his earlier stories about the county. Faulkner's discussion of a "living literature" ties into the socioeconomic readings of his works that contemporary scholars have carried out, since the changing history of Faulkner's fictional county corresponds to the rise of an American middle-class following the end of the Great Depression.

In a sense, Faulkner's preface to *The Mansion* looks like a call to scholars to consider the revisions carried out in his newer book that restructure and reconsider the guiding forces of Faulkner's literature. By bringing Jefferson and its citizens out of the mythic past and into his own present, Faulkner undoes the work of his major period novels that had looked to answer questions about the Depression-era South by considering its history. When Mink Snopes, incarcerated for thirty-eight years, appears at the end of *The Mansion* to murder his cousin Flem, the past of

Yoknapatawpha County effectively bursts into its present to erase the last imposter of an antiquated Southern aristocracy. After being born in a sharecropper's cabin, Flem dies in a mansion originally occupied by the power-elite of antebellum Mississippi. In the context of the trilogy as a whole, Flem's rise represents a challenge to the authority of the middle-class that Faulkner aligns himself with after the Second World War. For the urban, bourgeois Stevenses, Mallisons, and Ratliffs of the world to flourish in a new Jefferson, then those like Flem that mix class mobility with an ingrained notion of class resentment must be eliminated. In *The Mansion*, this happens when the fates of two of the victims of Flem's rise converge.

The Mansion is formally broken into three component volumes titled "Mink," "Linda," and "Flem." The first of these sections expands on the story of Mink's imprisonment for the murder of Jack Houston that first appeared in *The Hamlet.* The second section then continues on the narrative of *The Town*, as Linda Snopes leaves Jefferson for Greenwich Village and then the Spanish Civil War. After marrying a Jewish modernist sculptor and joining the Communist Party, Linda is forced to return to Mississippi after a Spanish cannon ball kills her husband and leaves her deaf. The final section of the novel allows for Linda and Mink, two characters from totally disparate parts of the trilogy, to be banded together against a common enemy. While Gavin and Ratliff make half-hearted attempts to protect the man whose rise they fought for nearly forty years, Linda gets Mink released from prison so he can kill Flem.

Faulkner's retelling of Houston's murder in the "Mink" section of *The Mansion* foregrounds the political implications of a crime that had previously

appeared as an outburst of irrational anger. In both versions of Mink's story, Mink expresses a certain pride in his violence against a man whose wealth exceeds his own. In the first version, however, the class resentment expressed in Mink's act is only implied, as Houston's disrespect towards Mink appears to be the cause for his murder. Just after describing the shot that had knocked Houston from his horse, the narration in *The Hamlet* reads:

> Then [Mink] would have to finish it, not in the way he wanted to but in the way he must. It was no blind, instinctive, and furious desire for flight which he had to combat and curb. On the contrary. What he would have liked to do would be to leave a printed placard on the breast itself: *This is what happens to the men who impound Mink Snopes' cattle,* with his name signed to it. (*Snopes,* 209-10)

In this description of Houston's murder, the victim's social standing is obscured by Mink's rage over a perceived insult. When Faulkner retells this story nineteen years later, the economic aspect of Mink's resentment towards Houston becomes central to his crime.

In *The Mansion,* Faulkner greatly elaborates on the story surrounding Mink's impounded cow. Instead of immediately killing Houston after hearing that he refuses to give up Mink's cow, Mink works for a month to build Houston a new fence before ambushing his employer with a shotgun. Will Varner, the local justice of the peace, orders Mink to do so in order to pay for the food the cow has eaten on Houston's property. At the end of the month, Houston then demands that Mink pay a one-dollar fee for the time the cow spent on his land while Mink built the fence. Notably, nothing resembling this story appeared in "The Long Summer" portion of *The Hamlet*. Before firing the fatal shot into Houston in this later version of his crime, Mink imagines telling Houston that:

> "I aint shooting you because of them thirty-seven and a half four-bit days. That's all right; I done forgot and forgive that. Likely Will Varner couldn't do nothing else, being a rich man too and all you rich folks has got to stick together or else maybe some day the ones that aint rich might take a notion to raise up and take hit away from you. That aint why I shot you. I killed you because of that-ere extry one-dollar pound fee." (*Snopes*, 713)

In Faulkner's later reconstruction of Houston's murder, money has become the central motive behind Mink's actions. Whereas in 1940 an affront to Mink's honor appeared to be enough to seal Houston's fate, in 1959 a financial component must be added to Houston's insult in order to push Mink past his better judgment. Similarly, while the earlier version took on an autochthonic undertone as the soil seemed like an accessory to Mink's crime, the later version replaces natural concerns with economic ones. Most importantly, in *The Mansion*, Mink kills Houston for demanding every cent he is owed without any sort of leniency towards the poorer man. In effect, Mink murders Houston (who had been previously humanized in *The Hamlet*) for acting like Flem Snopes.

In both *The Hamlet* and *The Mansion*, Mink expects to be saved from prison by Flem's influence in the Bend. Flem never comes to Mink's aid in either novel, though the thirty-eight year term of Mink's sentence is only described in the later work. Mink's mistake in expecting salvation in the form of his cousin's economic power points toward a defining aspect of Flem's behavior that becomes a central tenet of the society built in his wake – for Flem, class ties supersede familial ones. By marrying Eula, Flem achieves a social rank above Mink's, and his blood connections are severed by his newfound place in society. Flem's understanding of social ties becomes most apparent in his support of a wounded Linda after her return from

Spain, as Flem's position in Jefferson's society demands that he help his daughter regardless of her illegitimacy.

The set of circumstances that lead to Linda's injury in the Spanish Civil War demand scholarly attention, since the stories surrounding Linda's marriage to a Jewish sculptor and her involvement with the Communist Party look like nothing else in Faulkner's canon. To fully understand this aspect of *The Mansion,* it must be considered in its relation to the central narrative of *The Town*. Notably, Faulkner reuses the same three narrators from *The Town* to continue Linda's story in the second section of *The Mansion*. In the later work, however, these narrators interact in different ways than they had previously. Instead of rotating between Charles, Gavin and Ratliff with each new chapter to create a dialogue, Faulkner gives each Charles and Ratliff a pair of chapters in succession. Gavin, who had been the most loquacious of any of the narrators in *The Town,* narrates only one chapter in this second section of *The Mansion.* Though the novel seems at first to be interested in recreating the form of the second part of *Snopes,* closer inspection shows that the middle-class storytellers who had formed a common narrative in the earlier work appear considerably more disconnected from one another in *The Mansion.* Considering this section as a component of the form of the novel as a whole, Joseph Reed writes that:

> The shift between *The Town* and *The Mansion,* then, would represent in the changed method a breakdown of our own certainty and that of the community conscience as to the reliability of individual solution. The individual voices of *The Town* lend credence to a vestigial community agreement, but the mixture of first- and third-person narratives and the peculiarly disconnected order in *The Mansion* testifies to a fragmentation and breakdown even of this tentative certainty. The chaotic order of narrative method in *The Mansion* reflects the chaos of a community which has outgrown its identity. (Reed, 248)

For Reed, the lack of cohesion between the narrative voices that make up the text of *The Mansion* works to break down the community which had been created in *The Town*. What Reed neglects to note in his formulation is the nature of the community that has dissolved. In the second part of the trilogy, Gavin, and Ratliff banded together to fight against a perceived onslaught of Snopeses in Jefferson. Having failed to stop Flem from attaining a position of power and respect in their community, the duo implicitly comes to accept the role of the Snopeses in an urbanized Southern society. In their appearances in the "Linda" portion of *The Mansion*, both of these narrators seem to have internalized Snopes-like behaviors, as each one appears preoccupied with financial concerns. Simply put, Gavin and Ratliff both act like Flem in the final part of the trilogy, though they do so from a distinctively middle-class point of view.

Ratliff narrates the first two chapters of the "Linda" section, wherein he and Gavin travel to New York City to attend Linda's wedding. Before introducing Linda to her biological father, Hoake McCarron, Gavin takes Ratliff to a store with an "entire show window with not nothing in it but one necktie" (*Snopes*, 828). After tricking Ratliff into buying a pair of designer ties at seventy-five dollars each, Gavin explains the extravagant purchase to Ratliff:

> "You're forty years old," he says. "You should a been buying at the minimum one tie a year ever since you fell in love for the first time. When was it? eleven? twelve?... But even call it twenty. That's twenty years, at one dollar a tie a year. That's twenty dollars. Since you are not married and never will be…you may live another forty-five. That's sixty-five dollars. That means you will have an Allanovna tie for only ten dollars. Nobody else in the world ever got an Allanovna tie for ten dollars." (*Snopes*, 830)

In this speech, Gavin engages in what might be called middle-class prospecting. Just as Flem tricked Ratliff into buying the Old Frenchman's place at the end of *The Hamlet*, Gavin here attempts to persuade Ratliff to overpay for something without any inherent value. The difference between Flem's swindle and Gavin's lies in the class associations implicit in the items for sale. By selling off Eula's marriage portion, Flem reunites the autochthons of the Bend with a tainted version of the soil they unconsciously wish to reenter. The tie, however, affords Ratliff entry into a civilized class above his own. In Jefferson, a seventy-five dollar tie would only be worn by the richest of the rich. When he buys the tie, Ratliff shows an inkling of the upward mobility that makes Flem a threat to Jefferson's society in *The Town*. From this view, Ratliff's purchase of the tie resembles Flem's acquisition of the sewing machine salesman's share in the restaurant in Jefferson, since both exchanges allow for an outsider to enter into a previously unavailable social realm. Because Faulkner's narrative voice aligns itself with the middle class in this novel, Gavin and Ratliff's forays into Snopesism lack the impact of those previously carried out by Flem. Faulkner does not convey any danger that Gavin and Ratliff might overtake New York's society by engaging in its economy. It follows in Faulkner's logic then that Jefferson needs to look more like New York if it wants to survive past Flem.

Though Charles, Gavin, and Ratliff were concretely tied to the consciousness of Jefferson in *The Town*, much of what they describe in the "Linda" section of *The Mansion* takes place outside of Yoknapatawpha County. After Gavin and Ratliff travel to New York, Charles attends Harvard, and Linda goes to Spain. None of this could have happened before Gavin's refusal of Eula *The Town*. Because Faulkner's

later novels consider a world beyond the author's own fictive county, it seems that the end of autochthonic connection to the soil allows for individuals to travel freely beyond the lands their ancestors had been obliged to cultivate. Moreover, Eula's death allows for sex to take place outside of autochthony, as Linda and Ratliff both have separate sexual encounters in New York. Specifically, Ratliff has a romantic tryst with the woman who designed his expensive tie – a romance that revises Flem's first appearance in the Varner's store in *The Hamlet.* In the earlier novel, the white male population of the Bend perceived "a hired white clerk in the store of man still able to walk" to be "as unheard of as the presence of a hired white woman in one of their own kitchens" (*Snopes*, 31). After Eula's death, however, Ratliff feels free to engage in a sexual encounter with a female merchant. Though Flem's job in the Varner's store seems tied to prostitution in 1940, Ratliff can have sex with a woman he pays for a nonsexual service nineteen years later. Flem's unique expression of sexuality through commerce seems to have become common practice following Eula's suicide, which means that the elemental ties that had bonded yeoman farmers to their land now bond middle-class whites to their money. Since people's sexual practices in this novel are bound to the economic materials on which they depend, Faulkner's alignment with the middle-class looks like the logical continuance of the interest he showed in agricultural systems in *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses*.

As strange as it is to see the former defenders of Jefferson look like Snopeses in the "Linda" section of *The Mansion*, Faulkner makes even more radical changes to his county's history in the final portion of the novel. Most outrageously, the author revisits the Compsons, whose disintegration accounts for much of the greatness of

both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Without much in the way of explanation, Faulkner hands over the legacy of his most renowned literary creations to Flem Snopes:

> His uncle told [Charles] how back in 1943 the town suddenly learned that Flem Snopes now owned what was left of the Compson place. Which wasn't much. The tale was they had sold a good part of it off back in 1909 for the municipal golf course in order to send the oldest son, Quentin, to Harvard, where he committed suicide at the end of his freshman year; and about ten years ago the youngest son, Benjy, the idiot, had set himself and his house both on fire and burned up in it. That is, after Quentin drowned himself at Harvard and Candace's, the sister's, marriage blew up and she disappeared, nobody knew where, and her daughter, Quentin, that nobody knew who her father was, climbed down the rainpipe one night and ran off with a carnival, Jason, the middle one, finally got rid of Benjy too by persuading his mother to commit him to the asylum only it didn't stick, Jason's version being that his mother whined and wept until he, Jason, gave up and brought Benjy back home, where sure enough in less than two years Benjy not only burned himself up but completely destroyed the house too. (*Snopes*, 965)

For any reader with an attachment to *The Sound and the Fury*, this passage is shocking. Thirty years after first publishing the book that spurred Faulkner's period of unmatched literary achievement, the author reconsiders the story of the Compsons from a different historical moment. Faulkner then condenses a saga that had originally played out like a Greek tragedy into a single paragraph. Ironically, this retelling actually maintains some inkling of the innovative form that made *The Sound and the Fury* the achievement that it was, since the syntax the author uses breaks apart the story of the Compsons into pieces that do not quite fit together.

In the context of *The Mansion*, Faulkner's new version of the Compsons story allows for the assent of the middle brother, Jason, to the position of male power within the family. By 1943, Quentin and Benjy have both been killed by their

respective inabilities to adapt to a new South, and Candace and her daughter have both fled Mississippi entirely. Jason alone remains to carry on the family name, and the middle child's neurotic obsession with finances in combination with his poor abilities as a businessman make him an ideal target for Flem.

Having been forced to split the mortgage on his family's land with Flem when Benjy burnt his house down, Jason tries to swindle Flem into buying the whole property after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor in 1941. Knowing that the United States would greatly increase its military in response to the assault, Jason imagines that he can make a nice profit on the land while preserving his family's legacy if he signs his portion of the mortgage over to the bank. Flem, Jason thinks, will sell the land off to the government to be used as an airstrip and, out of respect for Jason's wishes, name the new installation "Compson Field." Being a better swindler than Jason, Flem buys the land independent of the bank and leaves the lot vacant until the war is over. As the troops start to return from battle in 1945, Flem constructs "a subdivision of standardized Veteran's Housing matchboxes" for the GIs to live in (*Snopes*, 974). Naming his new subdivision "Eula Acres" in memorial for his suicidal wife, Flem effectively wipes the Compsons out of Jefferson's history while simultaneously driving a final nail into the coffin of autochthony.

By placing Eula's name on a new, suburban terrain where veterans enjoy the perks of a commercial economy while beginning the reproductive work that will lead to the baby boom, Flem gives the ideal of feminine sexual power over to the middle class. In essence, the feudal land of the aristocratic Compsons and the agrarian ideal of yeoman farming as symbolized in Eula's sexuality come together to create a

postwar bourgeoisie. The reproductive activities of these new Southerners appear inseparable from their interactions in a consumer economy, as innumerable babies are born in identical suburban homes. The population of Jefferson appears forever changed, and it is all thanks to Flem Snopes.

For Jefferson's new society to survive, those citizens who exist outside of the set of values that these veterans embody have to be removed. Having long been defenders of the rising middle-class, Gavin, Ratliff, and Charles remain in Yoknapatawpha after the creation of "Eula Acres." Gavin even marries a widow, and he continues to act as a father to children who are not his own. Flem, Linda, and Mink, however, still appear as outsiders to this new community, and they therefore must be purged. Though Flem has made a new world possible for the postwar middle class, his usurping of the De Spain estate aligns him with the Old South that has past. Meanwhile, Linda's radical political connections exclude her from entry into her mother's memorial subdivision. Mink is equally disconnected from the new world, since he has literally been cut off from history for thirty-eight years. The fates of these three Snopeses come together in the climax of the trilogy, when a figure from Yoknapatawpha's past appears to murder the man who built its future.

Faulkner uses a third-person narrator who is heavily aligned with Mink's point-of-view to dramatize the moment of Flem's murder. No words are exchanged between the cousins as one slays the other, and Flem appears to take on an eerie detachment from his own death scene. After going through a book's worth of trouble to get to Jefferson with a loaded gun, Mink merely walks into Flem's house and

confronts his cousin. As Mink raises his gun at Flem, his cousin continues sitting in his favorite chair:

> [Mink] didn't need to say, "Look at me Flem." His cousin was already doing that, his head turned over his shoulder. Otherwise he hadn't moved, only the jaws ceased chewing in midmotion. Then he moved, leaned slightly forward in the chair and he had just begun to lower his propped feet from the ledge, the chair beginning to swivel around, when Mink from about five feet away stopped…and pulled the trigger and rather felt than heard the dull foolish almost inattentive click. Now his cousin, his feet now flat on the floor and the chair almost swiveled to face him, appeared to sit immobile and even detached too, watching too Mink's grimed shaking child-sized hands…and [he] cocked and steadied the pistol again in both hands, his cousin not moving at all now though he was chewing faintly again, as though he too were watching the dull point of light on the cock of the hammer when it flicked away. (*Snopes*, 1047)

The second time Mink pulls the trigger, it results in his cousin "making a curious half-stifled convulsive surge which in another moment was going to carry the whole chair over" (*Snopes*, 1047). Though it only takes Mink two tries to make his secondhand pistol fire, the first failed attempt allows the author to portray Flem's strange acceptance of his own fate. As a proven smooth talker and quick thinker, one would imagine that Flem would at least try to talk his way out of being shot. Being one of the richest men in Mississippi, Flem could certainly have afforded to bribe Mink, or at least offer to. Instead, Flem does not say a word to his cousin. The banker simply turns to face his killer, and he waits to be shot.

An explanation for Flem's detachment in the face of death seems important to a full understanding of his role as the central figure of the trilogy, but any sort of attempt at divining Flem's motives from Faulkner's words can be complicated. Faulkner never once explicitly offers Flem's thoughts in *Snopes*. Instead, Faulkner places an observer between Flem and the reader, as the narration in these novels often

appears aligned with someone who watches Flem. Throughout the whole of *The Town* and most of *The Mansion*, the narration comes from a specific set of bourgeois men with a common understanding of who Flem Snopes is. In his final moment, however, Flem is described from Mink's viewpoint. Flem appears as he is perceived by a man who is his kin and his killer. Sitting alone in a room in a restored mansion, Flem dies without a word of protest. He waits calmly for Mink to attend to his weapon after an initial misfire. From Mink's perception, Flem seems to accept his death with a bit of aristocratic honor. After portraying him as the lowest wretch of the capitalist world for more than a thousand pages, Faulkner lets Flem die with the dignity of an antebellum Southern patriarch.

Faulkner's portrayal of Flem's death seems to stem from the bank president and his cousin's newly negotiated roles in a master-slave dialectic. After rising from the tenatry of Frenchman's Bend, Flem has taken the place of the upper-class land owners that his father taught him to fight. This becomes especially clear in his development of "Eula Acres," where he literally owns the land that will sustain future generations of life in Yoknapatawpha. While Mink's motive in murdering Flem is his need for revenge after being abandoned by his own blood, Flem's acceptance of his own murder might be read as remnant of his engrained class resentment. After becoming the land owner he had always hated, Flem's only chance to attack the upper class left is to make himself an accessory to his own murder.

After shooting Flem and being shown out of the house by Linda, Mink runs into the wilderness to hide from the authorities. The outlaw dies in the last passage of

The Mansion, and his passing marks one final instance of autochthonic entry into the soil of Yoknapatawpha County:

> It seemed to him he could feel the Mink Snopes that had had to spend so much of his life just having unnecessary bother and trouble, beginning to creep, seep, flow easy as sleeping; he could almost watch it, following all the little grass blades and tiny roots, the little holes the worms made, down and down into the ground already full of the folks that had the trouble but were free now, so that it was just the ground and the dirt that had to bother and worry and anguish with the passions and hopes and skeers…leaving the folks easy now, all mixed and jumbled up comfortable and easy so wouldn't nobody even know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid…right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recording – Helen and the bishops, the kings and unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim. (*Snopes*, 1065)

By murdering the last land owner left in the county, Mink becomes able to find peace in the soil of his land. Instead of rising to heaven upon his death, he feels himself sinking into the dirt that he had worked thirty-eight years before. Because this last remnant of the yeoman farmers finally found himself able to connect to the soil outside of the economic constrains of sharecropping, he encounters his ancestors in the earth in a state where "nobody even know or even care who was which any more." With the class lines of tenantry farming unmade by Flem's rise and death, the promise of equality that was denied to Southern history by the legacy of miscegenation appears to Mink upon his death. America appears created anew in Mississippi's dirt.

While the deaths of Flem and Mink seem to resolve the central issues of class conflicts and autochthony in the trilogy, Linda's final appearance in *The Mansion* provides a somewhat more uncertain resolution. After aiding Mink in Flem's murder

by getting him out of prison early and helping escape from the scene of the crime, Linda purchases a Jaguar and leaves Jefferson for good. Gavin encounters her as she packs up her father's house, and he finds himself faced with the unthinkable idea that girl who he had took it upon himself to keep from turning into a Snopes might have been involved in her father's death. Knowing that Linda paid for the car with insurance money from Flem's death, he finds out that she had reserved it months earlier (S*nopes*, 1054). Confronted with the fact that Linda had previously planned to leave town upon Flem's imminent demise, Gavin sees in Linda the conniving nature of Snopesism that Ratliff had explained to him years before.

In the context of the trilogy as a whole, Linda's exit from Jefferson seems to hold even more sinister implications for Faulkner than it does for Gavin. By inheriting her Flem's fortune after being an accessory to his murder, Linda exhibits a combination of the worst aspects of Mink and Flem. As a communist and a radical, Linda appears to have inherited Flem's resentment toward the rich without even being his real daughter. Like Flem, Linda expresses her distaste for the upper class by manipulating those around her. Unlike Flem, she refuses to address her anger toward the wealthy through traditional capitalist enterprises. Instead, Linda uses Mink's violence to attack those who exploit the poor. Importantly, she does not engage in violence herself, but instead she manipulates situations toward violent ends. During her time as a nurse in the Spanish Civil War, Linda followed an anti-capitalist ideology to support men who were killing her enemies. Linda's relationship with Mink works in a similar vein, since she helps him get out of prison in order for him to shoot Flem. While nursing soldiers and freeing a man from prison can be seen as

sympathetic acts, the violence that underscores Linda's actions brings about serious questions surrounding her motivations.

Though Gavin's paternal feeling toward her would never allow him to see it, Linda's version of Snopesism seems to be more dangerous then any that has gone before her. By combing Mink's violence with Flem's methods, Linda manages to kill the wealthy while also making herself rich. As he portrays Linda leaving Jefferson in a brand new Jaguar, Faulkner alludes to the ending of *The Hamlet*, where Flem pulled out of Frenchman's Bend in a buggy with a pregnant Eula. As Flem drove toward life in a whole new social class, Linda leaves Jefferson for parts unknown. Though the threat of the Snopeses may have left Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner implies that it may not have gone very far.

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