Faulkner, Truth, and the Artist's Directive: A Reading of "A Fable".

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Faulkner, truth, and the artist's directive: A reading of "A Fable"

Matthews, Bobby Lynn, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1991

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Faulkner, Truth, and the Artist's Directive: A Reading of _A Fable_

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

the Department of English

by

Bobby L. Matthews
B.A., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974
M.A., North Carolina State University, 1984
August 1991

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For my Father, Harold, my Mother, Margie, and my daughters, Sydney, Gabrielle, and Amy
Preface

This project grew out of an appreciation for Faulkner that began with the reading of *As I Lay Dying* during my last semester as an undergraduate English major. It is a continuation of a Masters thesis focused on Faulkner's image of time in his characterization of Quentin Compson and Harry Wilbourne. I read *A Fable* for the first time while working on this thesis, and my fascination for this most intransigent of Faulkner's texts suffered no diminishment from the work that resulted in the text that follows. Indeed, the project has elicited questions about Faulkner—the writer, the thinker, the man—that inspire still more attention to the novel.

The assistance and support Professor Lewis P. Simpson, who directed the project, greatly facilitated my work. Besides the inspiration of his extraordinary literary criticism and the excitement of intimate conversations on literature and history in general, and Faulkner in particular, his encouragement, remarkable patience, and friendship enabled me to complete the project. Professor John R. May, in addition to providing a careful reading of the text as well as extremely helpful formal and ideational suggestions, offered genuine friendship and indispensable
support throughout my association with the Department of English. Most of the discursive ideas and texts that inform the dissertation were disclosed in conversations with Professor Cecil Eubanks, whose positive influence, both personal and professional, will accompany me henceforth. Professor Rick Moreland carefully read and re-read the text, offered valuable insights from his infinite reservoir of knowledge about Faulkner, and inspired further thought on Faulkner's image of the relation of art and life in A Fable. Thanks are owed also to Professors Bainard Cowan, Fred Schwarzbach, John Lowe, and Bill Demastes for invaluable help along the way. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Professor Michael Grimwood of North Carolina State University, who directed my first big project on Faulkner and at whose polite insistence I first read A Fable. And special thanks is due Professor Jim Springer Borck.

For the love, support, and guidance of my parents, Harold and Margie Matthews, whose influence positively informs all of my achievements—both tangible and spiritual—I shall always be indebted. Triche saw me through much of it with love and self-sacrifice. And Sydney, Gabrielle, and Amy, the darlings of my existence, cannot know of the joy they brought to the process.
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The old general in A Fable embodies the resolution of questions about the relation of art and life that Faulkner evoked in his invention of Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury and pursued in a series of subsequent characterizations. This artist-figure motif discloses Faulkner's implication of the relation in the modern crisis of faith. Faulkner images in narrative fiction what Nietzsche asserts in discourse, namely, the need for a reversal of the Platonic valuation of eternal "truth" (ideality) over art. The characterization of Quentin shows the potentially terrible consequences of man's propensity for mythopoeic invention, as Quentin's unconscious remythologizing of Christian mythos results in the nihilism it seeks to overcome. In A Fable, several characters repeat the paradigm of artist-figures who attempt through mythopoeia to override ontological conditions and establish ideal projections. The general, by contrast, recognizes the open--"aestheticist"--condition of existence, predicated on man's physiology, which entails the universality of perspectivism and makes valuation essential to the well-being of man's existence. Aware of both the mythic proportions of his public image and the need of his culture
for a sustaining grand illusion, the old general consciously develops a legend of himself that satisfies this need through a reaccentuation of Christian mythos. In this action he suggests Heidegger's reinterpretation of Nietzsche's reversal, a reading that postulates the "strife" between closure and disclosure as the inherent existential operation whereby art allows truth "to happen." The dissertation includes four chapters: (1) "The Textual Case for Faulkner's Aestheticism"; (2) "Remythology and Spoilation: The Mythopoeic Utterances of Faulkner's Failed Artist-Figures"; (3) "Strife, Structure, the Dissemination of Voices and the Destruction of Truth in A Fable"; (4) "The Artist's Directive: Remythologizing the Kerygma in A Fable."
Introduction: Two Approaches to Art

A Fable is a novel far too rich to lend itself easily to holistic analysis. Though given time and space the critic might well attempt such a study, the aim here is to isolate a primary element of the whole, to offer a rhetorical evaluation and interpretation of the novel in relation to this element, and to suggest, on the basis of this evaluation, the relation of the novel to some of Faulkner's earlier major fiction. My intention is to explore how the characterization of the "marshal" or "old general" of this novel culminates--in a convincing image of the relation of "truth" to language or art--Faulkner's personal quest through writing to comprehend existence.

The questions that Faulkner first images in the characterization of Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury dominate the history of western thought. Do identifiable constants inform existence and human experience? Is truth knowable? What is the relation of art and truth? Of art and life? Although Faulkner never explicitly poses these questions, his fiction is virtually controlled by them. The underlying discursive problem pertains to the ageless question of will, insofar as this term is defined in the somewhat crude traditional sense of a presumed human capacity for making conscious decisions that

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change the composition of an upcoming moment of experience from what it otherwise would have been. By the time Faulkner was working on *The Sound and the Fury* in 1928 his interest in this question had set him on the course of narrative inquiry that would shape his fiction. In the texture of the mature fiction he does not merely express what happens to his characters; instead, what happens to them is always posed in the light of conditional factors that influence the events in their lives. Consequently, the Faulknerian narrative always implicitly asks, "Might not the event have occurred differently from the way it did?" As Rosa Coldfield speculatively asserts to Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom!, "there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth."¹ If Rosa is correct, then experience is not fixed but contingent. The general problem Faulkner poses throughout the mature fiction entails ascertaining whether her assertion is affirmable and, if it is, how man might act so as to realize the "might have been." If it is not, then the question of the value of life itself is raised. In consonance with the views of prominent modern discursive writers, Faulkner's resolution of this problem hinges on his view of an inherent relation of aesthetics and ontology.

Faulkner's fictional consideration of the problem of truth rises in *A Fable* to levels beyond those imaged in

earlier texts devoted to the same problem. In various
caracters and narrative situations in other novels, he
presents two major historical perspectives on the question.
Isaac McCaslin's discussion with McCaslin Edmonds about the
ghost buck is perhaps the outstanding of several examples of
the Platonic view that truth is inherent and thus knowable
from within. Faulkner's "verities," which he expressed in
public and incorporated in the fiction, seem to correspond
to Kant's postulation of synthetic a priori truths. But
major voices in the novels suggest Faulkner's ultimate, if
reluctant, embrace of the pre-Socratic view of truth as
aletheia, or happening. Truth, to speak in the simplest
terms, is what occurs, or at least what an individual
perceives to be occurring. It is what the individual man
experiences. Truth lies in the operative condition of
consciousness' relation both to itself and to the world, a
relation that not only enables but actually compels the
invention of mythopoeia designed to account for experience.

In a letter to Malcolm Cowley the Platonic strain of
Faulkner's internal dialectic of metaphysics is disclosed.

Art is simpler than people think because there is so
little to write about. All the moving things are
eternal in man's history and have been written before,
and if a man writes hard enough, sincerely enough,
humbly enough . . . he will repeat them, because art
Faulkner suggests, first, that "man's history" is constituted by the repetition of "eternal," "moving" occurrences and, second, that the implicit valuative definition of art is a synecdochal image of one such occurrence. Calling them "moving things," Faulkner thus implicitly asserts the reality of what Kant termed "universal categories." He also asserts the capacity of art to image ("repeat") these "eternal" aspects of existence, which, he implies, are categorically few in number. History is seen as the ineluctable unfolding of events that, while they differ in terms of specifics, fall generically under one of a few metaphysically constant categories. Of course Faulkner, not discoursor but artist, never names these categories, but his frequent recitation of the "eternal verities" offers insight into his thinking along this line. In the familiar words of McCaslin Edmonds in Go Down, Moses, "Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart—honor and pride and pity and justice and love." Yet if Faulkner iterated his conviction of metaphysical constancy when he told creative writing

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students at the University of Virginia that each new generation will "inherit" the "ageless, eternal struggles," he also at times spoke in a negative vein, as when he wrote Cowley that "life is a phenomenon but not a novelty, the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere and man stinks the same stink no matter where in time." Still, Faulkner frequently suggested that the conditions of man's existence are not inherently static. Setting up a contrast between himself and writers who despair over the ameliorative potential of humanity, he asserted that "one can hate man's condition," yet "try to change it, and possibly will change it." Asked whether or not the American language is developing, he said, "the only alternative to change and progress is death." The optimism evident in such remarks stands in contrast to the above statements that support the claim for the universality of the conditions of experience. The contradiction in Faulkner's commentary thus ironically exemplifies his regard for conflict as the essential characteristic of being. He

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6Gwynn, p. 122. The specific reference in this case is to H. L. Mencken, who, according to Faulkner's paraphrase, suggests that "man stinks and always will stink. I don't agree with that."

7Gwynn, p. 151.
lived his own characterization of man's existence as "the human heart in conflict with itself," and in no aspect of his life more decisively than in his irrepressible epistemological compulsion, which posed the antipodal questions of whether art is simply a synecdochal image of one of life's "moving things," or whether it is inherent in human being and thus entails what Alan Megill terms "ontogenesis," the principle of radical creativity that makes possible genuine amelioration of the quality of life.®

A recurrent canonical motif of conflict as an inherent paradoxical condition informing existence underscores Faulkner's inability to accept unreservedly the reality of the verities. Besides his compulsive Platonic inclination, Faulkner suffered the cogent, ultimately undeniable influence of genuine doubt, which is manifest in the agnosticism expressed by numerous prominent voices in the fiction. As a consequence of the internal strife created by this collision of a powerful urge to believe in the actuality of "courage and honor and pride, and pity and love of justice and of liberty" and a doubt-informed urge to know, Faulkner's modernistic confidence in man's capacity for "truth," like that of Nietzsche and Heidegger, succumbed to a postmodernistic reservation about this capacity. The drive for "objective truth," imaged most starkly in the

®Alan Megill, Prophets of Extremity (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985).
characterizations of Quentin Compson in both *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Isaac McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* (1942), gives way to an assertion of the primacy of aesthetics and *aletheia* in the image of the old general. Yet, paradoxically, this conception of truth holds open the possibility, be it ever so ambiguous, for conscious, future-directed input into the stream of experienced event.

The dust jacket of the first printing of *A Fable* asserts the inevitability of "many controversial interpretations" that will be "read into" the book. My treatment reads the novel as a narrative image that in a general sense comports with a reading of existence that occurs in post-Nietzschean discourse. Following the terminology in Megill's analysis of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, I have elected to use the term "aestheticism" (the adjective being "aestheticist") in my study of *A Fable*. Aestheticism emphasizes being over knowledge, perpetual crisis over historicism, an "eternal present" over temporal linearity, differentiation over unity, interpretation over definition. Fundamentally, aestheticism regards existence as radically potential rather than consistent, static, and yielding of universal truths. In the chapters that follow I aim to show that the texture of Faulkner's fiction indicates that Quentin Compson and the series of important Faulknerian artist-figures who succeed
him fail adequately to understand this characteristic of existence and that the old general in *A Fable* is their singular opposite.

*A Fable* demonstrates the consonance of Faulkner's major works with the main line of western discourse from its roots in Pre-Socratic texts to its postmodern incarnations in texts contemporary with Faulkner's own. I am thinking here most especially, though not exclusively, of Heidegger, whose four-volume analysis of Nietzsche's writings perhaps reveals as much about his own conclusions about the nature and constituents of Being as it does about those of his subject. My argument that *A Fable* presents a distinctively postmodern image of existence draws heavily from Volume One, entitled *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*, and suggests a major parallel in the relative weltanshauung of Faulkner and Heidegger, who probably knew little, if anything, of each other's works. In using other writers' conceptions of the relation of art and life, especially those of Nietzsche and Heidegger, it is not my intention to place the philosopher's hat on Faulkner, but merely to elucidate some of the ideas that underlie images in the fiction. If, incidentally, particular discursive works and ideas are illuminated in the process, this result will be a happy consequence of my primary goal of letting heretofore unexpressed ideas that inhere in Faulkner's fiction see the light of day.
Chapter I
The Textual Case for Faulkner's Aestheticism

In concert with the tendency of modernist writers to acknowledge the fluctuant character of experience while seeking simultaneously to disclose more basic—constant—forces such as Nature or History underlying it, Faulkner frequently expressed his conviction that "man's condition" is one "in which he is in conflict with himself or with his environment or with others," and he reprised throughout his mature fiction images of conflict as the defining characteristic of man's existence. Asked at the University of Virginia whether his characters are "universal," he stated that man's "struggle is against his own heart, against— with the hearts of his fellows, and with his environment."¹ Emily Grierson was a case "of the poor tragic human being struggling with its own heart, with others, with its environment."² "You write a story ... to tell about people, man in his constant struggle with his own heart, with the hearts of others, or with his environment."³

²Gwynn, pp. 184-85, my emphasis.
³Gwynn, Faulkner in the University, p. 239, my emphasis.

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This triad of self pitted against self, against others, or against environment appears too frequently in his remarks to be a position that Faulkner had not thought through carefully and fully embraced. His metaphysic of conflict as imaged in the fiction, however, falls short of the category of theses that purport to identify the ground of existence. Faulkner's sense of the primacy of conflict notwithstanding, the texture of the mature fiction suggests that existence resists final definition. In accentuating the relative over the absolute, Faulkner's texture asserts his hard-won conclusion that the search for objective truth is quixotic and delusory, and ought therefore to be replaced with an awareness of man's essentially aesthetic condition and of the consequential importance of valuation.

Faulkner's aestheticism occurs as a general narrative composite of emphases on (1) time, imaged as the adventitious experience of consciousness; (2) the physiological basis of "human being"; (3) perspectivism as the basic condition of man's experience and communication, both with himself and others; and (4) man's propensity to embrace mythopoeia in attempting to understand and accept his place in the world. This composite informs Faulkner's textual motif of conflict as both the basic characteristic of existence and the enabling open condition for man's inherent faculty for creative responses to the world of his experience.
The invention of Quentin Compson during the writing of *The Sound and the Fury* embodied a purgation of Faulkner's inability to accept in his life the consequences of temporal process. In this novel he imaged for the first time in the texture of his fiction—specifically, in Quentin's monologue—the kinetic backdrop of man's existence that would henceforth appear in all of the major texts. Quentin constitutes Faulkner's recognition that, the strength of one's sense of it notwithstanding, a projected invisible, providential dimension that overlays or undergirds, as the case may be, the visible, "fallen" universe, has only noumenal existence. Had Faulkner been able to convince himself of the reality of such a metaphysical overlay, he would have had universal justification for the unfortunate occurrences in his own life that informed the characterization of Quentin. Accordingly, Quentin would have taken a characterological shape quite different from what he came to be. But in developing Quentin, Faulkner was responding to his need to work through an extreme personal conflict between the world as he was experiencing it and the world as he wanted it to be. As Faulkner's fictional

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4By texture I simply mean, following C. Hugh Holman in *A Handbook to Literature* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), p. 443, "the elements which remain in a work of literary art after a paraphrase of its argument has been made. Among such elements are details of situation, metaphor, meter, imagery, tone color, rhyme—in fact, all elements that are not considered to be a part of the structure of the work." I would also specify syntax and diction.
surrogate, Quentin challenges the phenomenal world in an attempt to force it to disclose its perceived metaphysical foundation. The harm he thereby perpetrates upon himself stands as Faulkner's self-acknowledgement of the quixotic nature of the quest for formal transcendence of contingency.

Yet despite the lesson that inheres in Faulkner's characterization of Quentin and several successor artist-figures in his fiction, the strife that informed the inception and development of A Fable, the late novel that Faulkner intended to be his "magnum o," manifests the writer's failure to overcome the urge to embrace, and thereby make real, Platonic shadows of his imagination.5

His narrative inquiry into the problem of the discrepancy between desire and reality assumes its structure on the basis of an internal dialectic between the two poles of his impulse to believe that fundamental changes in human being, both individually and socially, are possible, and his sense of the ontological impossibility of such transformations. His basic narrative vision moves between these two poles which demarcate in the fiction what Heidegger terms the beginning and the end of western philosophy—(1) Platonism, expressed most forcefully in what Faulkner referred to as the verities, and (2) aestheticism, based on a conviction of

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the open character of existence. The opposition between these two positions can be reduced to two hypothetical syllogisms: (1) If being is invariable, then fundamental change is impossible, and value resides in universals. Truth in this sense is Platonic, a priori, inevitable. (2) If being is contingent, then the possibility for creative interpolation exists, but it exists within a value-less vacuum; that is, values are relative and subject to creation. Truth in this sense is Pre-Socratic, immanent, and variable. Faulkner's textual accentuation of this latter view of truth marks his hard-won transition from

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6Aestheticism is not a word Heidegger specifically uses to denominate this postulated transition in western discourse. I borrow the term from Alan Megill in his Prophets of Extremity (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), because it effectively suggests what Heidegger sees occurring as a result of Nietzsche's concept of "will to power," namely the end of metaphysical discourse and the beginnings of a new attentiveness to manifest existence. Nietzsche's term essentially parallels Plato's metaphysical nihilism (a term that, for Heidegger, would be a redundancy), but makes possible the new focus of post-Nietzschean thought. For Megill aestheticism marks the general "postmodern" debunking of historicism in texts of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. My reading of Faulkner owes much to Megill's thesis that traditional readings of Romanticism which assert a dialectic of "alienation, through spiritual crisis, to a redemptive reintegration" with an undergirding "primal unity" ignore the more compelling "idea of primal difference or differentiation that Nietzsche and his successors put forward." The Romantic concept of "empathetic understanding, with its concern for mere reproduction, gives way to a notion of 'active' or 'productive' interpretation . . . ." This accent on production and its concomitant of "truth" as an "open" moment of the perpetual unravelling of experience, at the expense of reproduction and its intrinsic assumption of the representation of truth, provides the basis for my borrowing of Megill's term. See especially pp. 1-25.
modernist to postmodernist, from absolutist to "aestheticist."

In ascribing to Faulkner the aestheticist label, I suggest his ideational concurrence with the school of thought which finds the whole of existence to be basically aesthetic. Aestheticism as here defined holds that the condition of man's existence, or of his experience, precludes knowledge of objective truth. Experience is perspectival, not general, so the mind's particular slant on a segment of its experience is necessarily anomalous and relative. Writers who subscribe to this general description of existence find "art," or "creativity," or "interpretation," for instance, as opposed to some identifiable constant such as Man, or Culture, to be the basis of knowledge. Faulkner's adherence to this view of man's condition is evident in his textual image of consciousness, which he largely casts as a matter of the subject's immediate sense of time. Whether it be an individual's or a group's, consciousness or time exists as the perpetually unfolding product of the interplay of man's physiology and his environment. This generic narrative image offers the sustained implicit argument that the recurrence of experiential conflict in man's relations occurs as the inevitable result of a condition of physiologically based conflict that fundamentally informs consciousness. Faulkner consistently images this condition
in the texture of his mature fiction, making the relation of
texture to unfolding narrative event analogous to the
relation of physiology to experience. As the predominant
image in the canon, this metaphor of man's fundamental
condition establishes Faulkner's aestheticism, which
generally agrees with the conception of existence developed
by Henri Bergson, whose influence Faulkner acknowledged on
several occasions. Faulkner's aesthetic ontology, moreover,
genernally parallels the shared view of Nietzsche and his
most insightful reader to date, Martin Heidegger, that man's
impulse both to create and to respond aesthetically to
creation constitutes the very ground of his being. Thus,
juxtaposing his fiction with prominent elements of their
discourse on art creates an inter-illuminative relationship
between the texts. I mean to avail myself of this
reciprocity in my attempt to establish Faulkner's
aestheticism, indicating affinities, though, only for
purposes of elucidation, eschewing the less interesting and
more laborious and speculative practice of demonstrating
influence. In short, recourse to the general idea of
aestheticism that appears in the texts of several discursive
writers offers a means of establishing the aestheticist
slant of Faulkner's major fiction.

Bergson's description of man's experience of time
elucidates the idea of physiological conflict that informs
Faulkner's fiction. Acknowledging his general agreement
with Bergson's view of time, Faulkner told Loic Bouvard, "There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity." On another occasion he asserted that "time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people." Faulkner's meaning is not that time literally is nothing, but that man's experience of time is necessarily a matter of the state of his consciousness in a given moment. Bergson's analysis of the interpenetration of memories, perceptions, and tendencies in consciousness clarifies this idea:

In the depth of my being that which is most uniformly, most constantly and most enduringly myself [is] a continuous flux which is not comparable to any flux I have ever seen. There is a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. . . . Whilst I was experiencing them they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that I could not have said where any one of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all

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8Jean Stein, "Interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuvel," in Lion in the Garden, p. 255.
Thus Bergson sees time as a composite of the constituents of consciousness in a given moment. A "moment" of consciousness involves the experience of an anomalous, ultimately irreducible confluence of forces. The dynamic moment "contains," as it were, the ongoing physical process of consciousness. This complex instant is fundamentally creative, in the sense that ever materializing, changing experience occurs as consciousness, which is itself paradoxically caught up in the natural process. The typical image of this condition in Faulkner emphasizes an active (dynamic, vital, emergent, "processive," materializing)—creative—natural world, at the center of which stands consciousness and its capacity for expressive action. Aristotle termed this condition dynamis, which Heidegger defines as "force, the capacity to be gathered within itself and prepared to work effects." The complex of "memories, perceptions, and tendencies" that comprise one moment of experience stands in at least a minimal degree of contrast to that of any other moment. Strife inheres in the operation whereby one dynamic composite vitiates itself in

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the process of giving way to another. Thus the experience of consciousness in any given "moment" is necessarily different from that of any other moment, and precisely this fluid repetition of difference within consciousness—an innate empirical corollary of which is perpetually evolving perspective—constitutes the constant which is the basis of Faulkner's ontological aestheticism.

Roughly put, the condition is one in which dynamic constituents yield with extreme reluctance to would-be constituents. The key to the paradox rests in the word "yield," which demonstrates the "open" character of the condition. The conflict is expressible as an inherent dynamic antagonism between forces that currently constitute a moment of experience and forces vying to comprise it. The condition both does and does not admit potential entrants. This is the operative mechanical dimension of the paradox of strife that Faulkner images as the fundament of being, an inherent condition that stands as a situation in which the only constant factor is the very opposite of what by definition is constant, namely, the principle of change. While it is a principle that arguably permeates the entire universe, in terms of consciousness as imaged by Faulkner it simply involves the premise that the present exists as a condition of contingency, open to alteration by external forces—including future acts of consciousness itself—which enter the present, as it were, by a process of
internalization. The motif suggests the interplay of consciousness with both phenomena and noumena as the primary formative relation of human being. In these images consciousness does not relate to experience, but is experience, which in this context must be defined as a process and thus be said to be ultimately indeterminate and indefinable. With its unyielding stress on physiology, the texture of Faulkner's major fiction implicitly indicates his abjuration of the Cartesian interpretation of existence and his allegiance to the view that subject and object coexist, as it were, and therefore make experience inherently perspectival. Faulkner's sense of the centrality of this condition to human being induces him to accentuate the interrelation of choice and valuation as the operation whereby man embraces or repudiates moral responsibility.  

12The assertion of primacy for the aestheticist position appears to contradict the assertion that Faulkner's fiction generally disavows the claim that absolutes are discernible and expressible, for the concept of primacy appears to contradict aestheticism as defined above. If Faulkner's orchestrating point of view is aestheticist, how can one assert that it offers a general image of conflict as the dominant force informing existence? Aestheticism disputes the concept of absolutism, yet apparently passes off itself as the one constant characteristic of being. The answer depends upon the particularities of this image. The rhetorical elements that combine to produce it show conflict to be the controlling factor in the variableness of experience. The image of the "mechanism" of conflict that inheres in the relation of consciousness and experience has the constancy of such post-Enlightenment postulates as Man, Culture, or History. It differs, though, first, in that it attempts to describe empirical reality, as opposed to some invisible, though potent, force, and, second, in that its fundamental characteristic is its inconstancy. In brief, it is a constant
Faulkner's generic aestheticist image of consciousness suggests that experiential conflict is secondary to the physiological condition of perpetual conflict, from which the former necessarily derives. The motif yields only reluctantly to analysis, yet attempts to describe it ought to be made since it embodies Faulkner's most definitive conclusion about human being. Fundamentally it is an image of the present of consciousness as a process comprised of various elements, with varying levels of force, co-operating, as it were. The perceptual basis of this dynamic complex, of course, is the human brain and its multifaceted relationship to the entire organism. Yet, as a writer, not a scientist, Faulkner is uninterested in the purely technical aspects of the complex, though his textual emphasis on physiological factors indicates his conviction of its fundamental importance to man's experience. Rather, what interest him are the manifest elements of the operation, which might conveniently be termed "phenomena," and the other--"immaterial"--mental elements, which may be represented by the term "noumena." Among the first category are perceptions and feelings, insofar as the latter word condition of inconstancy. The interplay of syntax, imagery, and narrative discourse in Faulkner produces a texture which suggests that, rather than cancelling out each other, the apparently contradictory absolutist and aestheticist positions actually reinforce one another.
denotes a purely physical experience. Among the category of noumena are thoughts, imagery in the "mind's eye," memories, and emotions. By no means unimportant are, to use the Freudian metaphor, subconscious elements that impact on the "now" that constitutes consciousness. In any event, the condition is inherently paradoxical, as consciousness is both a part of that evolving world and simultaneously capable of awareness of its own microcosmic relation to the holistic process.

This general condition makes the realization of human projects extremely difficult and largely predicated on a practical understanding of it. Quentin experiences the uncanniness of his experience of time at numerous moments on the last day of his life, the events, moods and mental phenomena (such as memories and visions) of which he details in his tormented monologue—which, to be more accurate, is actually an ongoing dialogue with himself. It is the experience of Harry Wilbourne throughout "Wild Palms," and of the young Isaac McCaslin, as when, upon entering the locus of "his novitiate," "the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him, opening before his advancement as it closed behind his progress, no fixed path the wagon followed but a channel non-existent ten yards ahead of it and ceasing to exist ten yards after it had passed, the wagon progressing not by its own volition but by attrition of their intact yet fluid circumambience,
drowsing, earless, almost lightless.\textsuperscript{13} Isaac similarly senses the eeriness of time when he sees the footprint of the bear appear, then "fill with water until it was level full and the water began to overflow and the sides of the print began to dissolve away." Isaac attentively keeps pace with the succession of evanescing prints until, "emerging suddenly into a little glade," he notices that "the wilderness coalesced," "rushed, soundless and solidified" (p. 209, my emphasis).

By accentuating the influence of "man's nature" and "his environment" on his conscious relation to himself and others, Faulkner's texts offer images of physiologically informed conflict as the ground of experience.\textsuperscript{14} His aestheticism, like that of Nietzsche and Heidegger, is based on his interpretation of man's physiology, which is the source of the individual's immediate sense of experience, the temporal aspect of which Faulkner stresses. Both commentary and imagery in the fiction indicate the impact of physiology on man's perspectival condition. Simply stated, man's physiologically-induced mood occurs as the distance between what an individual immediately feels and what he desires to feel. The idea contained in the Greek word \textit{aisthesis}, roughly translated as "feeling," elucidates this


\textsuperscript{14}Gwynn, p. 118.
Experience is constituted by a state, or feeling, that derives from the relation of man's bodily self to the phenomenal world in which it exists. In *The Wild Palms*, Harry Wilbourne recalls how several times during his relationship with Charlotte Rittenmeyer he was lulled into listlessness by the daily ritual of "eating and evacuation and fornication and sitting in the sun." This emphasis on the creaturely aspect of man, which organically interplays with the individual's mood or sense of time, involves characters' typically torturous perceptual encounter with phenomena. Thus, in *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin is agonized by the smell of honeysuckle, which elicits painful reminders of his sister's and his own sexuality. Harry is similarly tortured by visual and auditory impressions that evoke memories of Charlotte, though he eventually makes a conscious choice to seek out such experiences. Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!* recalls to Quentin her "summer of wisteria," in effect an elaborate, mnemonically-rooted myth based on her childhood observation of the romance of Charles Bon and Judith Sutpen, and on her own frustrated "romance" with the "demon" Sutpen. According to her recollection, a "sweet conjunction of root

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bloom and urge and hour and weather" fed her experience.\textsuperscript{17} The yearly blooming of wisteria evokes a Proustian renewal of the mood.

Faulkner's emphasis on the relation of physiology to man's immediate sense of the world underlies his general concurrence with Nietzsche that perspectivism, the principle that minds never absolutely converge, governs human experience. Because the constituents of consciousness are never static, but in constant evolution, there can be no facts, only interpretations. This correlate of Faulkner's conflict-informed ontology postulates a condition which forces the individual to choose, from conflicting interpretations, which ones he will embrace and what actions he will therefore undertake. The capacity for responsive action on the part of those who have achieved insight into the conflict that informs natural processes is the central element of Faulkner's aesthetics. Conflict, as the inherent condition that delimits man's relation to the world and accentuates the importance of choice and valuation for human existence, is the ground of the ontology that impels Faulkner to stress physiology as the dominant affective factor in man's experience, and point of view as the dominant tangible manifestation of man's faculty for creation. Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's

"physiological aesthetics" effectively glosses this principle in Faulkner: "My having various states—the ways I find myself to be with something—participates essentially in defining how I find the things themselves and everything I encounter to be."¹⁸

Quentin is Faulkner's first extensive narrative image of the potent influence of the physical world on individual consciousness. A projection of Faulkner's own mythopoeic response to crisis, Quentin's mythos synecdochally illuminates the writer's sense of the importance of creative process to man's capacity for adaptation. To explain my use of the term mythopoeia in this context, I rely on Harold Bloom's chapter "The Mythopoeic Mode" in his Shelley's Mythmaking. Like Shelley, interested in the empirical experience of mind, Faulkner determined that in its interplay with world, consciousness is a force capable of creative self-interpolation. Bloom distinguishes between two general attitudes which result from the interaction of mind and nature. Commonplace experience involves an I-It relation in which the mind is not "bound up" with the object as it is in an I-Thou relation. The second, "imaginative," mode of experience involves a heightened relation to the

¹⁸Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche: Volume I, p. 83.
world. The I-It relation is inclusive, analytical, intellectual, experiential; the I-Thou relation, exclusive, synthetic, poetic, relational. Bloom finds in some of Shelley's poems evidence of an I-Thou relationship with natural phenomena that elicits improvisational activity on the part of the poet. Quentin undergoes precisely this process. The experience of anguish transports him into a mythopoeic relationship with nature and evokes poetic responses that eventually assume the substance of an idiosyncratic mythos.

Anguished memories sustain Quentin in a mode of mythopoeic perception. From the beginning of the monologue it is apparent not only that his experience of the world has been mythopoeic for some time, but also that he has brought a highly literary sensibility to the relation. The first image he describes is the light-induced "shadow of the sash," painful to him because it signifies his being "in time again," the medium of his sister's unacceptable actions, of his awareness of them, of life itself. Once Quentin sees the shadow, he begins to hear the ticking watch, which elicits an image of time as a corridor of "long

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and lonely light rays" down which Jesus walks (p. 76). Jesus he associates with St. Francis, whom he associates with Little Sister Death, who painfully reminds him of his sister, Caddy. Thus, Quentin masochistically employs the poetic techniques of symbol and allusion, creating by verbalization the quality of his experience. It is the reader's first evidence of the poetic process that Quentin believes will eventuate in a satisfactory resolution of his problem.

Imaged as a voice, itself a natural phenomenon, Quentin responds to agonizing phenomena which evoke noumena that ultimately overwhelm him. His utterances in response to every momentary flicker or image of light indicate his enraptured aesthetic state. A few such images exemplify numerous others: He sees Shreve's glasses "glistening rosily" (p. 77); he sees Gerald Bland's "oars catching the sun in spaced glints," and immediately thinks "Did you ever have a sister" (p. 92); "the river glistened beyond things in sort of swooping glints" (p. 111); fishing poles looked "like balanced threads of running fire" (p. 121); the flight of a butterfly suggests that "one of the sun-flecks had come loose" (p. 140); "dust motes whirled and slanted" (p. 144).

The dominant evanescent images in the monologue involve twilight, and they occur with increasing frequency as the monologue progresses along with the day. To nurse Quentin's swollen eye, Shreve brings a water basin with "a round blob
of twilight wobbling in it" (p. 187). On the streetcar
Quentin "could see the twilight again, that quality of light
as if time really had stopped for a while." The most
troublesome image, of course, is constituted by twilight and
honeysuckle: "when it rained the smell began to come into
the house at twilight either it would rain more at twilight
or there was something in the light itself but it always
smelled strongest then." This double image manifests
Quentin's association of time and light, as it evokes images
from the past: "looking down a corridor of grey halflight
where . . . all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered
taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without
relevance" (pp. 194-95). Quentin's is no ordinary mode of
existence, but reminiscent of Nietzsche's physiological
grounding of the act of creation as "an explosive condition"
involving "the extreme sharpness of certain senses, so they
understand a quite different sign language--and create
one". 21 Throughout the monologue Quentin comes into
conflict with his environment and reacts poetically.
Engulfed by sensory impressions that evoke anguishing
recollections regarding Caddy, such as the sunlight on
Gerald's wet oars, Quentin utters a poetic description
("spaced glints") of the perception, which reminds him of

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, tr. Walter
Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House,
1967), pp.428-29. The italics are Nietzsche's.
twilight, a general image he associates with Caddy ("Did you ever have a sister?"). To be sure, what happens when Quentin encounters images of light is unique to himself. It is an interpretation, but not, for Quentin, one that he chooses. His perspective is fixed, its potentially open condition vitiated by the particular obsessive orientation of his consciousness.

Note the similarities in Harry Wilbourne's experience in the final chapter of The Wild Palms, which details this character's increasing anguish, confrontation with despair, and meditation culminating in his resolve to cherish memories of Charlotte. Throughout this process Harry exists in poetic relation to the wind, which symbolizes his involvement with her. While she lies dying in a beach cottage, the wind seems to Harry a living presence "just interfering for the fun, the hell of it... It was risible, it was almost a chuckling; it did not really want to come in" (p. 281). He hears painfully evocative sounds that Faulkner presents onomatopoeically, usually created by the interaction of wind with an object—the ambulance "wailing" (p. 292), the wheels of the stretcher "making a sucking sound" (p. 294), the smocks of the doctors "flicking," the nurses' skirts "rustling" (p. 304). Stepping from the ambulance, Harry hears "the palms rustling and hissing again as if they were being played upon by a sand blower" (p. 295). In the room where Charlotte's body
lies, he perceives "not a cool wind blowing into the room but a hot one being forced out" by an invisible ventilator. It stirs "a lock of the dark, savagely short hair," and as he stands in anguished meditation upon the contrast between her former vivacity and the present lifelessness of her body, the stretcher team cruelly whisks her away, a button clicks, and "the hum of the blower" stops (pp. 305-07). Harry's sustained existence in this state of conflict informs his mythopoeic resolution at the conclusion of "Wild Palms."

Faulkner's sense of conflict is not synonymous with the divinely informed strife that drives Hegel's dialectical interpretation of existence, though it not infrequently aspires to be, but is rather more similar to the revelational strife that informs the images of nature-as-process that one finds in pre-Socratic texts or, more recently, in the later works of Heidegger. The absolutist/aestheticist tension that dominates Faulkner's mature fiction perhaps rises to its greatest pitch in the struggle of Isaac McCaslin in Go Down, Moses to comprehend God's truth and to act thereon. At a central point in the engaging dialogic encounter with his cousin McCaslin Edmonds in Part Four of "The Bear," Isaac recalls an earlier encounter between the two when Edmonds, who embodies the Platonic position that stands in opposition to the aestheticist weltanschauung inherent in the texture of the
novel, utilizes Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in attempting to define "truth" to his young kinsman. Edmonds' assertion that "Truth is one," that it is changeless, elicits Isaac's unspoken contrast between the "truth" ostensibly embodied in "somebody talking in a book" and the truth embodied in his failure to fire at Old Ben "long before the fyce covered the twenty yards to where the bear waited" (p. 297). Isaac privileges the latter—"simpler"—truth, borne out of the reality of the powerful internal conflict the incident evoked in him. In presenting Isaac's retrospective visualization of this "moment" of experience, Faulkner's text images truth as aletheia. In contrast to the Platonic version of truth as inherent a priori knowledge, and to the Hebraic conception of prophetically revealed truth, Isaac's sense of truth, at least in this instance, corresponds to the general Pre-Socratic conception of truth as perspectival (experiential) revelation—as Heidegger states it in his commentary on "The Anaximander Fragment," the experience of "approach and withdrawal as the basic trait of advent."22 It is "processive," anomalous, ontogenetic. Yet in his later decision to embrace an idiosyncratic Christian (Platonic) interpretation of events, Isaac ignores, or at least forgets, his own insight.

The general detachment of the third-person voices of *A Fable* offer a view of the world of perpetual process to which consciousness necessarily relates. In this novel Faulkner occasionally depicts the whirl of natural phenomena in the language of a narrator who speaks as though he were observing it from an elevated position. For example, the detached narrator of the initial chapter, entitled "Wednesday," tells of an infantry battalion "emerging from the Place de Ville in close route column, led by a light tank with its visor closed for action, which, as it advanced parted the crowd like a snowplow, thrusting the divided parting back from either curb like the snowplow's jumbled masses, the infantry deploying into two parallel files behind the advancing tank, until at last the whole boulevard from the Place to the old gate was clean and empty again between the two thin lines of bayonetted rifles."  

A similarly detached narrator in the fifth chapter, "Tuesday, Wednesday," describes an anguished community of citizens "seeming, as they approached the compound, to increase in speed as a wave does nearing the sand, on, until it suddenly crashed against the wire barrier, and hung for an instant and then burst, split into two lesser waves which flowed in each direction along the fence until each spent itself" (p. 6). 

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Both passages stand as metaphors for the world of perpetual change and motion that Faulkner's protagonists encounter.

Correspondences in Faulkner to Nietzsche's aesthetic theory, particularly as this theory has been interpreted and expanded by Heidegger, offer a means of clarifying Faulkner's narrative image of man's aesthetic existence. I do not mean to suggest that Faulkner read either Nietzsche or Heidegger carefully or that parts of the fiction stand as conscious narrative representations of discursive schema. No one can reasonably doubt, however, given their prominence in intellectual milieus, that Faulkner encountered ideas of both thinkers, if only indirectly in discussions that he is known to have participated in with other writers and intellectuals. John Irwin makes a credible case for the presence of the concept of "eternal return of the same" in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!. Thomas McHaney sees Thus Spake Zarathustra as a dominant influence on The Wild Palms. But the issue of provenance aside, affinities among positions fundamental to both the fiction and the discourse demonstrate that Faulkner reached strikingly similar conclusions to those of Nietzsche and Heidegger about man's capacity for and susceptibility to art. The textual correspondences derive from the profound

influence of the Platonic world view on the three writers. Nietzsche reads the modern crisis of faith in Christianity as the inevitable conclusion of the nihilism that inheres in Platonism. Confidence in the reality of a transcendent, "ideal," realm, in which Being exists in perfection and stasis, distracts man from the possibilities that inhere in attentiveness to "lived" existence in this world. Faulkner, like the discoursers, fascinated by but skeptical of the Platonic postulation, presents in the texture of his fiction a generic image of existence as the dynamic "now" of consciousness. In all three writers, obsessive focus on the immediacy of experience in this world stands as a reaction to Platonism. And in all of them it is the capacity for art that inheres in the composition of this immediacy that most fundamentally defines man.

Heidegger's reading and further development of Nietzsche's view of art as the basic human activity offers an illuminative approach to Faulkner's view of man's faculty for creation. In Heidegger's view the task Nietzsche consciously undertook entailed setting aside the errors of traditional metaphysics, lodged in the two poles of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian positivism. Nietzsche's resolution of the error lies in his concept of will to power, which holds that all occurrence in nature is informed by an inherent tendency toward heightening or increasing the power of the acting phenomenon. His primary objective is to
develop an effective interpretation of all occurrence, of which life is "the form . . . most familiar to us." And of all the phenomena of life, it is in the artist that, in Heidegger's words, "Being lights up for us most immediately and brightly." The artist is the person who is most clearly "able to bring something forth," "to establish in Being something that does not yet exist." The activity of the artist thus epitomizes Nietzsche's conception of the ground of Being, which he calls "will to power," as the capacity to bring forward something not yet in existence.\(^5\) In terms of an "expanded concept of artist," Nietzsche defines art in broad terms as the result of man's use of his innate ability to add to the quantum of existence. By the same token, "art in the narrower sense is that activity in which creation emerges for itself and becomes most perspicuous." It is "the supreme configuration" of will to power, Nietzsche's term for man's fundamental being.\(^6\) The activity of the

\(^{25}\)Heidegger, Nietzsche: Volume I:, p. 69.

\(^{26}\)Heidegger, Nietzsche, p. 72. Heidegger clarifies Nietzsche's concept by seeing it as partaking of aspects of Aristotle's definitions of dynamis ("force, the capacity to be gathered in itself and prepared to work effects"), energia ("a being empowered," "the being-at-work of force"), and entelechiae (force "as willing out beyond itself, precisely in that way to come to itself, to find and assert itself in the circumscribed simplicity of its essence"). Compare Otto Rank's definition of will as "an autonomous organizing force in the individual which . . . constitutes the creative expression of the total personality and distinguishes one individual from another," in Beyond Psychology (Camden, N.J.: Haddon Craftsmen, 1941), p. 50.
artist, then, provides the clearest possible manifestation of art and, concomitantly, of will to power.

From this basic view of the correspondence of the creative faculty and a general capacity to establish in being something that does not yet exist, Heidegger derives his own aesthetics, which is fundamentally similar to Faulkner's general image of the paradox of conflict. In the concept of will to power, Nietzsche purports to invert Plato's emphasis on the transcendent and to ground man's life in the dynamic immediacy of the present. Heidegger supports the Nietzschean project, but asserts that will to power is, ironically, merely the nihilistic conclusion of the strain of western discourse that began with Plato. In short, will to power stands as a metaphor for the essence of existence, and as such is no more substantial than Plato's postulate of an ideal world of which this world is but a shadow. What Nietzsche apparently did not see, according to Heidegger, is that will to power is not a descriptive term but a general metaphor for occurrences in nature. Thus, as George Steiner summarizes Heidegger's assessment of Nietzsche's aesthetics, "will to power is not a transcendence of western metaphysics but, on the contrary, its natural and nihilistic climax."²⁷ Heidegger wants to

²⁷George Steiner, Martin Heidegger (New York: Penguin, 1980), p. 150. Earlier in his discourse on Heidegger, Steiner asserts, "for all its lyric magnetism, the Nietzschean Will-to-Power is itself only a wildly exalted subjectivity," p. 70.
approach as near as possible to a literal description of the principle of dynamic process that underlies natural occurrences, and while, like Nietzsche, he finds aesthetics to be the key to the insight he seeks, his solution is not in terms of an Apollonian-Dionysiac dialectic, but in terms of a pre-Socratic "primalism" in which the word supposedly was not metaphoric but immediate to the portion of reality to which it corresponded.

Heidegger's description, in "The Origin of the Work of Art," of the strife-driven interplay of "world" and "earth" as the process through which creation occurs bears strong resemblance to Faulkner's motif of the paradox of conflict. I assert the parallels between these two writers' views of art not because one man influenced the other, a highly unlikely event despite their being coevals, but because their conceptions of art mutually reinforce each other. Several compelling reasons for the occurrence of this correspondence may be offered, though neither individually nor as a set are they conclusive. The root of Faulkner's agreement with Heidegger's description of the general process of creation most assuredly arises from the fact that their ideas derive from intense interest in the major questions that modernism posed in intellectual circles in the post-World-War-I western world. The fiction of the one and the discourse of the other are driven by these questions. Both writers responded to the crisis of values.
that afflicted the consciousness of modern man, Faulkner, like Nietzsche, through an answer to Schoepenhauer's pessimism (especially in *The Wild Palms*), and Heidegger through an analysis, evaluation, and innovative furtherance of Nietzsche's project. That both men developed an aestheticist response to the question of man's capacity for instituting an effective interplay of knowledge and action surely owes something to their similar views on the significance of death, both as an image and as an event. The nihilistic crisis of modernity derives from man's inability to teach himself what Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!* refers to as a "boon of death" (p. 143). For both writers man's capacity for effective creative acts depends upon a practical acceptance of death. But it is their common conclusion about the controlling influence of consciousness, or time, as the medium of man's being that marks the most basic parallel in their shared aestheticism.

In the "Origin," published seven years after the appearance of *Being and Time*, Heidegger transposes his description of the "thereness" of Dasein as a condition of "veiled" presence into his sense of the innate relation of art and truth. According to Heidegger's reading of the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, truth "happens" as the result of a conflict between what Heidegger terms "world" and "earth." Heidegger invents the verb "to world" to indicate the strife between world and earth that eventuates
in truth or art. Creation involves the "opening up of a world," by which process "all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits." The world is never objective reality, but the process whereby reality undergoes evolution. "The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home" (p. 44). In terms of the work of art--in contrast to "nature creating," so to speak, or to the "made" tool--being is brought from concealment into the "Open," which is established "in its structure" by the "setting forth" that takes place in the strife of world and earth (p. 45). Earth, "that which comes forth and shelters," corresponds to what Faulkner images as the realm of contingency within which consciousness exists and to which it has the capacity simultaneously to relate (p. 46). The difference between the work of art and the "made" work in general, both of which eventuate from the process of "worlding," is that the latter "disappears" into the end for which it was made, whereas what is established in the work of art derives from its relationship to the ability of consciousness to perceive what otherwise would have no avenue for coming to be, hence no being. "All this comes forth as the work sets itself

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back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color, and into the naming power of the word" (p. 46).

Heidegger speaks of world/earth strife in terms of the interplay of a "clearing" and "concealing" that constitutes the "establishing" or "happening" (aletheia) of truth (p. 61). That which exists "conceals" that which does not exist, and that which is in the process of coming to existence "clears" its way as it relates to that which exists. The "concealing" element of the equation resists the "clearing"--in Heidegger's words, "juts through" the clearing element--but it nevertheless yields to some extent (p. 49). This extent, or perceptible remainder, constitutes the work. Paradoxically, as it opens, reveals, or clears the way to "truth" or aletheia, it simultaneously assumes the position of concealing element. However similar this description may seem to the Hegelian dialectic, it is in fact fundamentally different. The process is not inevitable, nor does it result in a divine revelation. It is contingent, letting "ontogenetic" truth happen rather than ferreting out a priori truths. The earth, into which the world worlds, brings the irreducible quantity of phenomenal difference that causes dissemination of meaning and potential.

Not so much Faulkner's definitions of time as a "fluid
condition" existing in individual consciousness or as a "present moment" including both past and future, but his images of time, like those above from A Fable, parallel Heidegger's discussion of the identification of "being" and time. In his great discourse of 1927 on existence, entitled Being and Time, Heidegger, in his self-conscious elaboration of Nietzsche's views on being, attempts to establish this identity. His aim entails the undermining of all western metaphysics since Plato, who wrote of "Being" as a timeless realm apart from the flux of human experience. The primary characteristic of Dasein (loosely, Heidegger's term for man's existence) is its "thrownness" into what Heidegger calls "thereness." In this sense it is a condition ultimately beyond the control of the (human) being existing within it. This being or Dasein is thus in a position of perpetual strife between itself and the condition of its thereness. Moreover, the fact of this condition "is veiled in its 'whence' and 'whither,' yet [paradoxically] is disclosed in itself the more unveiledly." Analogously, Faulkner's "present moment" of consciousness contains its "whence" (past) and its "whither" (future), and aspects of these temporalities are present despite the essential absence of these "dimensions" of time. To exemplify from one of Faulkner's texts, consider the moment during his

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29 Quoted from Steiner, Martin Heidegger, p. 87.
involvement with Julio's sister when Quentin sees her "black, secret, friendly gaze, the half-naked loaf clutched to her breast." The image recalls to Quentin a painful earlier moment with Caddy when, attempting to affect her thinking and thus her behavior by evoking jealousy, he tells her that he was "hugging" Natalie. Instead of successfully controlling her consciousness, however, Quentin is, as it were, hoist by his own perspectival petard, as his mind focuses on "the mud flatted her bodice through her dress it smelled horrible" (pp. 137-38). Loaf, mud, and the breasts of the two girls become associated in his mind, as the present moment with the little girl paradoxically holds what it does not hold, aspects of Quentin's past as well as his future. In Steiner's gloss of this idea in Heidegger, man does not live "'in time,' as if the latter were some independent, abstract flow external to our being"; rather, man "lives" time.  

As the image of Quentin's "moment" with Julio's sister demonstrates, Faulkner's texture images Heidegger's statement that in relation to the work projected by consciousness, surrounding phenomena "first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are." What they appear to be as a consequence of context is "what they are. The Greeks early called this emerging and

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30Steiner, Martin Heidegger, p. 78.
rising in itself and in all things physis. It illuminates also that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the earth." By earth, Heidegger does not mean mere matter, but "that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent" ("The Origin," p. 42).

In the monologue of Quentin, in all of the voices of Absalom, Absalom!, and in most of the voices of The Wild Palms, Go Down, Moses and A Fable Faulkner similarly accentuates, through the peculiar combination of syntax, image, diction and content, the interplay of consciousness and an emerging world. Consider, for instance, the inception of Absalom, Absalom!, which is comprised of an extended moment ("From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown") in which Quentin, in a physiologically evocative setting ("a dim hot airless room . . . latticed with yellow slashes full of dust," shaded by a burgeoning wisteria vine and disquieted by "random gusts" of sparrows), experiences the rise of Colonel Sutpen ("out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt") and "his band of wild niggers" as they "overrun suddenly . . . the tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table" (pp. 7-8). Although in this case it occurs noumenally, in the vision of a particular character, this is
Faulkner's imagery of emergence, a narrative metaphor for the aesthetic condition of man's existence. The perspective here is Quentin's, induced both by a narrative tone (Rosa's) intended to convey the speaker's sense of an outrage perpetrated against her and by Quentin's own obsession regarding the nature of time. The oxymoronic image of Sutpen's emergence underscores the uncanniness of the experience for both of them, inasmuch as they are powerless in relation to it. To further accentuate the enfeebling effect of the occurrence, Faulkner substitutes for a verb an adjective ("he would abrupt") that is far more descriptive than any of the synonymous verbs he might have used (i.e., "appear," "emerge," "surface," even "materialize").

This image at the beginning of Absalom underlines Faulkner's awareness of the essential role language plays in the aesthetic relation of consciousness to the realm of contingency of which it is a part. Referring to the process whereby the mind grasps the classification of a plurality of specific things under one general concept (eidos), Heidegger writes that "the essential directive in the procedure is granted by language, through which man comports himself toward beings in general."

"Abrupt," for instance, rather than "emerge," as the verb for the action Quentin visualizes indicates the particular quality of his comportment toward

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31 Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p. 172.
the story Rosa tells. Indeed, in his characterization of
Quentin in this initial segment of the novel, Faulkner
suggests not only the essentiality of language to experience
but also the manner in which language may split
consciousness and thus create multiple selves or sub-selves,
as it were. This aspect of the process is manifest in the
narrator's reference to the "two" voices of Quentin
listening to Miss Rosa Coldfield tell her story of "the
demon" Sutpen. He "would seem to listen to two separate
Quentins now," one "having to listen, to one of the ghosts
which had refused to lie still even longer than most had,
telling him about the old ghost times," and one "too young
to deserve yet to be a ghost"—"the two separate Quentins
now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople,
in notlanguage" (p. 9). The passage debunks the concept of
the unified subject, as Quentin hears two powerful,
contradictory voices. But rather than hearing the voice of
Miss Rosa, the person doing the talking, he hears two voices
that are constituents of his consciousness, one of which,
moreover, is that of "the ghost which had refused to lie
still," implicitly that of Colonel Sutpen, the protagonist
of Miss Rosa's story and thus knowable to Quentin only
through the medium of her voice. The most interesting
epistemological implication appears in the reference to the
"silence of notpeople," which reverberates in "notlanguage."
Here, besides the obvious indication that language is the
resonant medium of existence of that which neither does exist nor can exist—in this case, the voice of a man now dead—an equally rich suggestion postulates the unconscious, non-linguistic "talking" of the "two separate Quentins" to each other.

An easy resolution of these paradoxes would follow from a critique that reads Faulkner's use of speech as a metaphor for Quentin's internal strife regarding the terrible story of the Sutpens. Accordingly, Quentin is torn by the conflict of his innocence with unknown, unavoidable elemental forces. This interpretation is by no means altogether invalid, but Faulkner appears to be positing a more fundamental relation of language and consciousness. The clash of forces that constitute the experience of Quentin is not exclusively linguistic, but it is knowable only through his capacity for language. This medium enables both Quentin and the reader to see Sutpen and "his band of wild niggers . . . drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing" (p. 8). Conveying this image in a third-person voice, rather than that of Miss Rosa, enables Faulkner to suggest that what she literally says and what Quentin consequently experiences are not the same. What he experiences is "notpeople" and "notlanguage," though the basis for these images is linguistic.

Faulkner's texts make clear that consciousness need not necessarily be thus overwhelmed by its innate propensity for
painful mythopoeic response to experience. Eric Voegelin's interpretation of Plato's concept of the "in-between" that characterizes the existence of individual man illuminates this aspect of Faulkner's aesthetics. According to Voegelin, man's existence "has the structure of the In-Between of the Platonic metaxy, and if anything is constant in this history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness." Man has the potential to be "conscious of reality as a process" and of his own consciousness "as a mode of participation" in this process. Further, as a conscious participant man has the ability "to engender symbols which express his experience of reality." Faulkner's texts indicate his agreement with Voegelin that man can recognize the symbols he engenders "to be part of the reality they symbolize," though the fiction demonstrates his doubt that many people ever achieve this level of consciousness regarding the process. Besides Quentin, especially in The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner considers in Rosa Coldfield, Harry Wilbourne in The Wild Palms (1939), and Isaac McCaslin in Go Down, Moses (1942), a series of highly intellectual individuals in whom

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the impulse to mythopoeic utterance is a powerful force. Each character's highly idiosyncratic, "creative" interpretation of Christian mythos and subsequent application of it to his life results in either death or emotional debilitation. Clearly the impulse to create art, so powerful a force in Faulkner himself as to command almost complete dedication to it, also evoked in him grave reservations about its ultimate value. These reservations derive not from Faulkner's sense of art as an accessory to life, to be taken or ignored, but from his conviction of a basic relation of art and life. Not until he was well into his work on A Fable (1954) was he able to resolve these misgivings and confidently ascribe to art the high valuation he had always unconsciously given it.
Chapter II
Remythology and Spoilation:
The Mythopoeia of Faulkner's Failed Artist-Figures

Faulkner shares with Nietzsche and Heidegger the view that the neurosis of modernity is attributable to man's largely unconscious questioning of the value of existence. This pervasive skepticism largely derives from an unsettled relation to Christian values that have been the predominant influence on western culture for nearly two millennia. In accordance with this diagnosis, both writers inquire earnestly into the ultimate human value of this mythos. Nietzsche regards Christianity as a historical consequence of "Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good as such." And while in The Genealogy of Morals (1887) he rails against its deleterious effects on the moral strength of western man, calling it variously "the slave revolt in morals,"¹ "a truly brilliant politics of vengeance," an "unspeakably cruel mystery" with "debilitating narcotic power,"² in the companion text published a year earlier, Beyond Good and Evil, he asserts the existence of a positive


dialectical "tension of the spirit"—manifest in "need and distress"—that is being experienced by "good Europeans" who ineluctably respond to Christianity and therefore potentially sense "the arrow, the task, and—who knows? the goal."\(^3\) Faulkner's similarly ambivalent feelings about Christianity are manifest in informal statements and in the fiction. In conversation he tried to downplay the thematic significance of Christian allusion in his work, saying that "the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background, especially the background of a . . . Southern country boy," that he "assimilated that . . . without even knowing it," and that its presence in his work "has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there."\(^4\) The apparent contradiction in these remarks (i.e., his oblique reference to himself as a Christian while disclaiming the importance of belief to the fiction) is interesting but not likely to simplify comprehension of Faulkner's views. There is much in the fiction, however, to demonstrate Faulkner's sense that the cultural impact of Christianity is terribly problematic, in particular the major artist-figures who wreak extreme suffering on either themselves or others (or both), arguably as a result of

\(^3\)Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 3-4.

their compulsive relation to Christian mythos.

This is not to suggest that Faulkner regarded Christianity as an inherent evil to be extricated from the western world. On the contrary, like Shakespeare, Faulkner's moral education was fundamentally Christian, and he instinctively tried to embrace the tenor of this mythos in his personal life and to image in his fiction the ironies of its unrealized standards in both individual experience and cultural history. Yet like Nietzsche he ascribed the cause of the general condition of neurosis in modernity to a crisis of confidence in the religious mythos which was the emotional mainstay of western man for nearly two millennia, its eminence as the embodiment of timeless perfection having waned considerably by the early twentieth century. As Quentin Compson's father puts the matter, Christ "was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels." Faulkner shares with Nietzsche the compulsion to articulate a credible theodicy that would replace the ineffectual Christian one. Yet while Nietzsche asserts the possibility of a wholesale "transvaluation" within western culture, predicated on man's inherent capacity for art, the relatively large number of characters in Faulkner's fiction who create deleterious theodicies suggests that he, despite

his many parallels with Nietzsche's thought, including the ontological privileging of this capacity, remains fundamentally pessimistic about the likelihood of man's ever making widespread effective use of it.

The old general of A Fable is the logical continuation, indeed the fulfillment, of the pattern of metaphysical problems Faulkner concerned himself with in the early works. Quentin, through whom Faulkner considered the crisis of an individual whose compulsive religio-cultural perspective forces from him an aesthetic reaction to family occurrences that clash with this perspective, is Faulkner's first mature narrative image of the impact of the problem on humanity. This character's inability to resolve his conflict of values in an actual sense eventuates in his projection of an imaginary (suicidal) settlement predicated on his visionary re-interpretation of the Christian mythos. In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner asserts the ontological impossibility of a reversal of temporal event, presenting dialogue in which both Quentin and his father express this constant of man's condition. Yet despite his overt acknowledgement of this condition, Quentin chooses imaginatively to empiricize, as it were, a visionary restructuring of Christian mythos that overrides it. Through her myth of the relation of time, being, and the difficulty of effective creation, Rosa Coldfield derides the promises of this mythos. In Harry Wilbourne, an obvious reconsideration of Quentin, Faulkner
images consciousness choosing to acknowledge the irreversibility of events and to reject a Platonic interpretation of being, opting rather to embrace a conception of possibility founded in the material world, albeit one that eventuates in a nihilism comparable to the Hebraic paradigm Harry repudiates. Having considered these various responses to the Christian mythos of his culture, Faulkner moved to a consideration of the general effects of this mythos in Go Down, Moses. Yet the focus is still characterological, as Isaac McCaslin's application of Christian principles to the history of his family supplies the writer with a vehicle for the consideration of a more general influence of the mythos than the problems of Quentin, Rosa, and Harry provided. Thus the conflict imaged in A Fable, when the corporal, a proponent of the perfectibility of man, manages to bring to a halt a dispute of international proportions, constitutes a further broadening of Faulkner's consideration of the influence of Christian mythos on western man.

As Faulkner's first mature image of an inherent interrelation among impulses to art and truth in man, Quentin became the paradigm for Rosa Coldfield, Isaac McCaslin and, most especially, Harry Wilbourne. Although it has largely gone unremarked, the parallel between Quentin and Harry was implied in a 1946 letter from Faulkner to Robert Linscott, senior editor at Random House, in which the
author suggested that "TSAF and THE WILD PALMS section from that book" be published in a single Modern Library volume. Moreover, his French translator, Maurice Coindreau, recalls that in the summer of 1937, when the invention of The Wild Palms was already underway, Faulkner "seemed to know The Sound and the Fury by heart, referring me to such-and-such a paragraph, to such-and-such a page, to find the key to some highly enigmatic obscurity." The critical events in Faulkner's life in 1937, similar to those in 1928 when he was writing The Sound and the Fury, suggest his impulse to objectify a narrative resolution to personal crisis. In response to crises similar to Faulkner's, Quentin and Harry create mythopoiesia designed to alleviate and account for their anguish, thus constituting synecdoches of Faulkner's quest through narrative to justify the inevitability of anguish. Yet despite their similar backgrounds and attitudes profoundly influenced by Judaeo-Christian ethos,

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6Joseph L. Blotner, ed., Selected Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 228. Faulkner's suggestion follows his penchant for publishing in the same book stories with unconnected plots but with thematic parallels and contrasts, as in The Wild Palms (1939), the two stories of which are "Wild Palms" and "Old Man." He also had used this technique in the three other novels he published prior to the letter of 1946 to Linscott: The Unvanquished (1938), The Hamlet (1940), and Go Down, Moses (1942). John Irwin makes an excellent case, moreover, for conscious authorial parallels between The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! See Doubling and Incest, Repetition and Revenge (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978).

each protagonist creates mythopoeia founded on a theory of aesthetics that stands in inverse relation to that of the other.

Severe personal disappointment conjoined with exposure to the intellectual climate of the 1920s to influence the shape of _The Sound and the Fury_ (1929), in which Quentin stands as the ironic resolution of Faulkner's earliest severe conflict between the world and a particular image of it that he valued. The loss of his childhood sweetheart, Estelle Oldham, when she married Cornell Franklin in 1918, initiated this pattern, which recurred in 1926 and 1937. His response to the first crisis was to join the Canadian RFC, thereby removing himself from Oxford, where the failed courtship and dreaded marriage occurred. He objectified subsequent misfortunes, however, by transforming his tension into literary products. For Helen Baird, whom Faulkner courted in New Orleans and Pascagoula, Mississippi, in 1927, he hand-made two gift-books: _Mayday_, an Arthurian allegory depicting a frustrated romance that brings the protagonist face-to-face with death—thus anticipating Faulkner's treatment of this theme in _The Sound and the Fury_ and _The Wild Palms_; and _Helen: A Courtship_, a sequence of love sonnets of the theme of romantic love and immortality. Baird's wedding a rival suitor in 1927 agonized him. Early in that year Faulkner and Estelle resumed their courtship when she returned to Oxford after divorcing Franklin. This
renewal of romance was surely complicated by Faulkner's involvement with a thus-far unidentified woman about whom he wrote to his Aunt 'Bama in early 1928. Years later he told Maurice Coindreau that he had written *The Sound and the Fury* at a time "when personal problems had placed him under a severe strain." According to Coindreau, he "was grappling with problems of an intimate nature." These problems quite likely involved a conflict between his well-seasoned love for Estelle and his desire for fulfillment with the woman he mentioned to his aunt. Whatever their specific nature, the problems influenced his characterization of Quentin, much as the portrait of Harry some ten years later resulted to a large extent from Faulkner's repetition of the familiar cycle of desire and anguish when he met, loved, and lost Meta Carpenter in Hollywood during the late 1930s. Like Estelle and Helen, Meta married while still the object of Faulkner's intense romantic fixation.

The early works *Mississippi Poems*, *Helen: A Courtship*, and *Mayday* figured prominently in Faulkner's development of themes that would inform his most important texts up to and beyond *A Fable*. The theme of man's apparent lack of

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8 David Minter points out that the reference cannot have been to Estelle, whom Aunt 'Bama had known for some time. See his *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), p. 92.

immortality and its significant offshoots—the insatiable
desire for romantic fulfillment, the transience of events,
the importance of physical perception to man's experience of
time and memory—recur throughout these early works. In
terms of style and technique as well as subject matter these
works anticipate the mature fiction that began to appear in
the late nineteen twenties.

Late in December, 1924, Faulkner gave to his childhood
friend and schoolmate Myrtle Ramey a volume of twelve poems
on onionskin sheets. Entitled Mississippi Poems, the
collection featured eight poems that he would publish in the
1933 collection A Green Bough. Poem I begins with the
speaker's inquiry about the endurance of memory: "Shall I
recall this tree, when I am old,/ This hill, or how this
valley fills with sun?" The speaker answers himself
emphatically: no; memory, like all other natural processes,
is ephemeral. But the intensity of the poet's desire to
retain forever his memory of important feelings compels him
to describe an eternal form of awareness whereby "The hushed
wings of wind," which "shape the tree tops," shake also his
"heart with hill and vale for aye/ When hill and vale itself
no longer live." Among the Mississippi Poems, the poet's
most profound assertion of his immortality occurs in poem

10Quotations from Mississippi Poems and Helen: A
Courtship are from William Faulkner, Helen: A Courtship and
Mississippi Poems, ed. Carvel Collins (New Orleans:
VII, "Mississippi Hills: My Epitaph." "Return I will," he reasons, for "there's still spring to shake and break my sleep"; and "Though I be dead,/ This soil that holds me fast will find me breath." These attempts to verbalize assurance of eternal being foreshadow the elaborate mythos Quentin develops in response to the irreversibility of time.

Parallels in the characterizations of Quentin and Harry reflect Faulkner's need to account for the periodic irruption of extreme suffering, which, as a consequence of his successive romantic misfortunes, had taken on the character of an inevitable condition of human existence. Although the ten-year period between his loss of Estelle and the writing of The Sound and the Fury in 1928 provided him with the hindsight that accompanies detachment, her return to him during the period of his unfulfillment with the woman mentioned in the letter to Aunt 'Bama intensified his sense of loss and probably significantly influenced theme and character in the novel. To be sure, Quentin's desire to overturn the basic conditions of temporality so that Caddy's virginity can be restored reflects Faulkner's feelings about his early loss of Estelle. Similarly, Meta's marriage to Wolfgang Rebner in 1937, shortly after Faulkner had made the anguishing decision not to divorce Estelle so that he could marry Meta, informed the frustrated romance of Harry and Charlotte in The Wild Palms. In both novels the protagonists' mythopoeic inventions parallel Faulkner's
narrative pursuit of a satisfactory theodicy.

Both characters' extreme sensitivity results in their preoccupation with fluid images that reflect the devastatingly swift passage of time. Visual, auditory, and olfactory images repeatedly irritate Quentin: the Harvard students "running for chapel," their "flapping collars flushing past like debris on a flood" (p. 88); a ringing bell that "stayed in the air, more felt than heard, for a long time" (p. 90); the honeysuckle "coming and coming especially in the dusk when it rained" (p. 153). While Harry speaks to McCord of "the current of time that runs through remembering," his experience of a succession of evanescent impressions supports the theory he is uttering (p. 137). He sees Charlotte "enter the vestibule and vanish." Of the waiter who serves them in the station bar, Harry sees "the same white sleeve, the anonymous featureless waiter-face you never actually see" (p. 130). A few moments later, "the waiter's hand set the refilled glass on the table and withdrew" (p. 136). Still later, three discrete perceptions blend into a single image: "The loudspeaker spoke again; they made to rise at the same time; at the same moment the waiter materialized and McCord paid him" (p. 139). Acutely aware of time as an enigmatic, fluid medium of irreversible occurrences, Quentin and Harry, like the author who invented them, attempt to capture its essence in words.
The similar descriptions of time expressed by Quentin and Harry provide the basis for the mythopoeia they develop in response to disheartening events. Quentin remembers his father's statement—"time is your misfortune . . . . A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged" (p. 104). Similarly, Harry describes consciousness as a condition of being "attached to [time], supported by [time] in space" (p. 137). These intransigent poetic ontologies reluctantly disclose meaning. "Space" in both descriptions simply means the set of impressions received. As Coleridge wrote, any mode of mental experience "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association."\textsuperscript{11} In short, both characters describe consciousness as a condition of attachment to time through perception of space.

This basic similarity notwithstanding, Quentin and Harry have substantially different feelings about the constituents of consciousness. Furthermore, this difference results in the contrasting theories of aesthetics with which they confront the dread of nihilism. A longer quotation from the passage in which Harry's description appears will help to clarify the contrast. In dialogue with McCord at the Chicago train station, Harry describes himself during most of his relationship with Charlotte as having been "outside of time," though

still attached to it, supported by it in space . . . supported by it, but that's all, just on it, non-conductive, like the sparrow insulated by its own hard non-conductive dead feet from the high tension line, the current of time that runs through remembering, that exists only in relation to what little of reality . . . we know, else there is no such thing as time. (p. 137)

The descriptions of both characters express their sense of entrapment. Quentin sees himself as a "gull" passively "dragged" by the "invisible wire" of time since his mind is powerless to control the perceptions and painful memories he experiences through the process of association. At the point of his utterance, Harry has also been a passive receptor, "attached to" time through crass images of the commercial modern world. The difference is marked, nonetheless. Quentin's view is static. Having accepted his father's idea that experience is essentially accidental, beyond individual control, Quentin values being "outside of time," inasmuch as he indicates his agony over waking to be "in time again" because "in time" he is in the world of perception and memory (p. 86).

By contrast, Harry's description confirms that the

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12 He remembers his father's speaking of "man who is conceived by accident and whose every breath is a fresh cast with dice already loaded against him" (p. 177).
condition of any given moment of consciousness need not be sustained. His expression is not reified but figurative. As such, despite its contorted, periphrastic character, it provides a theoretical basis for amelioration. Harry's phrase "outside of time" is a metaphor for his previous insensitivity to the fundamental value of his relationship with Charlotte. His mind had been "non-conductive" of "the high tension line"—the line of "remembering" its value and thereby retaining it. My reading of this passage differs from that of Cleanth Brooks, who fails to discern Harry's various levels of meaning for "time." Brooks interprets Harry's expression accordingly: "time is felt as a 'current' that 'runs through remembering.' It flows out of the past through the present and toward the future." However, this view makes "remembering" the present moment of consciousness and thus the base of all conscious experience. Consequently, Harry's syntax would situate him beyond all currents of time. Yet Harry's language shows that he is still "supported by" time through his sensory perceptions (space); thus, his syntax indicates that the sparrow is "insulated" only "from the high-tension line, the current of time that runs through remembering," and that Harry wants to be on this line. "Remembering" in this context is parallel to what Harry means by "inside of time"—again, aware of the

real value of their relationship. This line of remembering, like all others, necessarily exists "in relation to" the "little of reality"—that is, the reality constituted by impressions—we may know in a moment of consciousness. While Quentin's poetry leaves him unalterably stuck on a "dragged" invisible wire, Harry's expression acknowledges multiple currents that the mind may experience, thus foreshadowing the this-worldly, future-oriented mythopoeia he will later create.

The precise point at which verbalizations cease being merely abstract and become mythopoeic may be too subtle to fix. Coleridge has said that art commences "as soon as the human mind is intelligibly addressed by an outward image exclusively of articulate speech."¹⁴ In any case, by describing consciousness as a gull or as being "like" a sparrow, a character has begun to invent personal myth designed to mediate his experience. The connotations of gull need no delineation, but sparrow is a far richer word, with a literary history relevant to both Quentin and Harry—indeed, central to their self-devised myths. Following classical associations of the bird with lecherousness, Chaucer called the sparrow "Venus' sone" in The Parliament of Fowls and portrayed the Summoner of The Canterbury Tales

¹⁴See "On Poesy or Art," in Perkins, p. 492.
as "hoot" and "lecherous as a sparwe." In Old Testament lore the bird symbolizes worthlessness. Psalm 84 praises the temple of the Lord as a place where even "the sparrow hath found a house." In Psalm 102 the Psalmist likens himself to "a sparrow alone on the housetop," helpless because a wrathful God has "cast me down." Quentin's and Harry's relation to the image certainly fits attributes of lechery, worthlessness, and helplessness each ascribes to himself. But inasmuch as it appears at a point when the character is developing his meditation on sex and death into an abstraction designed either to counter (Quentin) or to understand (Harry) the nature of time and conscious experience, the image—an obvious allusion to Jesus' well known use of the sparrow in the Gospel of Matthew—serves as a myth-inspiring memento mori.

The mythopoeic confrontation between Quentin's consciousness and the sparrow that pitches on his window ledge occurs just four pages into the monologue (i.e. several minutes after he awakes).

A sparrow slanted across the sunlight, onto the window ledge, and cocked his head at me. His eye was round and bright. First, he'd watch me with one eye, then flick! and it would be the other one, his throat

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pumping faster than any pulse. The hour began to
strike. The sparrow quit swapping eyes and watched me
steadily with the same one until the chimes ceased, as
if he were listening too. Then he flicked off the
ledge and was gone. (p. 79)

The carefully crafted monologue shows that before Quentin
encounters this highly mythopoeic perception, he had been
experiencing an associational chain of thoughts that began
when he accidentally perceived his friend Spoade walking to
class. The perception had interrupted Quentin's
recollection of a conversation with his father about loss,
time, virginity, and death, and the sparrow's slanting
across the light restores Quentin's pondering of these
matters. Whereas the image begins with an annoying change
in light and also involves a sharp, fading sound, it reminds
Quentin of the pain associated with his existence in time.
Moreover, Quentin's biblical knowledge intensifies the
moment, as the sparrow reminds him of Christ's emphasis on
the eternal existence of the soul.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not
able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is
able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of
them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

But the very hairs on your head are numbered.
Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10: 28-31)

The image of the sparrow having expired as "the last stroke ceased vibrating," Quentin's imagination immediately endows it with symbolic significance. In effect, he accentuates his feelings about Caddy by valuing them above any concern about the consignment of "both soul and body [to] hell": "Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful they would have fled hell except us. I have committed incest I said" (p. 79). As the image fades, Quentin moves from mythopoeic perception to the creation of a mythopoeic abstraction. At the thought of his need to commit a "dreadful," damning sin, incest comes impulsively to mind, and he will soon use this imagined sin as a pretext for his being cast with Caddy into "a hell" where they will be "more than dead . . . the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame" (p. 116).

Quentin perceives the sparrow while trying to understand the anguishing irreversible losses he has suffered. Caddy's loss of her virginity becomes his psychic loss, as the recalled conversation with his father indicates: "Father said it was men invented virginity not
women. Father said it's like death: Only a state in which the others are left . . . and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin." (p. 78). To Quentin, Caddy's "unvirgin" condition and the decline of the Compson family exist as synecdoches of the loss of self-awareness that will ineluctably occur over the passage of time. Mr. Compson starkly poses the problem when he tells Quentin "you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this." (p. 177). Christ's association of the sparrow with the fate of the soul after death symbolizes Quentin's search for an appropriate response to the ravages of time. We recall that he begins the monologue irritated about waking into "time again" (p. 76), thereby indicating his preference for being "outside of time"--a condition he associates with sleep, death, and Caddy's virginity. His father's analogy between death and virginity suggests the synonymity of these conditions, and Faulkner's retrospectively written "Appendix" (1945) to The Sound and the Fury shows that Quentin's reification of this figure of speech becomes the sine qua non of the desired vision he believes will be realized and fixed for eternity once he takes his life: Quentin "loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment." This "concept" entails a consciousness-in-death, a "hell where he could guard Caddy forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal
fires."

Hopelessly psychotic, Quentin attempts to reverse the temporal order through an illusory scheme of rationalized illogic. He had reasoned that if he could persuade his father that he and Caddy committed incest, then her other lapses from virtue "wouldn't be so and then the world would roar away." But Quentin cannot turn this myth into reality merely by verbalizing it. Unable to reverse merely by utterance of a falsehood "the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every mans brow," he seizes upon death as his only recourse to effect "an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard" (p. 177). In brief, he believes the only willed response to the exacerbating temporal order is the ultimate one that ends it altogether.

Harry's allusion to Jesus' image of the sparrow appears when he is seeking to contend with his temporal experiences. Like Quentin, he senses a relationship among loss, time, virginity, and death, so the biblical association of the sparrow with life after death aptly fits his immediate


17 Andre Bleikasten describes Quentin's apotheosis as "not at all a state of not-being but rather an ek-stasis, that is, literally, a standing outside and beyond his self--without any self-loss," in The Most Splendid Failure (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), p. 140.
situation. As indicated above, Harry's use of the image in a simile shows that he is consciously creating poetry. Unlike Quentin, he is aware of the difference between language intended to mediate experience and immediate experience itself. Like many of Faulkner's narrators and characters, he has a penchant for using the indefinite pronoun "it." The word appears several times in the metaphorical contrast between "inside of time" and "outside of time" he presents to McCord:

You know: I was not. Then I am, and time begins, retroactive, is was and will be. Then I was and so I am not and so time never existed. It was like the instant of virginity, it was the instant of virginity: that condition, fact, that does not actually exist except during the instant that you know you are losing it. (p. 137)

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18 At Charlottesville, Faulkner noted "that some people get a certain amount of pleasure in hunting around in a writer's work for reasons, for symbols, for similarities, and of course they are very likely all there." Further, a "writer would use a symbol at the drop of a hat if that was the simplest way to throw the light on the particular incident he's telling about, and it's perfectly valid, I think, for anyone to seek for those symbols"; see Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University: Class Conference at The University of Virginia, 1958-1959 (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 121. The position of the sparrow in both works offers further evidence that they ought to be cross-referenced.
The indefinite pronoun enables Harry to relate several forms of physical experience that figuratively parallel the period of time when he has been aware of the value of his relationship with Charlotte. He initially compares this period of heightened awareness to the span of life itself—"inside of time." This initial antecedent then becomes "the instant of virginity," an intensive moment in contrast to Harry's previously blunted sensitivity. The "condition" of virginity exists only when "you know you are losing it." This "instant" suggests Harry's current situation "inside of time," aware that the fluid condition of time necessarily foredooms him to lose Charlotte. Toward the end of his profuse expatiation on time, through a blending of images that correspond to the indefinite pronoun, the "instant of virginity" becomes the orgasmic moment that suggests the termination of life and time. Harry's self-comparison to a "sparrow insulated by its own non-conductive dead feet from the high-tension line" therefore implies an equation of his previous death-in-life condition of unawareness to the state of complete unawareness that is death. His allusion to the sparrow as well as his metaphorical use of a painfully real event—his loss of virginity—discloses a capacity for poetic distancing that Quentin's blending of mythopoeic perception and reified mythopoeic abstraction precludes. Even before the onset of the misfortunes that will take Charlotte's life, Harry has used his poetic faculty to
develop insights into the nature of time that will enable him to construct a myth of memory in accordance with his considered priority of "remembering" her. Harry's synecdochal images of loss foreshadow the kaleidoscopic flow of events he experiences prior to Charlotte's death in the final chapter of The Wild Palms. In jail, awaiting trial for manslaughter, he clings to his ability to think, waiting determinedly for a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of his experience. The explanation depends upon Harry's capacity to verbalize it, which he comes close to doing after Rittenmeyer's first visit to the jail: "he almost touched it. But not yet. ... it would return; he would find it, hold it, when the time was ready" (p. 312). Again the ubiquitous indefinite pronoun appears. Here the word represents some explanatory combination of "what" and "how"—"what meaning can I find in my experiences" and "how can I ensure the continuing existence and development of that meaning?"—though Harry can presently express only the former of these questions.

The "second time he almost got it" occurs between Rittenmeyer's visits (p. 316). When the tail of a hurricane strikes "somewhere in the Gulf," Harry's consciousness fixates on the wind and develops a series of evocative images that almost leads to the answer he seeks.

It would be even quieter inland . . . upon the clipped
sward . . . it would be clipped and green and quiet, the body, the shape of it under the drawn sheet . . . Only that can't be all of it, he thought. The waste. Not of meat . . . But memory. Surely memory exists independent of the flesh. But . . . it wouldn't know it was memory, he thought. (pp. 315-16)

The indefinite pronoun enables Harry to blend one image into another until he reaches the threshold of his apotheosis of memory. The wind becomes the sward, which then becomes Charlotte's body, which becomes the "all of it" or the meaning of their relationship. The penultimate antecedent, the reality of her rotting body, he must bravely confront before he can discover this meaning. But he must learn something new of her during Rittenmeyer's second visit before he realizes that the meaning he desires lies in the very mythopoeic power he has already used so effectively in the search to find it.

Harry achieves his answer when Rittenmeyer's anger reveals that Charlotte's love for Harry had compelled her to exact from her husband a promise that he will help Harry—the very man who had taken her away from him! This recognition sets in motion once again the mythopoeic process that Harry eventually vows to nurture for the rest of his life:

it was just a simple falling of a jumbled pattern
and so there was just memory, forever and inescapable, as long as there was flesh to titillate. And now he was about to get it, think it into words . . . It was there, waiting, it was all right, it would stand to his hand when the moment came. (p. 323)

In this passage, which confirms Harry's facility with the poetic process, he reconciles himself to nature by thinking the "jumbled pattern" of underlying meaning "into words." His discovery of Charlotte's selfless pleas on his behalf evokes a powerful feeling about her, enabling him to recognize the possibility for future experiences of this kind. His understanding that he must stay alive to prolong their love is reaffirmed moreover when he connects his intense feelings for her to some sensory perceptions that evoke her memory. He sees the "light on the concrete hulk" of the abandoned warship, "as if he lived there"; he hears "a preliminary murmur in the palm" that signals the beginning of "the light offshore breeze"; he inhales "the smell of swamps and wild jasmine"; and he sees "the dying west and the bright star" (p. 324). These perceptions elicit strong feelings about Charlotte, causing him to recognize that "memory was just half of it, it wasn't enough." The meaning of his relationship ("it") depends upon his ability to store memories of her as well as to experience fluid "avatars" informed by sensory perceptions.
Harry's myth is thus a belief in the mind's mythopoeic capacity for "humanizing nature" by combining perceptions into unified expressions of "thoughts and passions." It is a this-worldly myth that deifies man's faculty for shaping his experience of organic nature. Faulkner exemplified the faculty through the writing of *The Wild Palms*, reconciling himself thereby to a present painfully colored by the past. His medium was poetry, the dynamic experience of discovering insights into experience. In developing Harry's story, he confirmed his belief in the power of consciousness to understand its ontological reality and to construct thereupon an essentially rational, but flexible, structure of belief that allows for adjustment to the unpredictable flux of events while sustaining the individual in his progress toward meaning. He showed in Harry Wilbourne that this meaning never materializes absolutely, but develops incrementally within the mind committed to its revelation. Harry can make himself an active receptor of feelings that relational perceptions may evoke in the future, or he can create mythopoeic theodicy, such as his ironic use of Jesus' sparrow to convey the gravity of his former death-in-life condition of unawareness. Through his characterization of Quentin and Harry, Faulkner effectually worked out the conflict between his desire for eternal consciousness and his recognition that death terminates consciousness. In other words, he balanced the religious perspective of his
culture against the realistic scientism of modernity. The contrasting myths of these characters represent two of the prominent modern responses to death, the one of Christian mysticism, the other of existential resolution. In a single Modern Library volume, the stark contrast they make would have underscored Faulkner's interest in the ambiguous potential of the mind's capacity for mythmaking.

The prophetic words of Hamlet just prior to his entrance into the banquet hall that will be the scene of his death ironically emphasize the confrontation with death that Quentin and Harry experience: "we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now yet it will come—the readiness is all" (V. ii. 219-23).\(^{19}\) The sparrow augurs Quentin's imminent death, but the "special providence" he believes will be realized in death differs from the orthodox implications of the term. Like Hamlet, desperate for a solution to his dilemma, he has no doubt of the divine order that, according to Christian orthodoxy, underlies creation. But his paradoxical feelings about Caddy compel him to adapt the Christian tenet of consciousness-in-death to his own mythopoeic vision. Thus, his reified myth of memory makes of hell a heaven, as his paradoxical reward of eternal damnation in a condition

"aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard" sustains his illicit feelings (p. 220). That is, Quentin takes his verbalized abstractions for concrete reality. Harry, by contrast, is awed by his enigmatic sexual feelings, yet uses his experience of them consciously to construct metaphors intended to dispel his confusion. His conclusion that "if memory exists outside of the flesh it won't be memory because it won't know what it remembers" convinces him that only by retaining the fluid condition of consciousness will he be susceptible to experiences that will evoke and intensify his recollections. Thus, from his memory of past realities, he knowingly develops abstractions designed to enhance the likelihood of such experiences in the future. Harry is aware that perceived phenomena, the inseparable nexus between man's physical being and his spiritual one, provide the basis of his valued ongoing mythopoeia. In contrast to Quentin and according to a metaphysics significantly different from Hamlet's, Harry knows that "the readiness is all." Yet, instead of applying this superior knowledge to the end of creating a new, dynamic life for himself—as Charlotte had suggested he do—he embraces rather a life of intense introspection, choosing to apply it solely to the production of intense memories of her. Harry, then, is yet another artist-figure whose utilization of mythopoeia undermines the high valuation of life the novel espouses.
Not unlike Quentin and Harry, nor in this regard different from the author who created her, Rosa Coldfield seeks a theodicy to account for what she deems to be her terribly gratuitous experiences. Having been frustrated, despite her insistence that reality deliver up experiences commensurate with her sense of what ought to be, she is left with language as the resource for the vindication she desires. Her expressed theodicy, which is developed for the most part in Chapter V of *Absalom*, involves her perspective on the relation of time, being, and creation. It is a myth of time as certain heightened "instants" isolated in her consciousness as a result of the stark experiences that filled them. These instants evoke postulations of being that obsess her and provide the basis of her mythopoeic interpretation of man's fundamental condition, eliciting questions and presenting implications about man's capacity for creation. Like that of the typical artist-figure in Faulkner's fiction, she requires a healthy process of de-mythology if she is to have any opportunity to achieve awareness of the implications of man's place in a contingent world and the concomitant potential for acceptance and growth it carries. No less an outraged prophet than her characterological predecessor Quentin, or her descendant Isaac McCaslin, Rosa finds a shocking discrepancy between her view of what the morality of her culture ought to be and what it in fact has shown itself to be. This morality is
embodied in her image of Thomas Sutpen, innate cultural hero by virtue of his position in the Confederate army and as patriarch of what remains of her family. It is also embodied in the orthodox Christian religiosity and the racial hierarchy of her upbringing. In sum, Rosa's expectations are incarnate in a general image of cultural values with which the facts and events of her life conflict.

Rosa's primary symbols are not specifically Christian, like the sparrow of Quentin and Harry, but rather more Greek and discursive. Yet the informing mythos of her own idiosyncratic mythopoeic utterance is Judaeo-Christian, specifically with regard to her demand for justice and her self-perception as sacrificial lamb. This half of the internal dialectic voiced in her "summer of wisteria" monologue vies with her propensity for Greek discourse that will penetrate the empirical dimensions of being. If essentially undeluded about the impossibility of recovering from oblivion the "might-have-been," she is nonetheless outraged at the ontological conditions that forbid fulfillment as she envisions it. Hers is a conflict not between "what was, what used to be" and "what should, what might have been," but between what never was, except in the noumena of her mind, and what never could have temporal or phenomenal existence. Her past, present, and future consist therefore of "one constant and perpetual instant" of "surrender" to "that might have been which," according to
her mythos, "is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality." Yet despite her indictment of "high heaven's very self" for allowing her to exist in a world whose chief characteristic is process, she retains a culturally-conditioned religious conviction which assures her of the reality of "that justice" which, despite its unwillingness to distinguish between "gristle bone and tender flesh," will nevertheless sustain its paradoxical ruthlessness "for appointed right and truth."

Rosa's tragedy parallels Harry's in that she apparently glimpses the aestheticist ontology an understanding of which might enable her to overcome her misplaced Platonism, yet cannot effectively utilize this knowledge. Nowhere is Faulkner more textually insistent on the relation of being and man's capacity for creation than in Rosa's analogy of the activity of the artist with that of the individual's attempts to mold the course of events. Her negative view of man's capacity for creation notwithstanding, she effectively images Faulkner's concept of the open--potential--temporal character of man's relation to the world. For her,

living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before what-is-to-be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gash. . . . not cowardice which
will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and poisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, . . . which in all the years of time has taught itself . . . only how to re-create, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing. (pp. 142-43)

Despite its being the language of a terribly frustrated character, Rosa's expressive mix of literal description with metaphor conveys an idea of the primary formative principle of man's existence which Faulkner's mature fiction repeatedly images. Individual experience is fundamentally constituted by the relation of man's innate creative faculty to the spatio-temporal components of immediate consciousness. The significance here is not so much Rosa's strained use of poetry to assert a philosophical attitude, but the suggestion that man's relation to the world is basically poetic, or aesthetic, insofar as these terms indicate the necessity for perspectival actualization as the generic form of response to both phenomenal and noumenal
data. The double accent falls on the oxymoronic Bergsonian view of time as "one constant and perpetual instant" of potential, in Faulkner a complex constituted by the immediate contents of consciousness and by man's capacity to make an effective "rending gash" into the "arras-veil" of the instant. It is an instant which, in its openness to man's input, offers him a quantity of "freedom," though Rosa feels that man neglects to take advantage of this potential. Instead, he engages in futile creation that merely "mirrors and repeats" all foregoing instants. Man therefore fails effectively to utilize his inherent "spark" of potentiality. "Living" is thus seen as an instant in which man's unrealized capacity to act comes into conflict with the perpetually potential or "open" character of his existence. Rosa's disappointment thus results from her awareness of the conflict between the typical individual's (including her own) genuine potential and his general inability to fulfill it. But man's lack of wisdom and bravery notwithstanding, the basic ("constant and perpetual") characteristic of "living," namely its docility in relation to man's capacity "to make" and its receptivity ("even glad to the lightest naked thrust") to his acts, holds open the possibility for effecting some change in the course of events. Rosa's anger, however, at the discrepancy between ought and is blinds her to the possibility that inheres in her own language.
In *Go Down, Moses*, Isaac McCaslin's similarly unrealistic expectation of Judaeo-Christian mythos to realize itself undermines his attempt to positively influence the lives of his slave-descended relatives. "The Bear, Part 4" discloses Isaac's discovery of the horrible crimes perpetrated by Carothers McCaslin, Isaac's grandfather, on his slaves. The unit is structured around a lengthy and involved, almost formal argument between Isaac and his surrogate-father-cousin McCaslin Edmonds, about Isaac's decision to forego his inheritance in an attempt to expiate the sins of his family. Isaac's position, an inherently semantic one, is that he cannot "repudiate" his inheritance since the "earth" belongs not to individual men, but to "the communal anonymity of brotherhood."^20 In contrast to this position, McCaslin argues that their grandfather nevertheless "did own it, . . . else why do you stand here relinquishing and repudiating?" (p. 258).

Isaac's moral perspective, based on a particular value which denies man's right to own anything pertaining to "earth," opposes McCaslin's adherence to the de facto situation. Although Isaac, like his cousin, employs principles of logic to support his position at various points throughout their convoluted debate, his fundamental argument is an appeal to

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an emotionally informed moral conception. In Go Down, Moses, a novel published about one year before evidence of the idealistic original conception of the project that became A Fable surfaced, the ironic results of Isaac's attempts to expiate ancestral sins undermine his idealism.

The deceptive tone of the narrative voice that frames the debate, however, suggests that Isaac represents the ideological center of the novel. While a close reading shows that this voice conveys the limited, skewed perspective of Isaac, a less detached encounter of the text may lull the reader into compliance, if not out-and-out identification, with him. For example, the reader is likely to be won over by the voice's assertion that old Carothers, despite "knowing better," could attempt to foster in his heirs the belief that he actually owned the land and therefore could bequeath it. Such rhetoric subtly begs the question, and when it is immediately followed by a characterization of "the strong and ruthless man"—of which category the patriarch is purportedly one—as a person who "has a cynical foreknowledge of his own vanity and pride and strength and a contempt for all his get," the unquestioning reader is likely unthinkingly to embrace Isaac's position (pp. 254-55). After all, what sort of reader can easily identify with the vain, "ruthless," contemptuous cynic? Yet what is absent from this language, and what a holistic consideration of Part 4 ought to reveal, is the severe
limitations of Isaac's perspective, which is warped by his terrible anger toward his ancestor. His perspective is reductive in the extreme, and Faulkner's dispassionate orchestration of the entire section, especially the dialogue, effectually discloses the compelling unspoken potential this perspective ignores.

When the narrator asserts Isaac's sense of "the reason" that Carothers "believed he had tamed and ordered" the land, the assertion is not a fact, but a speculation that the patriarch justified his claim of land ownership by virtue of the fact that he had forced his slaves to remove "the forest from it ... in order to grow something out of it" for the purpose of turning a profit (p. 254). All of this is Isaac's emotion-driven point of view regarding his grandfather, one projection among an infinity of other possibilities. Isaac's passionate clinging to it as truth underscores Faulkner's thematic treatment of the question of exactly what constitutes truth and how one gets at it. The text's disclosure of Isaac's severely restricted methodology for determining truth exemplifies Faulkner's general theme of the relativity of truth and of the consequential centrality of valuation to human being.

Isaac values what he describes as the "communal anonymity of brotherhood" (p. 257). He weaves an elaborate myth in support of this ideology, drawing on his interpretations of both Old and New Testament texts and on
highly personalized readings of world and American history. Like Quentin and Rosa, he stands sorely in need of a process of de-mythology, and before being offered it through his cousin's deconstructive reading of Isaac's mythos, he has the opportunity to derive it for himself through an experiential encounter with Fonsiba, a grandchild of the patriarch and his slave-daughter Tomasina. This relative has left the McCaslin plantation to marry a young black man who has applied the myth of Canaan to his new circumstances, predicated on a federal land grant "for military service." Observing the man "sitting there in the only chair in the house," "before that miserable fire," in "ministerial clothing," and wearing "a pair of gold-framed," lenseless spectacles--"reading a book" rather than attempting to work the farm--Isaac discloses his capacity for myth-debunking by asking the rhetorical question, "What corner of Canaan is this?" (pp. 275-79).

Even so, to justify his repudiation of the McCaslin inheritance, which, as the concluding stories of the novel "Delta Autumn" and "Go Down, Moses" manifest, constitutes a repudiation of responsibility comparable to that of Fonsiba's husband, Isaac similarly relies on a highly idiosyncratic reading of Judaeo-Christian mythos, with himself as sacrificial Christ-figure of the family. According to this reading, Isaac has been "chosen" by God to rectify--at least in terms of the McCaslin family--the
terrible divergence of His creatures from what was intended when "He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man" (p. 257). This divergence involved the practice of chattel slavery that Isaac's "grandfather and his kind, his fathers, had brought into the new land which He had vouchsafed them," thus violating the demand that they vouchsafe God in return "pity and humility and sufferance and endurance" (p. 259). Isaac can fulfill this demand, he believes, by repudiating his right to inherit the "tainted" McCaslin property. The basis of his argument is a Platonic view of truth, which, ironically, he arrived at experientially in the episode involving the fyce and Old Ben.

In a reverie strategically located toward the end of the dialogue with McCaslin, Isaac recalls an earlier discussion of the two kinsmen in which his cousin had presented an interpretation of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" designed to gloss the boy's experience. In this dialogue, McCaslin asserts the Platonic view of truth: "Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart--honor and pride and justice and courage and love. Do you see now?" But for Isaac, at least at this point in his personal development, "truth" is not abstract, merely "somebody talking in a book," but wholly experiential. He had experienced the paradox of hunting the famed bear "four years and at last met it with a gun in his hands and he
didn't shoot." Why? As Faulkner's text manifests, Isaac is paralyzed by his own reading of the fyce's courage. He has experienced the Pre-Socratic, Heideggerian interplay of world and earth, an eventually disclosed truth; and his cousin's assertion that "what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth" rings on ears deafened by his internalized re-collection of the experience (p. 297). The reader should recall, though, that earlier in "Part 4" Isaac, in defining his view of truth, uses his cousin's rhetoric from the earlier dialogue. Proleptically countering McCaslin's sarcastic query that the "men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometime liars," Isaac asserts that the apparent relativity of truth is an illusion, since "there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart" (p. 260). As McCaslin remarks early in the main dialogue, Isaac has the interpreter's propensity of "proving your points and disproving mine by the same text" (p. 261).

To undermine Isaac's biblical and historical reifications, McCaslin not only points out to his cousin the contradictions in the latter's referential authorities, but also demonstrates the force of the principle of perspectivism by offering his own readings of these sources. For example, to Isaac's fundamental argument that justice eventually must be done and that it is incumbent upon him to act out his role in it, McCaslin asserts "there was still
1865" (p. 282). In this assertion McCaslin is not claiming, as Rosa does, that God definitely is using one terrible event to retire another one, but that the defeat of the South certainly constitutes this possibility. McCaslin also asserts the "sons of Ham" argument to deflate Isaac's literalist reading of the Bible. He cogently postulates the apparent limitations of Isaac's creator God, to whom McCaslin irreverently refers as "this Arbiter, this Architect, this Umpire." Did He condone what he saw, and thus implicate Himself? Did He choose not to act, despite having the capacity? Did He even "see"? According to this linguistic framework, which, as such, can be no more or less convincing than Isaac's own logic-based interpretations, one must deduce that the creator is "perverse, impotent, or blind: which?" (p. 258).

At the end of the dialogue, Faulkner discloses to the reader the subjective teleological dimension of Isaac's application of Judaeo-Christian mythos to his present family circumstances. It is an apocalypse of personal freedom from the sociocultural guilt of his forbearer. Yet Isaac's is no less a purely visual, noumenal apocalypse than that of Quentin, as the rhetoric of the detached moderating voice of

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21 McCaslin implies, that is, that if Isaac chooses to read part of the Bible literally, then, to uphold the principle of consistency, he must apply a literal reading to all of it—in which case, as the antebellum argument from Southern apologists for slavery held, God condemned the descendants of Ham to servitude.
the dialogue indicates. For the historical circumstances of the "two threads" of labor and sustenance referred to early in the dialogue created "the frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony both to join him with...bones whose names while still fleshed and capable even old Carothers grandfather had never heard" (p. 299). This is the thread that, according to the implicit *weltanschauung* of *Go Down, Moses*, morally binds Isaac to the flux of history, both local and universal. His grand mythopoeic artifice fails to accommodate this assertion of "earth" within its created boundaries, with the result that both he and the McCaslin descendants that follow him suffer what otherwise might have been gratuitous experiences.

In each of the four major artist-figures considered in detail here, Faulkner images the highly deleterious potential of man's predilection for mythopoeic utterance when confronted by terrible experiences that evoke metaphysical uncertainty. Quentin, Rosa, Harry, and Isaac all project elaborate cosmologically based mythoi, with themselves as the structural centerpiece. Faulkner spares no opportunity to show us the influence of pronounced physiological states on these characters' idiosyncratic visions of the world and the too specific place they would take in it. What ought not to be lost on the reader, however, is the positive aestheticist force of each of these
projects. Whereas each character voiced an image of himself in an attempt to manage his personal crisis, so, too, did Faulkner, in creating them, confront the problem of imperfectibility, his own as well as the world's. The difference, of course, between his and theirs, is the difference between an aestheticist and a nihilist view of the paradox of conflict that informs being. It is, finally, a difference of valuation, specifically, whether or not to value life itself, as the long and agonizing process of completing A Fable, his grandest aesthetic undertaking, amply confirmed for Faulkner.
Chapter III

Strife, Structure, the Dissemination of Voices, and the Destruction of Truth in A Fable

It is at best a highly questionable practice to make Faulkner's commentary on his texts the centerpiece of a critical interpretation. He often spoke of them in somewhat cryptic metaphorical terms, forgot or confused precise details in attempts to recall parts of texts, and occasionally appears to contradict himself in separate references to a particular item in his fiction. Still, Faulkner's remarks about A Fable provide approaches to the novel that must be considered in any serious undertaking to interpret it. One cannot disregard his eagerness to explain to his friends and family, with increasing frequency as the process of composition wound to its conclusion, the meaning of the book. Nor should one forget, however, that Faulkner's conviction regarding his intentions was no less secure during the early stages of composition than it was in its last stages, though these relative perspectives stood in almost complete contrast to each other.¹ Completely to ignore either Faulkner's remarks about the project or the significant amount of physical evidence of his struggle to

compose it, therefore, would be to ignore an important avenue of insight into how and, to some extent, why the novel assumed its final dimensions. Yet as Faulkner himself not infrequently insisted, the texts ought finally to be allowed to speak for themselves. In terms of both structure and content, and in the relation thereof, A Fable upholds the principle of aestheticism suggested by some of his earlier texts as the fundamental characteristic of existence. The interrelation of man's physiology, of his perspectival experience of time, and of his propensity for myth is imaged in the involved relation of structure, texture, character, and voice that comprises the novel.

A Fable consists of a major line of narrative into which a secondary line offering parallels, contrasts, and even actual connections is woven. Intersecting these two lines are a multitude of related narratives of various lengths. The main plot, which patently corresponds to elements of the Passion Week and other aspects of the Jesus story, involves a first-world war conflict between a French corporal and the generalissimo of the entire French army, who also happens to be the biological father of the corporal. The corporal has led a mutiny of the enlisted men of both the Allied and the German forces, for the purpose of bringing an end to the war. The corporal and his twelve "disciples" have been arrested, and the generalissimo offers to rescind the order for their execution if the corporal
will acknowledge the danger of his actions and publicly renounce them. The secondary plot presents a stolen three-legged racehorse and an English groom who, accompanied by an old negro preacher and his grandson as jockey, traverse the south and midwest winning races and thereby creating a renown of legendary proportions.

The initial chapter of the novel starkly introduces the main characters and themes that the secondary characters, themes and fables will provide implicit commentary on. There are two main characters, the Supreme General in command of the entire Allied forces in World War I and his son, the French corporal, though the latter figure is truly prominent only in terms of his place in the allegory suggested by the main plot or fable. In terms of action his presence is negligible, even though ideologically he represents one of the principal elements of conflict in the novel. Of the several levels of conflict disclosed in this short chapter, the one that involves the large questions about the nature of man with which Faulkner is concerned is the most significant. The major question the novel poses might be simply stated as follows: Is conflict, particularly on a world-social level, an inevitable characteristic of human being? If so, what is the most practicable way to manage it? If not, how can man determine and extenuate the sources or causes of the human acts that eventuate in it? Another aspect of the same problem
involves man's capacity, not necessarily to sustain his existence, but rather to improve the quality of it. Is human nature constant? Is nothing under the sun new, or does man contain an inner capacity to improve himself? These are the questions Faulkner poses not only in A Fable, but at least implicitly in all of his writings.

Toward the end of 1943 when Faulkner began to consider the project that would be published much later as A Fable, he apparently thought of it in simple terms. He intended it to be "a thing," he wrote literary agent Harold Ober in late October, of "about 10-15 thousand words," "an indictment of war perhaps." The word "perhaps" offers a clue to the significant qualification in his initial intentions regarding the project, for it discloses his reservations, probably for the most part unconscious at this point, about his ability to write an unconditionally pacifistic narrative polemic. Before he would submit the final draft for publication in late 1954, the "10-15 thousand words" were to become more than 100 thousand, and the delicate tension that is evident in his expressed intention would expand into the wholesale strife that informs this novel as well as his earlier masterpieces. Indeed, the same basic conflict had driven the development in 1928 of his most significant character, Quentin Compson, and influenced some of his most

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impressive novels and characterizations during the fifteen intervening years. This strife was largely born of the contradiction between the promise of moral perfection embodied in the influential Christian ethos of his culture, with its implicit promise of earthly justice and happiness, and Faulkner's failure to obtain these ends in his personal life or to find them manifest in the world of his observation. *A Fable*, to no less an extent than *The Sound and the Fury* and *Go Down, Moses*, is the result of the author's pursuit of a satisfactory theodicy.

From Faulkner's correspondence with his associates at Random House, one learns of how he encountered the initial idea for the book. A Hollywood director "told it in casual after-dinner talk to a producer" who knew and liked Faulkner's work. The three agreed that Faulkner "should write the story, the other two put up the money, [and they] would make the picture independently and own it between [them], share and share alike." Further, Faulkner was free to "write the story in any form [he] liked," the proceeds from any play or novel to be his "exclusively." Having sent the first half of the story along with the letter to Ober, he proceeded to outline its concluding half: "It continues on, through the Three Temptations, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection. The Epilogue is an Armistice Day ceremony at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier." This letter of November 1943 indicates that money, not literary substance, was
uppermost in his mind. Faulkner intended "to rewrite it as a magazine story to be printed later by Bennett and Bob [his editors at Random House], and as a play."

Nearly two months later he wrote Ober that "the first draft of the fable" was complete and that he had "started rewriting it." The next epistolary reference, which occurred one week later in a letter to Robert Haas, demonstrates that during the process of writing the first draft of the story Faulkner's view of the project had changed from a merely pecuniary to an altogether serious one. Still referring to it as "the fable," he outlined its basic allegory:

The argument is (in the fable) in the middle of that war Christ (some movement in mankind which wished to stop war forever) reappeared and was crucified again. We are repeating, we are in the midst of war again. Suppose Christ gives us one more chance, will we crucify him again, perhaps for the last time?

That's crudely put; I am not trying to preach at all. But that is the argument: We did this in 1918; in 1944 it not only MUST NOT happen again, it SHALL NOT HAPPEN again. i.e. ARE WE GOING TO LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN? now that we are in another war, where the third and

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3 "To Harold Ober," 17 Nov. 1943, Blotner, pp. 178-79.
4 "To Harold Ober, Saturday, 8 Jan. 1944," in Blotner, Selected Letters, p. 179.
final chance might be offered to save him.  

These remarks, constituted by a mix of philosophical, poetic, and grammatical problems, suggest Faulkner's inconclusiveness regarding even the precise question he meant to answer. For instance, the rhetorical question (Will we crucify Christ for the last time?) corresponds to no definite referent. Is it a follow up to the announced allegory of Christ as "some movement in mankind," or, as it seems to be, a theological acknowledgement of the mystical power of a judgmental Christ who may be offering mankind a "last" chance? If logic is applied to the remarks, then a mixture of the mystical and the empirical occurs, as the curious question is evoked of how a "movement in mankind" can be said to be offering mankind a "last chance."

Moreover, if the mystical interpretation holds, what is Faulkner implying about the consequences of yet another "crucifixion" of Christ?

Grammatically the statement is also troublesome. Not only is the antecedent of "that" unclear, but the "this" of the sentence which follows it points to no definite term. "We" did what in 1918? Is Faulkner referring to the French military's squelching of the mutiny among the ranks--the historical paradigm for Faulkner's "movement in mankind

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which wished to stop war forever"—or is the implication far broader, referring perhaps to the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people, resulting not in peace but in the recrudescence of conflict on an even greater scale in 1939? Moreover, if "it" must not happen again, what possible courses of action might prevent it? And is Faulkner's apocalyptic reference to a "third and final chance" being "offered" to be taken literally?

This first authorial indication of utter seriousness regarding the work "crudely" suggests Faulkner's theme. Although he gainsays any charge that he is proselytizing, the tone of the remarks is patently pacifistic. The blunt appeal to biblical authority sets up an apparently straightforward allegorical reading. Man must somehow find a way to reverse his historical tendency towards international conflict. Implicit in the allegory is the interpretation that men en masse will behave according to a wholly predictable pattern of conflict that carries the potential for self-annihilation, this despite his awareness of models (i.e., Christianity) that seem to offer him an alternative. Yet the apocalyptic linkage of the crucifixion, the devastation of Europe during World War I, and the ongoing world crisis evokes Faulkner's impulse to believe that mankind has the potential somehow to avoid in its resolution of the current problem the terrible consequences of the first two events. With development of
the appropriate attitude and accompanying political strategy, man can eliminate the sort of perspective that erupts in world conflagration. Thus, the Utopian impulse that informed Faulkner's initial thinking about *A Fable* ignored his earlier conclusions, imaged most sharply in Quentin Compson and Isaac McCaslin, about the inherent limitations of the human condition. Presumably, the hero of this work would be a Christ-figure who, in contrast to his biblical paradigm, elicits from the masses complete adoration and a concomitant perfection of behavior that eliminates conflict from the world. The finished work would be an epic depiction of this hero's entrance onto a scene of world conflagration and his apotheosis as the savior thereof.

It seems reasonable to conjecture from Faulkner's remarks that the title of the short story as originally conceived, "Who?", points to the proponent of pacifism, who is buried in the tomb of the unknown soldier at the end of the story, as the figurative embodiment of the authorial point of view. That Faulkner struggled with the simplicity of this perspective is suggested by statements in letters to his correspondents at Random House during the following years. In a letter of April, 1946, he indicated to Ober that the title of the work was no longer to be "Who?" and that, generically, not only was it not a fable, but
"something new for me, really not a novel." Yet, nearly a year later, he hoped the book "can be accepted as a fable, which it is to me." Two months later, in June, 1947, he wrote: "It's getting right now. It was a tragedy of ideas, morals, before; now it's getting to be a tragedy of people." By this time the ideological focus of the project had shifted from the Christ-figure to a far more complex perspective.

Faulkner himself spoke to the process that probably underlay the shifting theme of the project that became A Fable. Assuming that Faulkner had in mind a "specific historical pattern" in its composition, an inquirer at the University of Virginia asked him if this framework "circumscribed" his imagination in a manner different "from the way in which it ordinarily works." Implicit in the question is the assumption that in the writing of this novel Faulkner began with and persisted in a clear idea of what he intended to convey, while in his "ordinary" method of writing, presumably the one he employed in writing The Sound

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8"To Harold Ober, received on June 9, 1947," in Blotner, Selected Letters, p. 250.

and the *Pity* or *Light in August*, the text took its form on the basis of the free play of his imagination. In his reply to the question, Faulkner suggested a dialectic of "pattern" and "imagination" as the dynamic of his creative process. "I think that whenever my imagination and the bounds of that pattern conflicted, it was the pattern that bulged," he asserted. Then, speculating that "the reason that a man has to rewrite and rewrite" is "to reconcile imagination and pattern," he went on to offer one of his best descriptions of the general process of art. Given its relevance to *A Fable*, it bears repeating in its entirety here:

Of course, any work of art in its conception, when it reaches a point where the man can begin to work, has got to have some shape, and the problem then is to make imagination and the pattern conform, meet, be amicable, we'll say. And when one has to give, I believe its always the pattern that has to give. And so he's got to rewrite, to create a new pattern with a bulge that will take this bulge of the imagination which insists that it's true, it must be.\(^\text{10}\)

Having begun the projected story with the specific intent to utilize the Christ myth as an allegory of modernity's potential to eliminate conflict from its world,

\(^{10}\text{Gwynn, Faulkner in the University, pp. 51-52.}\)
Faulkner soon relinquished this embrace of utopianism to his fertile imagination's far broader conception of man's inherent inability to purge the world of strife. Soon into the project originally designed to show that man "MUST NOT" fail "again" in his effort to avoid another figurative crucifixion of Christ, Faulkner, remembering what his characterization of Quentin Compson disclosed to him about man's physiologically-based perspectival condition, recognized the futility of all human subscriptions to the concept of millennialism. The text of *A Fable* bears witness to this recognition, as the shift of the ideological focus of the novel from the corporal, the Christ-figure, to his supposed antipode, the Satanic marshal or "old general," indicates Faulkner's tribute to the "new pattern" created by the "bulge" of his imagination as his work progressed.

The passionate assertiveness of Faulkner's description of the Christ analogy notwithstanding, it is, like the core of his writing, essentially interrogatory. As a descendant only two generations removed from an ancestral community that suffered some of the worst effects of the Civil War, and as one who experienced both the excitement and the horror of the Great War during his highly impressionable late teens, Faulkner had first-hand knowledge of the terrible ambiguities of armed conflict. And while the holocaustic tenor of the allegorical remarks may well have reflected, at the time they were expressed, a genuine
concern for the preservation of western civilization as the theme of the project, at some point the old question of the significance of man's capacity for artistic creation and reception came to be the dominant one. Try as he might in his inception and development of *A Fable* to convince himself of an innate, but untapped, human capacity to overcome imperfection, he could not repudiate his earlier conclusion, imaged most starkly in Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, that man's manifest capacity for invention was by no means without disastrous potential. By the date of publication of *A Fable* some ten years after its inception, the emphasis was no longer on the search for a conviction-informed way to eliminate conflict, but rather a resigned acceptance of its inevitability. Indeed, in a preface that Faulkner wrote after finishing the book, but decided against including, he not only disavows pacifism as his theme, but also asserts that in order "to put an end to war," "the men who do not want war may have to arm themselves as for war and defeat by methods of war" those who believe in "the validity of war."11 Whereas in *The Sound and the Fury* the primary crisis is individual, here it is western culture itself at the crossroads of despair and tragedy. Yet the key to his resolution in both cases is art, the primary element of which is the dynamic relation of artist and audience.

Quentin's audience, of course, as always, is himself. By contrast, the audience in *A Fable* is the anxiety- and dread-ridden populace of the district, a microcosm of all of France as well as the entire western world, and the artist is the apparent moral opposite of the Christ-figure who embodied the initial authorial stance.

Thus, Faulkner's already hard-won certainty of man's propensity for conflict eventually prevailed again over his strong idealistic urge, various manifestations of which constitute the primary formal element of many of his major characters. The exception is the character who came to be the hero of *A Fable*, the "old general," Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces who are "co-embattled" against Germany during World War I.\(^\text{12}\) In this character Faulkner resolves the problematic of man's dualistic creative/receptive faculty which he evoked in his characterization of Quentin and reconsidered in the succeeding major artist-figures in the canon. The old general embodies Faulkner's conclusion that this faculty, though susceptible to perversions that diminish the quality of life, is the means also to mythoi that nourish individual, community, nation and, potentially, world. The source of both harmful delusions and sustaining illusions, man's artistic impulse is a primary constituent

of his being.

Around the old general revolve all other rhetorical elements of the novel, whether literal or metaphorical. Having initially conceived *A Fable* as "an indictment of war,"\(^{13}\) at some point Faulkner remembered what he had concluded earlier about the inevitability of conflict, and the ideological center of the novel shifted from the corporal, who embodies belief in what Eric Voegelin terms *metastasis*, to the old general, who recognizes that conflict is endemic in the human condition.\(^{14}\) Thus Faulkner became aware that his intended epic image of a world free of conflict had ineluctably evolved into yet another novelistic image of the strife that inheres in man's existence.

Discussing the prophet Isaiah's attempt to transcend existence "into a divinely transfigured world," Voegelin introduces the term *metastasis* to signify "the state of the psyche in which the experience of cosmic rhythms, in the medium of historical form, gives birth to the vision of a world that will change its nature without ceasing to be the world in which we live concretely."\(^{15}\) This is not the place to consider Voegelin's detailed sketch of the Hebrew


\(^{15}\) Voegelin, *Order and History*, I, p. 452.
prophets' struggle with this propensity, but to note rather that it is fundamentally the same one that informs Quentin's visionary "ekstasis"\(^\text{16}\) and Isaac McCaslin's millennialist myth of himself as Jesus, come again to redeem the McCaslin family. In *A Fable* this impulse to empiricize myth rises to comparable narrative heights in the three characters who constitute the "trinity of man's conscience" referred to on the dust jacket of the novel's first printing. The structure of the novel, which results to a large extent from the stationing of these characters in relation to the old general, is a major element of Faulkner's intention to undermine the reified mythoi of adherents of metastasis.

The dust-jacket reference to "the trinity of man's conscience in the persons of the young aviator, the Old Quartermaster General and the dedicated soldier from the ranks" is problematic, particularly since Faulkner referred to the triptych in response to a question at the University of Virginia, where "trinity" becomes "trilogy," the connotations of which are significantly different. Nowhere is such a trinity overtly mentioned in the text, so it is available to the reader only by inference and through three extraneous references, the two mentioned above and the aforementioned discarded "Preface" to the novel. The problem with critical inference regarding this issue is one

of balance, since the textual prominence of Gragnon, who is not one of the trinity, overrides that of Levine, the aviator, who is. Furthermore, the trinity, at least as Faulkner interpreted it at Virginia, does not include the Christ-figure, the corporal who inspires the mutiny, nor does it account for the sentry. Yet another problem with the remarks on the dust jacket involves determining just whom Faulkner meant by "the Old Quartermaster General"—the old general, or the Norman classmate who succeeds him in the position. Faulkner clearly meant the generalissimo when he mentioned the Quartermaster General at Virginia, though this character's tenure in the position is brief. Moreover, in the discarded preface, Faulkner names "the old Quartermaster General who says in the last scene, 'I am not laughing; what you see are tears,'" as the "passive third" of the trinity. Not Faulkner's remarks, however, but the textual positions of Levine, the old Norman, and the runner

- Blotner, Faulkner, II, p. 1494. Lewis P. Simpson has written convincingly of the interchange between Faulkner and a young student at the University of Virginia in "A Fable of Civilization," in his The Brazen Face of History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 209-31. Simpson focuses on Faulkner's stipulation of the old general as the person of the trinity who embraces acceptance. My reading of this character essentially agrees with Simpson's, though it depends to a large extent on the Norman classmate of the general being in this position. As Faulkner did on several occasions when trying to recall elements of his fiction, he apparently confused characters in this attempt to illuminate the old general. The mistake, however, may suggest a fundamental similarity between the two generals, despite their significantly different views of man.
establish their thematic relation as the intended referents of the trinity.

A Fable is comprised of ten chapters, which Faulkner referred to as "actions" in a note scribbled on an early page of the typescript setting copy. Although scholars have ignored this textual fact, the old general quite literally stands at the center of the novel. This centrality results to a large extent from Faulkner's structural emphasis on time, but it also contributes to the rhetorical end of highlighting the general's relation to the characters of the trinity. Always interested in individual experience, in this novel Faulkner focuses rather on a spectrum of relations within a broad span of time. The present is dawn on the Wednesday two days after a regimental mutiny which ultimately eventuated in the refusal of rank-and-file soldiers of both sides to continue the war. The mutinied regiment is being driven in lorries into the city of Chaulnesmont, the Allied command center, where their fate will be decided by the old general. The harried people from the district that spawned the regiment are converging on the Place de Ville, site of the Hotel where the command sits. At the end of this comparatively short initial chapter,

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Faulkner images the major conflict of values in the novel as the corporal and the old general, with the throng as backdrop, poignantly stare "full at each other across the moment" (p. 17). In the course of the novel, this present moment will give way to the daily progression of events, but not until a flashback details the events leading up to and including the mutiny on Monday, then progresses to Wednesday through a series of scenarios and sub-plots that include internal flashbacks, as it were, some of them extending over a number of years. The structure of the novel poses a problem quite simply because the old general does not reappear for the next 175 pages, by which point Faulkner has interposed a number of extremely complicated incidents and characters not apparently related to the confrontation imaged in the first chapter, and presented in a texture so rich in detail as to be virtually incomprehensible without concentrated reading and reflection. These incidents and characters achieve full meaning only in relation to the old general. The chapter in which he resurfaces, "Wednesday Night," which is both the thematic and the structural center of the novel, generally alternates between narration of past incidents that grounded his moral education and of present moments in which he is forced to apply the knowledge acquired through these experiences. However, the long chapter is more a kunstlerroman than a bildungsroman, because in his method and perspective the old general
embodies the premier type of the artist according to Nietzsche's precise definition of art in the grand style.

The point at which the reader should notice the special relation between the general and the characters of the trinity occurs in the chapter that follows "Wednesday Night." Here Faulkner unravels the fictional knots tied in the three characters' earlier appearances in the text. The resolution of each character's crisis occurs in its own textual segment—first the runner, then Levine, finally the Norman—separated from the one that follows it by a space in the text. Moreover, immediately after these three segments, the focus shifts to the imprisoned corporal and his disciples, with the lengthy "temptation" dialogue between general and corporal soon to follow, thus accentuating the thematic importance of the trinity's ideological relation to the general.

Levine is the character about whom Faulkner said in the discarded preface, he "sees evil and refuses to accept it by destroying himself."19 In the reference to the "trilogy" years later at the University of Virginia, Faulkner similarly referred to him as "the one that said, This is dreadful, terrible, and I won't face it even at the cost of my life."20 Levine reads the fraudulent show designed by

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19 Blotner, Faulkner, II, p. 1494.
20 Gwynn, Faulkner in the University, p. 62.
the conflicting forces to mislead the enlisted men as a flaw in the very nature of being that he cannot live with. Like Quentin, Rosa, and Isaac, his problem with existence is that it fails to live up to the promise of the myths it elicits. More specifically, the myths that the culture of these characters has bequeathed to them often fail to stand the test of time and reality. Herbert Schneidau describes this perspectival situation as a "failure to identify morality and culture." Confronted by this general eventuality, as people inevitably will be, one must face the conditions of existence on their terms and either embrace them or else respond creatively—by remythologizing, as it were—or both.

The old Norman or quartermaster general eventually sees, with the help of the old general, the inherent conflict that informs existence and precludes the elimination of evil. When he learns of the general's role in the resumption of the war and the execution of the corporal, he recognizes that his nearly lifelong devotion to a myth of the old general as the "savior" of both France and "Man" has been a waste of his selfhood (p. 264). As

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21 In this regard Levine recalls Ivan Karamazov's repulsion toward an existence in which the suffering of children occurs, in Dostoevsky's The Brother's Karamazov.

22 Herbert N. Schneidau, Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976, p. 16.)
quartermaster general he had been compelled to participate in bringing the German general "across the lines" for the apparently cynical meeting designed to counter the effect of the mutiny. His essentially Christian perspective eliciting from him feelings of extreme guilt—particularly since the runner's battalion and the "unarmed German force" it met were destroyed by artillery when they attempted to repeat the earlier mutiny—he wishes to resign the position and so appears before the old general (p. 327). In the view of the Norman, the military enacted the conspiracy merely "in order to hold our last desperate and precarious place" on earth (p. 327). The people therefore, he asserts, "are capable of saving themselves" and need only to be "defended, protected" from the military (p. 328). To defuse this argument, the old general informs the Norman that the mutiny failed because Polchek betrayed the corporal, "as that or them or at least one among them for whom man sets in jeopardy what he believes to be his life and assumes to be his liberty or his honor always does" (p. 330). The Norman, then, fails to take into account all of man's "capacities," the implicit logic being that man's inherent imperfection necessitates general social adherence to order and commitment (p. 330). Contrary to the quartermaster general's initial belief that the marshal will execute the corporal out of fear that the latter's success will result in a diminishment of the former's power, the marshal in fact acknowledges, both here
and in the long dialogue with the corporal, how essential idealism is to the well-being of man, as his expression of the paradox of this conflict indicates:

"If I gave him his life tonight, I myself could render null and void what you call the hope and dream of his sacrifice. By destroying his life tomorrow . . . I will establish forever that he didn't even live in vain, let alone die so. Now tell me who's afraid? (p. 332)

The most important foil to the old general is the battalion runner, who in the course of the novel moves from one extreme to another. Besides the general, greater narrative attention is devoted to this character than to any other in the novel. He is developed in the second longest chapter in the novel, "Tuesday, Wednesday, Wednesday Night," and the process is one of development by implication, so to speak, since the chapter actually involves the Reverend Tobe Sutterfield's narration to him of the horsethief episode involving the sentry; the runner's attempt to use the sentry for the purpose of accomplishing the corporal's pacifist goal constitutes, of course, an image of the story's effect on him. In this regard Faulkner exemplifies once again man's propensity to take for reality events merely depicted in language. The runner interprets the story as an example of the power of love, then enacts his own repetition of this
myth in coercing the sentry to lead a mutiny of his regiment.

Before the war the runner had been an artist of sorts ("not only a successful architect, but a good one") and an intellectual "aesthete" ("doing a little more than his share of the talking about art or politics or life or all three," p. 60). Being "among the first London volunteers," a hero at the Battle of Loos and lately an officer, he approaches his company commander with the request that he be allowed to resign his commission, not because he loves man so much that he prefers to "sleep in the same mud he sleeps in," but because, rather, he hates man and wants to be "free" from any responsibility for him (p. 61). The runner's misanthropy, however, is not due to the fundamental ignobility of man or to man's predilection not to fulfill his potential, but (and here his thinking parallels Levine's) to the absurdity of man's condition, which for the runner is signified by the fact that he, "by the simple coincidence of wearing this little badge on [his] coat, [has] not only the power, with a whole militarized government to back [him] up, to tell vast herds of man what to do, but the impunitive right to shoot him with [his] own hand when he doesn't do it" (pp. 61-62). This caricature of the metaphysical uncertainty of human being compels the runner to "realize how worthy of fear and abhorrence and hatred [man] is" (p. 62).
The runner's myth of the preposterousness of man's condition is no less illusory than the imaginary reifications of Faulkner's earlier artist-figures. Moreover, the runner's view of man ironically results from the same perspective that will lead him to embrace an apparently opposite view after his observation of the response Harry, the sentry, gets from rank- and-file members of the battalion. The runner's two responses to the human condition, the first one of repulsion and (quite literal) resignation, the second of hope and action designed to ameliorate, spring from the same unwillingness to accept the world on its contingent terms. Thus, to counter his own myth of the inherent degradation of man, he invents a myth of self-resignation from any responsibility for what occurs within this condition.

This attitude, however, is replaced by what appears to be its opposite extreme when the runner observes the "clump of thirteen men in horizon blue" and the relation of the sentry to his debtors, learns of the mutiny of Gragnon's regiment, and makes the acquaintance of the "old porter" who has enlisted in the army to facilitate his quest to find his missing son (pp. 67-68). Influenced by this character's reading the realization of Christian mythos in the unfolding of events, the runner, with his own pronounced faculty for mythopoeia, embraces the porter's view of the corporal as Christ returned for the initiation of the millennium.
Accordingly, in his mind the corporal and his followers take on the force of mystical power in their confrontation with "ruthless and all-powerful and unchallengeable Authority," which "would be impotent before that massed unresisting undemanding passivity" (p. 68). No less now a man of action than when he publicly shamed himself with a prostitute in order to lose his commission, the runner attempts yet again to institute an abstract mythopoeia within the dynamic stream of event, forcing the highly reluctant sentry to lead the men of the battalion into a futile repetition of the earlier regimental mutiny.

The runner's metastatic politics of "unresisting undemanding passivity" is predicated on his reading of love as a potentially overarching force in human affairs. There is, of course, the love of the porter for his son, manifest in his unyielding, self-sacrificial search for him. But it is two other, highly unusual manifestations of love that convince the runner the conditions of the millennium are implementable. These are the relation of his creditors to the sentry and the devotion of the sentry and Tobe to the renowned horse. In "Tuesday Night," Faulkner underlines the first relation as one of love by having a colonel describe it that way to a staff major who is investigating it, "because the only word I can think of is love" (p. 59). The more emphatic myth of love, however, is that spun by the Reverend Sutterfield. Not only he and Harry are devoted to
the horse; apparently the entire populations of villages and towns the group passed through confederated to prevent federal and state authorities and hired investigators from capturing them. Hearing Tobe witness to this capacity of man to unite in the pursuit of a single end, the runner is propelled further into his illusion of the possibility of forced peace. Faulkner undermines his idealism, though, through other voices in the chapter and, after the long biography of the old general in "Wednesday Night," in the segment depicting the runner's misguided forcing of the sentry's hand and the subsequent annihilation of the battalion and its German counterpart.

The frame narrator of "Tuesday, Wednesday, Wednesday Night," for instance, asserts the "inherent doom" of the story of the sentry and the horse, "since, being immortal, the story, the legend, was not to be owned by any one of the pairs who added to its shining and tragic increment, but only to be used, passed through, by each in their doomed and homeless turn" (p. 154). In contrast to this view of the myth of love as an archetype to be "passed through" stands the runner's conviction that the kerygma can be (and is, in the person of the corporal, being) established in the realm of human affairs. Another passage images the detached perspective of the ex-Federal deputy's lawyer, who envisions himself "against, as a frieze or tapestry," the roster of heroes "who were the milestones of the rise of man,"
including "Caesar and Christ." The effective modus operandi of these figures, whose primary values—according to this reading—only apparently conflict, is, "by putting some of him [man] in motion in one direction, by him of him and for him, to disjam the earth, get him for a little while at least out of his own way" (p. 101). This remark ironically comments on the active remythology of the old general, whose self-perpetuating grand legend not only palliates, but infuses with hope the troubled relatives of the regiment. In contrast to the runner's sense of man's worthiness of "fear and abhorrence and hatred" (p. 62), the general reveres man for having "that in him which will enable him to outlast even his wars," namely, his capacity for creative adaptation, even to the worst of his shortcomings (p. 352).23

Faulkner establishes the old general's mesmerizing, myth-provoking effect on others through their remarks about him. General Gragnon's army commander, for instance, despairs before him: "If I were a saint, I would weep" (p. 230). Why? Why not, rather, rejoice? It may be because of the paradox that the old general, seen here as an example of

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23 The antecedent of "that" is, of course, man's "deathless folly," the general's term for the paradox of man's creative relation to the world. It is this faculty that leads to the spate of inventions by means of which man will continue to respond to existence, so that his capacity to be "still talking, still planning" will enable him to escape the from "last red and heatless sunset" of earth to "the next star in the blue immensity of space" (p. 354).
the man-of-men concept, embodies the moral force necessary to confront and manage evil, but, as a man himself, contains too much knowledge of the inherent evil in man to approach sainthood himself. Or, it could be that the saint weeps for joy that this man constitutes the moral pinnacle of man. In this sense, he represents man's moral, social and psychological potential. He "executes," as it were, on the basis of both morality and intellect. But the narrator of Gragnon's hearing does not agree with Lallemont's perspective. In the view of this voice, virtue and deliberation play no role in the determinations of the old general, who merely sits "for a specified time over the meaningless papers . . . until the moment came not to judge nor even condemn, but just to fling away the impending papers and execute" (p. 228). Both views are interpretations, as is Gragnon's sense that the old general has photographic memory—"that he remembered the name and face of every man in uniform he had ever seen." "It's true. He knows me at once" (p. 230). This is Gragnon's natural myth-making capacity at work, a reflection of the author's too, as it suggests the legend that has naturally been building up around the old general.

To be sure, the old general has assumed the position of a powerful presence in the novel at this point. He stands at the vortex of the social situation it depicts: Gragnon's hearing and the city's tumult. This hearing, in which the
division commander requests the execution of the regiment, is one of many that metaphorically interplays with Tobe Sutterfield's hearing. The request is based on Gragnon's myth of the providential "beneficence" that, in his mind, necessarily undergirds a life predicated on adherence to principle. "It [the request] had been right" (on the bases of "honor and integrity") and "it was still right" (on the basis of "that quality" that enabled Gragnon to become division commander), since the "honor and integrity" which the "beneficence" had seen in him, rather than the "beneficence" itself, was forcing "the compulsion" (p. 231). Gragnon fails to recognize that his presumably logical argument is fundamentally aestheticist. For Faulkner it is another aspect of man's psychological propensity for myth. The mind not only needs the lie, but also quite naturally contributes to its establishment. Thus another paradox occurs in the establishment (substantiation) of falsehood, something that is fundamentally insubstantial. Gragnon is engaged in mythopoeia as much as Quentin, though less obviously. Even if the ascetic character of his early religious socialization in an orphanage, coupled with his military training, may account for his easy embrace of such an abstraction as "beneficence," Gragnon elevates this invention, predicated on his self-perceived capacity for absolute faithfulness to the "rules," to a position of mystical force. It is because it must be, since it cannot
but be, given his absolute devotion to it. The rules of
eexistence are thus and so, and I have followed them to the
letter, so my expectations must be realized. Accordingly,
Gragnon's "speech," reported by the narrator but gratuitous
to the text, has no connection "with what lay on the table,"
the sword proffered in submission to the perceived rules of
engagement (p. 231). Although Gragnon adjudges his "speech"
to be authentic, like many of the utterances in response to
disappointment imaged in the novel, it lacks the practical
connection to the primary value the novel espouses through
the image of the old general, in both his actions and his
language--namely, the sustenance of life itself. In saying
that "the beneficence itself didn't need the gesture," the
narrator exposes the fallacy of Gragnon's myth (p. 231).
Gragnon's proffering of the sword, a miniature symbol of the
larger "gesture" of executing the regiment, is inferior to
the old general's gesture of sparing them and scapegoating
the corporal. The latter action, though equally poetic,
enforces the superior value.

Gragnon must blindly serve his destiny by asserting
abstractions--proffering the sword, making the speech,
executing the regiment, and taking his own life--that, for
all their poetry, undermine the aesthetic possibility that
inheres existence and is imaged in the old general's ongoing
poetic actions. Gragnon's stoic intention to kill himself
as the only orderly response to the "fixed" situation he
perceives is all the more patently absurd when the reader remembers that the whole business of the mutiny was set in motion so that the group commander, "Mama Bidet," could get his baton. Yet despite Gragnon's point of view that the whole war is the consequence of natural forces "conceived . . . by some immaculate pollenization like earth's simultaneous leafage . . . "out of the mutual rage and fear of the three ocean-dividing nations themselves," he persists in his form-based Stoicism (p. ??). The German general's attention to ritual is similarly absurd. The modus operandi of both characters is outside the dynamic stream of events, the paradoxical (aestheticist) fusion of which constitutes the potential for occurrences that one cannot project with absolute precision, but can absolutely negate with such rigidity of action as that of Gragnon and the German general. This sustained moment of possibility Heidegger attempts to clarify with his dialectic of unconcealment and concealment, of unretarded process or ontogenesis. Gragnon's static myth of the beneficence vitiates it.

Gragnon perceives "the old gray inscrutable supreme general" as having "the face of one who long ago had won the right to believe in nothing whatever save man's deathless
This viewpoint initiates the old general's biography and, at its point of utterance, actually seems to be the voice at the ideological center of the novel. And although the first-time reader lacks the information needed to discern this erroneous perception of the division commander, Gragnon mistakenly says that the old general merely presides and therefore does not need "to control" the plan "as it took its ordained undeviable course" on the basis "of the vast solvent organizations and fraternities and movements" which hold power in the western world (p. 233). This sarcasm expressed toward the establishment corresponds to the pacifist attitude which induced Faulkner's original plans for A Fable. By publication date it has become the shortsighted perspective of a character who stands as a major foil to the protagonist who embodies the weltanschauung the novel images. The entire lengthy passage is overstatement, some of it in rich Shakespearean syntax that indicates Faulkner's penchant for employing the bard's strategy of putting into the voice of a character truths larger than the more limited one of his immediate understanding. The "design" Gragnon postulates is no design at all, but the consequence of an irreducible

24 This is actually the language of a third-person voice which announces that it refracts the perspective of Gragnon. For example, it remarks, "As the group commander himself had practically told him this morning . . ." and "In fact, it seemed to him now that . . ." (p. 231).
complex of material forces in their historical evolution (p. 232). Moreover, it is an erroneous projection on his part, since the attack—in practical terms the old general's sacrifice of Gragnon to Bidet—was purely personally motivated and not an altogether significant part of the war at all. Yet the old general does design on the basis of a controlled strategy which allows the disclosure of value-sustaining imagery to occur. This strategy takes into account the fluidity of existential evolution and the spectatorial capacity of consciousness within it. Gragnon's lengthy reflection, in dialogue with the old general's statements and actions, is reductive in its "all or nothing" interpretation of the event. He sees it absolutely in terms of his destiny. The failure itself disgraced him, thus demonstrating his inability adequately to train all the men in his command, the specific nature of it, the mutiny, being largely irrelevant. Gragnon's "quality" of incorrigible belief in the necessary realization of his myth of "the beneficence" demands that he make the request that the regiment be executed (p. 231). But the old general recognizes a more fundamental social need as the society for

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25 . . . all that vast powerful terror-inspiring representation which, running all democracy's affairs in peace, comes indeed into its own in war, finding its true apotheosis then, in iron conclave now decreeing for half the earth a design vast in its intention to demolish a frontier, and vaster still in its intent to obliterate a people" (p. 232, my emphasis).
which the regiment fights is likely to experience moral disintegration if the regiment is executed.

An examination of another of the fables within *A Fable* that Faulkner interprets in his correspondence will demonstrate the fallacy of the will to truth that purportedly informs the genre. It occurs within the story of the groom, the old negro, and the stolen racehorse— one of the two major fables of the novel. A federal deputy hired by the millionaire owner of the horse, having become fascinated by the developing legend, not only has resigned from the pursuit, but also has committed himself to facilitating the party's continuing evasion of the authorities. When the groom is apprehended and arrested in a small Missouri county seat, the deputy returns to his home in New Orleans, sending in his place an expensive attorney whose task is to protect the groom and the old negro. The groom mysteriously disappears from the jail, but in the meanwhile the negro, reportedly hiding in the tail of his frock coat tens of thousands of dollars won betting on the horse, is captured by the deputy, who, at the insistence of a mob of irate citizens, takes him to the courtroom for a hearing. The attorney asks for and is given (by the mob) ten minutes "to consult" with his client, during which interval the attorney's chauffeur attempts to drive the negro away from the town (p. 173). Sensing the ruse, however, the mob apprehends the old negro in the street and,
in a moment of irony that recalls a number of scenes in Faulkner, merely compels him to leave town. "We dont like rich niggers here," the mob's spokesman tells him (p. 189).

In a financial bind, Faulkner was trying to sell this part of the work to a magazine. Corresponding about it with Ober, he offered this interpretation of the scene:

the last 60 pages are a complete story in a way:
an anecdote of a mob (man at his basest) performing an act of right and justice despite himself, because of base motives. They freed two thieves not because of pity for them but because they would defend at all costs man's right to get that much money, no matter how.26

This glossing of his own text by the author offers interesting clues about what he intended to convey in A Fable. The book begins with a mob scene, ends with one, and includes many others. Does Faulkner consider all of them representative of "man at his basest," and do they indisputably appear to be that way in the text? What of the indicated a priori view of "right and justice"? Is Faulkner indicating that "despite himself," i.e., his baseness, man (the mob) will inevitably discover justice? Moreover, is man in the mob condition, as the unusual parenthesis

suggests ("mob" is the antecedent of "himself," thus making "mob" and "man" synonymous), in Faulkner's view representative of the true nature of man? There can of course be no definitive answers to these questions, just as Faulkner's interpretation of the anecdote necessarily lacks absoluteness. Other plausible views may readily be demonstrated, and Faulkner's rhetorical strategies contribute to the inherent ambiguity.

The question the anecdote elicits in Faulkner's mind may be phrased "What is the nature of justice?" or "How does man, communally considered, arrive at justice in the resolution of a dispute?" The text obscures even the specific charge to be adjudicated in the case of the old negro. Most of the narrative focuses on the attorney's perspective, which changes from conviction that the mob will do nothing to fear that their actions may culminate in a lynching. One point is clear. Before the mob acts, they insist on hearing the case in the courtroom, and their tacit understanding is that the attorney will present it. But the reader must surmise for himself the charge, although the obvious one is horsetheft. Having anticipated this charge, the attorney charts a defense that is typical in its "legal" circumlocution: The prosecution cannot demonstrate "that the man had not been trying simply to find the owner and restore him his property all the time" (p. 168). Hence the attorney's (and the reader's) confusion when the mob ignores
the theft and focuses instead on the answer to the question its spokesman puts to the old negro: "How much did you and that fellow really win on that horse?" They interpret the reply, "It was a heap," as indicative that he is a "rich nigger," which they will not allow in the community. Their judgment is that he be on the train "when it leaves and don't come back" (pp. 188-89).

Thus, one is left with the question "what constitutes justice?" in this instance. *A Fable* postulates no painstaking sociocultural evolution of a legal institution capable of resolving conflict, such as the one Aeschylus images in the *Oresteia*. If justice has been done, whose justice is it, since the legalities (i.e. prosecution for theft) have been completely ignored by the process? One easy answer is that the community's sense of justice has prevailed. Another is that justice will eventually out, regardless of the players and the circumstances. Faulkner's interpretation in the letter to Ober contradicts the first answer and does not dispute, though neither does it affirm, the second. More importantly, the text in ways too numerous to document undermines both possibilities. Instead, it demonstrates the impossibility of verbalizing an absolute answer.

Several voices in *A Fable* reflect on the tradition of rapacity that arguably undergirds the wealth and power of western civilization. The Norman, for instance, asserts that
rapacity does not fail [since] all governments and nations which ever rose and endured long enough to leave their mark as such, had sprung from it and in and upon and by means of it became forever fixed in the amazement of man's present and the glory of his past; civilization itself is its password and Christianity its masterpiece, Chartres and the Sistine Chapel, the pyramids and the rock-wombed powder-magazines under the gates of Hercules its altars and monuments, Michaelangelo and Phidias and Newton and Ericsson and Archimedes and Krupp its priests and popes and bishops. (pp. 259-60)

In addition, the attorney describes his prepared defense of the old negro as being "in the old fine strong American tradition of rapine" (p. 168). But if the tradition of "legalized" rapine and its concomitant, the power of the west, are to be sustained, "illegal" rapine such as the theft of the millionaire's racehorse must not be sanctioned. This view of the west may be described as one in which the people have been conditioned to accept "legalized theft" as the norm. The community, however, does not act according to this theory. Rather, its "justice" undermines the system and thereby demonstrates a weakness in
the latter's theoretical foundation. Faulkner's view that the mob has performed "an act of right and justice" is thus disputed by the view of rapacity expressed by this character.

Faulkner also demystifies the notion of absolute justice through the language of the primary narrator of the anecdote. This detached voice describes the courtroom as "the tabernacle, the shrine itself, of [Man's] last tribal mysteries," thus suggesting superstition as an influential factor in the institutionalization of justice. The voice challenges the Aeschylean image of justice as being partially grounded in a human capacity for reason. Man decreed it, built it, sweated it up . . . to be no symbol nor cradle nor any mammalian apex, harbor where the incredible cockleshell of his invincible dream made soundings at last from the chartless latitudes of his lost beginnings and where . . . the voice of his affirmation roared murmuring home to the atoll-dais of his unanimity where no mere petty right, but blind justice itself, reigned ruthless and inattentive amid the deathless smells of his victories: his stale tobacco spit and his sweat. Because to begin with, he was not he but they, and they only by electing to be, because what he actually was, was I and in the first place he was not a mammal and as for his chartless
latitudes, he not only knew exactly where he came from six thousand years ago, but that in threescore and ten or thereabouts he was going back there. (pp. 172-73)

The juxtaposition of Darwinian empiricism with Christian millennialism, presented in a satirical tone weighted heavily toward the naturalistic view, debunks the notion that reason significantly influences the adjudication of human conflict. It may not be the view of the author, as it is merely one voice among many that vie for recognition in the text, but it undermines any claim, including Faulkner's in the letter to Ober, that the people's response to the old negro constitutes "universal justice." The voice respects the "mammal" man's "invincible" capacity both to dream and to acknowledge that justice is neither "blind" (objective) nor "inattentive." It ridicules, though, man's belief in justice predicated on a "unanimity" that on the one hand denies its biological classification (mammalia) while on the other hand it asserts its divine status in a providentially ordered universe it projects ("he was going back there").

Another rhetorical strategy that suggests the free-floating character of justice occurs during the ten-minute interval when the turnkey tries to get the old negro to the attorney's automobile, in which the chauffeur would drive him to the sanctuary of a near-by town. In a
one-paragraph digression of some 500 words, the attorney reflects on the chauffeur, "a swaggering demi-d'Artagnan of a mulatto murderer" whose release the attorney had secured after a year in prison, not because he "held any brief even for the murder of this particular woman, but because of the way it had been done: . . . as the lawyer imagined it, [the mulatto] simply ran past her with one single neat surgeon-like back-handed slash of the razor . . . the two of them running on side by side for two or three paces in the moonlight until the woman fell, the man not even spotted and the blade barely befouled" (pp. 182-83). Such verbal pyrotechnics may astound the reader. Surely he will be confused about the placement of this virtuoso display of writing in the middle of the anecdote. Yet it sets up the "judgment" of the mob by demonstrating the capriciousness of justice. It also indicates the attorney's fear of man (he wants a chauffeur capable of defending him) and his belief that the mob's action is likely to be anything but just.

A few paragraphs later, just prior to the judgment that the defendant leave town, the narrative voice presents another internal view of the attorney. This time, the attorney postulates the invincibility of "man" when either of two conditions is evident: (1) the "ability to move en masse at his own impulse"; and (2) "silence in which to fall into thought and then action" (p. 187). Somewhat humorously but nonetheless seriously, the attorney envisions evolution
as a solution to the problems posed by the first condition. In a thousand years the reliance on automation will have "effaced the legs from a species just as that long-ago and doubtless at the time not even noticed twitch of Cosmos drained the seas into continents and effaced the gills from their fish." The second condition, however, which must be "conquered" before peace can be sustained, seems unconquerable. This "silence in which man had space to think and in consequence to act on what he believed he thought or thought he believed" informs the mob's confrontation of the old negro (p. 187). This confrontation, which stands in synecdochal relation to the general condition of conflict in A Fable, highlights the problem of language and interpretation developed throughout the text and contributes to the irony of the mob's "adjudication" which follows it.  

In Faulkner perhaps to a degree unmatched by any other prominent writer of prose fiction, the problem of the will to truth through language predominates. Consider the scene in Go Down, Moses when Uncle Isaac McCaslin recalls a conversation with McCaslin Edmonds. Having quoted a stanza from Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Edmonds tells him the poet "was talking about truth. Truth is one. It covers all

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things which touch the heart—honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love. Do you see now?" Isaac, though, "didn't know. Somehow it seemed simpler than that." The text of A Fable indicates that its writer, like Isaac, distrusts the capacity of language to convey truth. The "fable" of the old negro, the attorney, and the mob not only presents a variety of perspectives but remains open to as many responsible "readings" as there are responsible readers to produce them. The strength of Faulkner's own metastatic will to truth notwithstanding, his stronger sense of man's essentially perspectival condition eventually took control of his invention of this novel. Consequently, the aesthetic principle imaged under the ironic title A Fable is not that of art as representation of truth, justice or event, but rather that of art as the inherent repetition of the "open" or radically potential, "happening" condition of perpetual conflict that paradoxically constitutes the ground of existence.

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Faulkner's fiction intersects with the most fundamental question of western discourse, that of man's capacity for conscious decisions that shape his experience. Having presented over the course of about fifteen years (1928-1942) several sharply delineated images of highly intellectual protagonists who struggle with this problem in attempting to resolve personal crises, in 1943 Faulkner began ten years of work on A Fable, a novel in which yet another protagonist struggles to understand the conditions of existence, with a view to the potential for amelioration. One important difference from the preceding series of characters, however, involves the magnitude of the crisis which the character at the structural center of A Fable faces. In contrast to the personal crises imaged in earlier novels, the conflict imaged in this novel involves the entire western world. But the problem remains essentially the same, namely, to what extent can man engage in actions that predictably shape the quality and conditions of his future. In A Fable Faulkner crystallizes as it were everything his development of the earlier characterizations had revealed to him about the relation of consciousness to the world, embodying in the
primary protagonist of this novel (1) an understanding of the basic ontological principle that the character of the temporal guarantees the recurrence of conflict and, despite this factor of the contingent as the ground of man's existence, (2) an awareness of man's inherent capacity for and susceptibility to formal creative acts that extenuate his suffering and sustain his existence.

Scholarship has for the most part misread the character in *A Fable* who embodies this understanding, the old general—the marshal or Generalissimo, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces.¹ The old general is an anomaly within

¹Delmore Schwartz, for instance, in one of the early considerations of *A Fable*, argues that, far from taking steps to sustain man, the old general has concluded that "human beings are worthless" and that "everything truly human" is contemptible. See "Faulkner's *A Fable*," in Donald A. Dike and Davis H. Zucker, eds., *Selected Essays of Delmore Schwartz* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 298-99; Joseph Urgo, in one of the few recent studies of the novel, agrees with "Schwartz's contention that the old general is an evil force against which good human forces ought to fight." Among the mistakes that Urgo makes in what is an interesting misreading of *A Fable* is his identification of the authorial point of view with the language of a narrator who refracts the point of view of a particular character. Urgo quotes Gragnon's reflection that "vast solvent organizations and fraternities and movements . . . control by coercion or cajolery man's morals and actions," for instance, to support his negative view of the hierarchy the general rules. Urgo also argues that the general dissembles when he asserts to the corporal that man "is capable of enduring and will endure." Yet Urgo offers no substantive support for his extravagant claims (1) that what the general "really means . . . is that man can endure authority" and (2) that when the general "says that man will 'prevail,' he means survive even his reign." See Faulkner's *Apocrypha: 'A Fable,' 'Snopes,' and the Spirit of Human Rebel* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1989), pp. 108-112; for contrasting views of the general, see Philip Blair Rice, who reads the general as "functionally the supreme representative of Caesarism," yet "an ambiguous figure
Faulkner's fiction, because coming to terms with the writer's characterization of this figure is essential to comprehension of his resolution of the discursive problem he had considered in earlier major protagonists—the problem of freedom versus necessity—or, to state the matter differently, the Platonic problem of the value of art and its relation to life. In contrast to the old general's methodology and perspective, Faulkner's earlier artist-figures' attempts to resolve personal crises through art stand as strategies severely limited by the characters' failure to understand that art as a human activity is not

from the beginning" who although he expresses "the more difficult faith in man," cannot be accepted "as the author's final spokesman," in "Faulkner's Crucifixion," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), pp. 377-79, and Heinrich Straumann who writes that the general "unites in himself . . . a light and dark principle [which] is immanent in all the orders and values of existence," in "An American Interpretation of Existence: Faulkner's A Fable," in Four Decades of Criticism (Michigan State Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 335-57; Michael Harrington in Faulkner's Fables of Creativity (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990), p. 116-18, similarly writes that the general seems "to incarnate both the heights of human aspiration and the depths of human corruption." Moreover, "he seems also to be in many respects the ultimate artist-figure in A Fable . . . not only aware of the ramifications of the fable in which he is involved but capable, to a certain extent, of orchestrating it"; in the most thorough reading of the entire novel to date, that of Keen Butterworth in A Critical and Textual Study of 'A Fable' (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 66, the general is read as the embodiment of tragedy in that he "must choose to execute his son because the son's idealism has threatened" the "heritage" of "modern civilization itself," of which the general is the primary guardian. The affinity of my reading with those of Harrington and Butterworth should become obvious in the development that follows.
only basic and compulsory but also the means through which man has the potential to bring some order to an essentially chaotic world. To be specific, the old general marks the ideological culmination of Faulkner's ongoing narrative study of the significance of art in human affairs. This protagonist embodies the implicit postulate that, man's capacity for creation being his most distinctive characteristic, the values for which creates significantly influence the quality of his experience. In utilizing his understanding of the temporal functioning of man's dualistic creative/receptive faculty to make himself the centerpiece of a sustaining cultural myth, the old general discloses a supreme state of consciousness that substitutes for Christian valuation an axiology upholding the sustenance of human existence.

The old general is the rhetorical linchpin of the various strands of plot. The main plot--involving the old general and his biological son, the corporal whose pacifistic evangelism brings to a halt World War I--presents the most general image of the issue to which each of the sub-plots speaks: Given the nature of man and the conditions of life, is conflict inevitable? Has man the

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Loic Bouvard recalls Faulkner's telling him that "the most important thing is that man continues to create, just as woman continues to give birth," in "Interview with Loic Bouvard," in Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 73.
potential permanently to eliminate conflict and, if not, what recourse has he in the midst of it? Each major character in the book either explicitly formulates his perspective on this problem or else constitutes an image thereof. Although specifically the general upholds the financial, political, moral and military superstructure of his culture, he does so out of a conviction that this framework will most effectively sustain the culture he heads. In contrast to the limited, confining moral visions of Quentin Compson, Rosa Coldfield, Isaac McCaslin and the quartermaster general, to the metaphysical solipsism of Harry Wilbourne, to Gragnon's extreme adherence to military ethos, to Levine's naïve nationalism, and to the radical activism of the battalion runner, the old general's artistry is practically oriented. He brings to the task of responding to an immediate conflict an effectual interpretation of the relation of consciousness to the world that each of these characters either lacks or ignores. This interpretation asserts the inherently conflictive character of man's existence, the physiological basis of human being, and the perspectival as the fundamental condition of human understanding and intercommunication. The old general's ideology of preservation, based on his conviction that these conditions are fundamental to existence, underlies the sustaining cultural myth he creates.

*A Fable* bears witness to Faulkner's agreement with
Nietzsche that the primary influence on human behavior is physiology. Man experiences states of feeling that derive from the relation of his bodily self to the phenomenal world in which it exists. A major consequence of this condition is "perspectivism," Nietzsche's view that there are no facts, only interpretations. From this conclusion follows the correlate that the individual must choose from competing sets of interpretations the one he will embrace. Hence the concept of valuation. Nietzsche asserts that the crisis of confidence in the Christian values of two millennia is the source of the general condition of neurosis that pervades modern mankind. Having considered the individual implications of this problem in protagonists developed in his major work from The Sound and the Fury to Go Down, Moses, Faulkner holistically images the cultural significance of the problem in A Fable. While he is by no means as explicit as Nietzsche about the need for a new valuation to replace the longstanding ineffectual Christian influence, he nevertheless concurs with Nietzsche that the task of sustaining mankind necessarily devolves upon the few who have achieved superiority of perspective. Faulkner ascribes to the old general the attitudes toward life that, for Nietzsche, comprise this perspective, which results in a theory of art-as-praxis that Nietzsche terms "the Grand Style."

According to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's
fragmentary discourse on aesthetics, the "essence and essential determination of art" involves the unity of art as a countermovement to nihilism—a metaphysical problem—and of art as an "object of physiology"—a physical one. When these apparently antithetical aspects of art actually include each other, what results is the production of art in the grand style, in which "measure and law are confirmed . . . in the containment of chaos and the rapturous." What occurs in the grand style is "a triumph over" plenitude, an emphasis on measure, the experience of sustained tranquility as one's manner of being, and the propensity to resist "what is animated."3 It understands valuation to be the basis of man's actions and aesthetics to be the key to decisions about value. It also discerns that "aesthetic delights are biological delights,"4 and that the movement from the latter to the former, from sheer feeling to "estimates of aesthetic value," is informed by "logical feelings," an expression intended to convey man's capacity for "having a feeling for, letting one's mood be determined by, order, boundary, the overview."5 In his creative "freedom with regard to the extreme opposites, chaos and law," the artist in the grand style does not crudely compel chaos to take form, but

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3Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p. 132.
4Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p. 165.
5Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, pp. 120-21.
employs "that mastery which enables the primal wilderness of chaos and the primordiality of law to advance under the same yoke, invariably bound to one another with equal necessity." The physiological, then, "is the basic condition for art's being able to be a creative countermovement" to nihilism.®

Recourse to Heidegger's assessment of Nietzsche's discussion of the romantic/classical opposition will clarify this concept of the grand style. Although classical art as defined by Nietzsche is not purely synonymous with the grand style, the two approaches are fundamentally similar, particularly in terms of the detachment of the artist who, with "unconstrained disposition" (the essence of "mastery"), yokes the powerfuly antithetical forces of chaos and law into "an event's self-imposed law." This is, to be sure, terribly strained language, but Heidegger refers to the Greek term techne, not in the sense of "making" or "producing," but as "that knowledge which supports and conducts every human irruption into the midst of beings."® This definition, which comprehends the strategy of the old general in relation to the fear-driven multitude in A Fable, stands in contrast to the "romantic" art of Quentin and other important artist figures in Faulkner's earlier

®Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p. 128.
®Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p. 80, my italics.
According to Nietzsche, "a romantic is an artist whose great dissatisfaction with himself makes him creative—one who averts his glance from himself and his fellows, and looks back." For the romantic artist "what is properly creative is discontent, . . . desire and hunger," but this is a general attitude that ironically foreshadows "its opposite." Faulkner's narrative images for the mythopoeia of Quentin, Isaac, Harry, Rosa, Gragnon and the "trinity-of-conscience" characters in A Fable discloses that each character's myth is an attitudinal reification of a projection of consciousness, not, as it purports to be, an absolute representation of reality. Indeed, Rosa's image of the "instant" as "arras-veil" and Harry's expressed ontology that underlies his aesthetic methodology support the anti-romantic view of the open character of experience. In the old general, Faulkner actually images the "opposite" approach to existence, "the contrary possibility . . . that

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9One is reminded of Sartre's erroneous identification of Faulkner's "metaphysic of time" with the image of "a man sitting in a convertible looking back." "In Faulkner," he writes, "the present does not exist, it becomes; everything was." This assessment certainly applies to Quentin, Rosa, Harry, and Isaac, but it hardly fits the creative energy of Charlotte Rittenmeyer in The Wild Palms or the controlled artistry of Doom in "A Justice" and the old general. See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Time in Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), p. 228.
the creative is not a lack but plenitude, not a search but full possession, not a craving but a dispensing, not hunger but superabundance." Whereas "creation out of discontent takes 'action' only in revulsion toward and withdrawal from something else"—as the disaffection of Quentin from his perception of Caddy, of Isaac from his perception of his family's history, and of the battalion runner from his perception of the inherent degeneracy of "man"—creation from a sense of the plenitude of existence, a sense which the old general repeatedly shows himself to be in possession of, "flows purely out of itself and its own fullness."\(^\text{10}\) The former approach is reactive, the latter active.

Heidegger defines the Greek term ethike episteme as "knowledge of ethos, of the inner character of man and of the way it determines his behavior," and aisthetike episteme as "knowledge of human behavior with regard to sense, sensation, and feeling, and knowledge of how these are determined."\(^\text{11}\) The old general's "active" response to the needs of the community stems from his observation of its chaotic state and his comprehension of its capacity for response to an image that corresponds to its inherent sense of order. In other words, he perceives the particular aesthetic state of the people and appeals to it through an

\(^\text{10}\) Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, I, p. 132.

\(^\text{11}\) Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, I, p. 77-78.
image that corresponds to their inherent "primordial" propensity for "the overview." Faulkner's repeatedly emphasizes the citizenry's heightened physiological state, induced by fear that their relatives in the mutinied regiment will be executed by order of the marshal. They are

t wrench by anguish and terror . . . and drawn to the city whether they would or not . . . with no other will and desire except to relinquish their grief and anxiety into the city's vast conglomerate of all the passions and forces—fear, and grief, and despair, and impotence [theirs], and unchallengeable power and terror and invincible will [what they perceive to be characteristic of the general] . . . the grieving and the begrieved on one hand, and on the other the lone gray man supreme, omnipotent and inaccessible . . . who dealt in wholesale death and who could condemn the whole regiment and miss its three thousand men no more . . . that he would miss the nod of his head or the reverse of the lifted hand which would save them.\(^\text{12}\)

To emphasize further this opposition between the general and the frenzied community, the narrator presents an image of "that whole band of irredeemable earth from the Alps to the sea, studded with faces watching in lipless and lidless

detachment for a moment, a day or two days, for the old gray man at Chaulnesmont to lift that hand" (p. 125). It is the primary opposition in the novel both, thematically, in its implicit posing of the question of how best to resolve a cultural crisis in a manner that sustains man and, rhetorically, in its providing the tension around which the novel is structured.

In the first reference to the old general, Faulkner delineates the attitudes the character will manifest throughout the novel. He is a man "who no longer believe[s] in anything but his disillusion and his intelligence and his limitless power" (p. 13). This description suggests that he once strongly embraced some belief, but subsequent to an unfortunate effect of this embrace, disillusion has replaced belief, so that the old general's desired manner of being now involves engaging only in actions that enhance his personal strength. The tone and substance of this description will, to be sure, initially alienate the character from many readers. However, by the end of the novel, it should be clear that the detachment that resulted from his former naivety facilitated the establishment of himself as the centerpiece of a sustaining national myth. His dis-illusion about the corporal's idealism makes possible the legend he creates to sustain the political order and, by implication, man. In contrast to the Christian perspective—long reified in the western world yet
never so powerful—the old general's art is grounded in this world, for, playing on their hope, fear, and suffering to create a surrogate theodicy, it responds to immediate psychological needs of the people.

When the corporal engineers the mutiny that threatens to stop the war, the general's problem is twofold: how to act, and in whose interest? To be sure, the eminence of this character, in this particular situation, compels a decision, the assertion of which necessarily constitutes simultaneously an ascription of value. The old general is presented with a number of possibilities, each representing a value vying to predominate. There is Gragnon, the rebelling regiment's division commander, whose rigid adherence to the military code of honor and sense of his own position within it force him to request execution of the entire regiment. There is Marthe, sister of the corporal and daughter of the woman on whom the old general sired him, who, hoping to prevent her brother's execution, appeals to the old general's sense of personal guilt. There is the German general, who, believing war to be a prerequisite for the survival of humanity—and military officers therefore to be the most superior human beings—seeks a pact that will result in the resumption of hostilities between Germany and the Allies. And there is the corporal, the Christ-figure, who refuses to renounce his cause, preferring the symbolism of martyrdom to his own life. These values, however, the
old general judges to be secondary to what for him is the ultimate value, namely, the sustenance of the culture he heads.

In *A Fable*, through the microcosmic image of the French district caught up in a frenzy of "anxiety and dread," Faulkner images an entire culture at a critical juncture of its history (p. 4). The community, fearful that the general will embrace Gragnon's request that the mutinied regiment be executed, stands as it were on the threshold of emotional annihilation. The fifth chapter of *A Fable*, "Tuesday, Wednesday," depicts the frenzied mass, obsessed by fear that the execution is imminent, driven between Chaulnesmont and a prison compound several miles away where the regiment awaits the general's decision. "They had no plan," the narrator relates, "only motion, like a wave" (p. 130). They lack a "reassuring certitude which," in the words of Derrida, "is itself beyond the reach of freeplay." This absence of confidence in a "fundamental ground" is the source of their anxiety, "for anxiety is invariably the result of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game."13 The pendulum could swing either way, on the one hand into utter nihilism, and on the other into a faith

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which, although quite literally predicated on illusion, provides the hope needed for their cultural sustenance. In short, the people are ripe for a reassuring illusion, which the general implements by executing the corporal, who, like Jesus, has become "a protagonist for anguishment, an object for execration" (p. 129). Contrary to the views of numerous voices that comment on the old general, his experiences have provided him with the broad social perspective that enables him to create such an image, and in actively usurping "the legend of God," he presents it.

At Virginia, asked about the old general, Faulkner patently indicates that this character's most basic trait is his pronounced creative capacity and predilection. He is the "dark, gallant, fallen" angel "who had been cast out of heaven . . . because God Himself feared him." Responding to the questioner's puzzlement that the old general is the father of the corporal, Faulkner pointed to the general's artistry:

That was a part of Satan's fearsomeness, that he could usurp the legend of God. That was what made him fearsome and so powerful, that he could usurp the legend of God and then discard God. That's why God
feared him. 14

From an orthodox perspective, this comment blatantly crosses the border of acceptability into the realm of out-and-out sacrilege. Yet it has mostly been ignored in criticism on the novel. 15 To assert that Satan not only could but did "usurp the legend of God" and that Satan did discard God is, first, to elevate Satan over God in terms of their relative capacity to invent legends. Moreover, Faulkner undermines the omnipotence of God (as McCaslin Edmonds does in the rhetorical questions he poses to Isaac McCaslin—see p. 86 above) by asserting that God "feared" Satan. While these assertions disclose Faulkner's intention to consider in A Fable questions related to man's general propensity for mythmaking and, perhaps more importantly, for myth-embracing, they also demonstrate his interest in the specific influence of Christian mythos on western civilization. The basic narrative strategy involves the invention of an intertext to this mythos that parallels the paradigm in its basic structure, but inverts the relative value of its principal components. Thus, according to this revaluation of "the fairy tale which conquered the western


world," God assumes the inferior position and Satan is
invested with primary power.\textsuperscript{16} The strategy here does not
exclusively entail the process of figurative
demythologization Faulkner had employed in the development
of Quentin and the intervening artist figures in his
fiction; instead, like Nietzsche in \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra},
Faulkner \textit{remythologizes} Christian mythos to the end of
imparting to the reader an image of the relation of art and
sociopolitics.\textsuperscript{17}

Otto Rank writes that "the specifically artistic
impulse to create and the moulding of its forms of creation
[are] outgrowths of the contemporary culture and the
individual dynamism underlying the artist-personality." The
"motive power of the individual urge to create" interplays

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{17}I am influenced here not only by Herbert Schneidau's
definition of demythology as a rhetorical strategy whereby
prophets like Jeremiah and Amos attempt to undermine
deleterious social practices and attitudes predicated on
illusory perspectives ("myths"), but also to Rudolph
Bultmann's attempt "to strip the mythological framework [of
the kerygma] from the truth" it enshrines. The methodology of
both the Hebrew prophets and Bultmann is descriptive, while
Faulkner's might be called "imagistic," insofar as this term
signifies the novelist's "demythologizing" narrative images of
the harmful reifications of Faulkner's artist figures. In A
Fable he turns to the process of remythology in his narrative
reconsideration of the kerygma. See, generally, Herbert
Schneidau, \textit{Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition}
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976) and Rudolph
trans. Reginald H. Fuller, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London:
\end{footnotesize}
with "canons of style evolved from the collective unconscious."\textsuperscript{18} As an image of individual man's use of the creative faculty, the old general differs from Faulkner's earlier artist figures in his ability to objectify his recourse to Christian mythos rather than internalize it, as do Quentin, Rosa, and Isaac. These earlier characters interpret personal experiences mythopoetically, specifically on the basis of idiosyncratic readings of the kerygma. In using this mythos for emotional resolutions of ultimately irresolvable conflicts, they follow a cultural practice that spans two millennia, one that Faulkner had grave reservations about by the time he wrote \textit{The Sound and the Fury}. The old general understands his culture's predeliction for recourse to Christian mythos in its futile attempts to realize ideals. A product of the culture that he acts to sustain, the general recognizes the archetype that inheres in the ongoing crisis. His "motive power" (perspective or "individual dynamism") being to establish and sustain the sociopolitical order, the general's reaccentuating "usurpation" of the legend of God acknowledges the community's unconscious propensity for a positive response to this mythos.

The long biographical flashback that primarily constitutes "Wednesday Night"--an ironic saint's life of

sorts—establishes the general's moral authenticity. In developing the biography, Faulkner relies on several narrative voices, each with its own self-assured view of the general's character. One voice, for instance, provides the broad social view of the general, which holds that he is the embodiment of a "splendid fate" that even the strictest of circumstances, such as his enrollment at St. Cyr, will not enable him to "escape" (p. 245). Behind this point of view lies the remythologizing hand of the author, whose strategy for controlling the reader's perspective is to have the general in fact "escape" this projected fate, at least in one of the dominant senses in which it is indicated. The general fulfills his destiny in terms of the stature that he achieves, but he does not embody the amoral values that each of the secondary narrators assumes to be an inevitable concomitant of his "fate." Thus the primary tool of the artist in this strategy is irony, which is the operative condition of perspectivism.

Faulkner's narrative images of various observers of the general's life—including his classmates at St. Cyr, a staff captain, and a particular "Norman" classmate at St. Cyr—create a foreshadowing structure of irony that sets up the final scene of the novel, the general's interment, which demonstrates his lasting influence on the people. In contrast to the morally insubstantial rise to eminence that these perspectives predict, a reflexive reading of the novel...
demonstrates that the general, both a literal and a figurative embodiment of moral authenticity, lived his life as though aware of the sociocultural significance of his death. As images of the tendency of both individuals and groups to perceive an object or series of events and misread it into truth, the numerous misinterpretations in "Wednesday Night" confirm the general's mythmaking strategy in relation to the people. As dead military hero, the general ironically sustains the people, who are cast in the novel's final scene as an unthinking mob that offers frenetic, Dionysian devotion to the corpse about to be interred in a national monument. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, the general does with his life what Faulkner does by imaging the points of view of the various observers, namely, utilize the perspectival character of man's existence to invent an image thereof that sustains man while indicating his inherent creative potential.

Through a practical use of man's faculty for creation and its psychological sibling, the spectatorial impulse—what Nietzsche terms "aesthetic doing and observing"—the general creates a legend of himself that fulfills the people's unconscious need for illusions that counter the onset of an emotional void.19 Relying on his Bergsonian

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sense of the temporal quality of man's experience, through these observers Faulkner indicates the general's propensity for vanishing from public sight, only to reappear later in an ongoing dialectic of absences and presences that constitutes the structure of the legend he develops. By way of the fundamentally poetic interplay of their consciousness with this recurrent structure, the observers become "preservers" of the general's legend "with an essentiality equal" to that of the general who creates it.²⁰ For example, one narrator relates that the old general, then "a captain with a brilliant and most incredible future, had vanished" only "to reappear thirteen years later as a brigadier" (p. 244). The "people who up to that time [when he vanished] thought they knew him, know neither where he has been nor why, though they are certain they know how" he has acquired the higher rank. The old general's ironic response to these expectations demonstrates his awareness of the sociopolitical significance of art, in this case a national legend that results from the people's spectatorial capacity and inclination. The old general apparently knows, even at the inchoate stage of the military career that provides the initiatory structure of his maturation, the

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger: Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 71. "It is the work that makes the creators possible in their nature and that by its own nature is in need of preservers."
capacity of art for establishment and preservation, and he responsibly employs his burgeoning stature in his direction of a life-sustaining legend—of which he is the centerpiece—that spans several decades.

The legend of the old general is engendered within the exclusive community of his anomalous upbringing. Until he enters St. Cyr, "the world outside the Faubourg St. Germain had scarcely ever seen him," and few have ever heard of him "except as a male Christian name." He grew up, the reader is told, "in the somber insulate house of his mother's eldest sister in the rue Vaugirard," which is where the runner goes on his visit to Paris to research Harry. This sister who raised him was the wife of an opportunist, "a cabinet Minister who was himself a nobody but a man of ruthless and boundless ambition who had needed only opportunity and had got it through his wife's money and connections." The youth grows "to the threshold of manhood . . . his uncle's heir and heir to the power and wealth of his bachelor godfather," the federation chairman "who had been his father's closest friend." Like Gragnon, he is "an orphan, an only child," though the conditions of his upbringing contrast starkly with those of the division commander (p. 246). Faulkner thus suggests by this implicit contrast that the humble upbringing often championed in myths and legends does not necessarily produce strong character, nor does its opposite, the silver-spooned
upbringing, necessarily produce poor character and values. In contrast to his more revealing foil, however, Isaac McCaslin, who is also "the last male of his line," the general embraces the paternal responsibility his upbringing entails.

The reader learns in "Wednesday Night" that the old general is personally disinterested, but interested in the endurance and well being of mankind. By the end of the novel, it is clear that at some point in the process of the old general's maturation, he chose his own destiny, as it were, which was different from the "destiny" everyone who knew anything about him had predicted (p. 246). At this point (and Faulkner chooses not to image its actual occurrence), the general begins to act so as to contribute to the quite naturally developing image of himself. He thus fulfills his destiny in accordance with his chief value—the sustenance of his culture. In contrast to the multitude of unconnected people who are delineated in his reverie by the window, the general enjoys power and prestige that give him the opportunity for large cultural influence. That he chooses to use it to establish particular values makes him heroic, at least according to the point of view of the primary narrator.

Fellow classmates at St. Cyr experience "surprise," "amazement," and "downright unbelief" that the youth (who would become the general) was there "at all," not because of
his apparent "fragility and indurability," but because they read him as the embodiment of a "golden destiny of an hereditary crown prince of paradise." The "golden youth," the "Parisian," he is the heir to money and influence, not only by virtue of connections, but also of his youth, gender and place, specifically, Paris. He "had only to reach majority in order to inherit that matchless of all catastrophes: the prestige of exhausting his life" by riotous living (p. 247). Yet instead of opting to employ the special relation to Paris that his connections offer him, he chooses to be "just another anonymous one is a class of candidates for professional careers" (p. 248). Through this remark Faulkner ironically highlights the essential nobility of character of the old general, whom a previous perspective in the novel had cast as an unthinking, merciless head of a sociopolitical establishment that is indifferent to the well-being of its denizens. The general works to establish security for the masses, sacrificing the inherited life of luxury in favor of the responsibility of his social eminence. Rather than the "lover" of Paris, he becomes her protector.

Relying on the irony inherent in the principle of perspectivism, Faulkner employs a narrator who demonstrates the discrepancy between the youth's genuine character and the classmates' imaginary projection of his deviousness. According to this projection, it can only be that "not he
but his family . . . compelled him into the army" since he has become a "threat" to their name and position. The family needs to "quarantine" him, both to protect its reputation and to provide him with a "refuge" from the consequences of his behavior, placing him beyond both his capacity to harm them by association and the capacity of justice to harm him by forcing reparations for what he has done. According to this perspective, the family is perpetrating a scheme to "gain a sort of blinding redundance on the great name's original splendor from the golden braid which his hat and sleeves would someday bear," (p. 249) because if war provides the youth with opportunity, he will "be a general at forty" and eventually a marshall of France "when the nation buried him" (p. 242). This reading of the youth's presence at St. Cyr, however, proves to be erroneous when he does not use the influence. With "the highest marks ever made at the academy," which obviate the jealousy they might otherwise have felt toward him for the "Quartermaster Captaincy which rumor said was waiting for him at the Academy's exit," he is a superior student who has no need for special treatment (p. 249). Even so, when the general leaves without the captaincy, exiting instead with a subalternship, the classmates--still reading yet thinking they are literally perceiving truth--see the refusal of the captaincy as a show or "gesture," "not the youth's" but the relatives' who are directing the development of his national
image. Thus, this interpretation goes, the refusal is not genuine since the family is "powerful and potent enough to afford even discretion and modesty" and will therefore privately confer the captaincy. But what transpires instead is the youth's departure ("quietly, almost surreptitiously") for Africa, with neither unearned rank nor undue equipage, for the purpose of fulfilling the requisite field-service obligation (p. 250). Ironically, the classmates expect a gesture from the family, but get from the youth one that is the opposite of their projections. Extending into the future, it is the first element of the sustaining national image of himself that he is directing. Already at twenty-one, about to embark on a major period of the process of maturation that has been underway since his entrance into the academy, the youth manifests characteristics that will serve his establishment of this image more than three decades later.

To account for the youth's enigmatic departure, the classmates conclude that he will go to a "remote frontier" where there will be no check to his relatives' ability to secure pleasure for him. This projection, predicated on their unexpressed belief in "rapacity itself"--which is postulated by the primary narrator as a force that overlays human affairs and is, paradoxically, "compassionate," "omnipotent," "all-seeing and all pervading"--leads the classmates to conclude, perhaps unconsciously, that the Quai
d' Orsay will gently signal ("out-breathe") the youth's success in the heroic saving of a fragment of the empire that was lost during the Napoleonic wars. A "national unanimity" will proclaim him in a response so "loud and long" that it will "obfuscate" the mere facts of the case and "distract the mind from all curiosity regarding them." The family's scheme will have eventuated therefore in the creation of a protagonist "without past on a stage without yesterday," accompanied only by his "accomplishment," "like two masques for a pantomime furnished out of the bloodless lumberroom of literature." The people will observe, "with amazed admiration," the youth matured into supreme marshal of France, though in substance he will be "like wisps of mist or vapor" among "concrete-bedded mastodons" and "like the saint in an Anglo-Saxon tale" who cheaply buys her sainthood by exchanging her maidenhood for it (p. 251). And "not one" of "the sheeplike acclaiming mass" will want to check the details of his heroism. Having been created out of whole cloth, he will be "immune even to the uproar" that acclaims him in a ritualistic triumphal march. The general indeed achieves the legendary status postulated in this voice, but as a consequence of his virtue and responsibility, not his utilization of the principle of rapacity (p. 252).

Through the youth's disappearance across the Mediterranean, by means of which he continues the
development of his legend, Faulkner underlines his aestheticist ideology, casting this evanescence in figurative terms of the birth of destiny. The classmates learn not only that the youth from the "port base" "to assigned duty somewhere in the interior," but also that no one knows "exactly where and on exactly what service" (p. 252). Even so, they had expected both the obscurity of place and the secrecy of event, since part of the family's scheme would have him situated somewhere "actively and even aggressively private, like an oasis in the desert's heart itself," "where on a lion-robed divan he would await untimed destiny's hasteless accouchement" (p. 253). Yet "truth," in Heidegger's sense of the term as developed in the "Origin," is not predictable but disclosive. Instead of the flight to an oasis, the youth goes to a place where the conditions of his existence are exactly the opposite of what the classmates think they will be. Or, stated differently, the conditions as they actually exist are exactly what the classmates thought the family would spare him through the use of its unlimited power. Expecting his existence to be "benignant and inscrutable, irascible and hieroglyph like an American Indian totem pole in ebon Eden innocence," they discover that he has gone to the worst possible post and, moreover, that he serves not only "his own one year tour of command, but that of his successor too, and was now ten months forward in that of what would have been his
successor's," so that those watching his career, "except that one" who will succeed him in the post, think "that earth itself had faltered, rapacity itself had failed" (p. 253). The youth's ironic action of apparently needlessly continuing to serve at the post challenges the classmates' myth of the force of rapacity. He chooses not to wait passively for the birth of destiny, but to adopt a stance toward its transpiration. Through the Heideggerian conflict between what the classmates know and expect of their fellow student (earth) and what he actually does (world), the youth adds another element to the sustaining national image of himself.

The most thematically resounding view of the old general belongs to an individual classmate at St. Cyr, the future quartermaster general, whose view differs from that of the classmates in general. Like his counterparts in the "trinity of conscience," he reads the phenomena he encounters and constructs around them a mythos that satisfies his value system, itself based on a particular mythos whose manifestations are widespread in his culture. As the third unit of Faulkner's "trinity of conscience"—the one who represents acceptance—he stands "Number Two to the other's One on the day of graduation." Among the students at St. Cyr, he is the first to connect the youth's "face with his great name," and he sees in him "the promise of a destiny which would be the restored . . . glory and destiny
of France too" (pp. 246-47). The classmate's great-grandfather had been a protege of Desmoulins "until Robespierre executed them both." Like this ancestor, a political idealist willing to sacrifice his life for a deleterious ideal, the classmate had come to Paris to be an art student, "but relinquished his dream to the Military Academy for the sake of France as the great-grandfather had done his to the guillotine for the sake of Man" (p. 254). And like the great-grandfather in his susceptibility to mesmerization by a figure with a strong personality, the classmate "looked once at that one which to all the world else had been that of any seventeen-year-old youth and relinquished completely to it" (p. 254). Satisfying his impulse to respond through art to the severe lack that his encounter with the youth elicits, he "picked up the three figures—uncle, nephew, and godfather . . . and turned them around and set them down again in the same positions and attitudes but obversed" (p. 254).

The classmate's mythopoeia occurs, however, not immediately, but "several years" after he makes the acquaintance of the youth, "almost ten in fact after that day when [the classmates] had watched that sun-stricken offering behind Oran accept that fragile stride and then close markless behind it like a painted backdrop." This image is reminiscent of several in Go Down, Moses, in which Isaac McCaslin responds to the phenomenal unraveling of images.
that constitutes his experience. The narrator ironically remarks that the youth walks into the desert "carrying unreality with him to establish where before there had been none." When after four years the youth is still in the desert, whether or not he had been "an actual threat once," he is "now an enigma burying its ostrich-head from the staff commission which would drag him back to Paris and at least into vulnerable range of his old sybaritic renunciation."

For six years he performs "voluntarily" a "duty" which every officer in the army but he should have been compelled to perform "before it came to him" (p. 254). Continuing the strategy of imaging the development of the legend of the old general as a process of the interplay of occurrence and its backdrop of nothingness, of evanescence and materialization, Faulkner has the narrator relate that the youth "vanishes from Africa too," six years later, "none knew where except the Norman classmate's passionate and hungry hope."

Nothingness, which in this case results from the absence of the youth from the public arena, is necessary to the legend that is developing around his figure. After the sojourn in Africa, he "vanished not only from the knowledge of man but from the golden warp and woof of the legend too," with nothing left but "a name in the Army List," with the position of sublieutenant. Underscoring the youth's powerful presence in the mind's eye of his classmates, despite his quite literal absence, the narrator remarks that
he is "not even dead, not even whereabouts unknown" (p. 255).

In a scene reminiscent of Conrad's motif of a small group of men who offer various vantage points on a particular subject, Faulkner brings together five military men, including the Norman classmate, who discuss sometime in 1885 the known events of the youth's life since he left the Academy two years earlier. This framework enables the author to continue the development of the Norman's response to the youth and simultaneously to image the more detached rhetorical level of events regarding the general's artistry. Included in this group is a staff captain who is descended from "a Napoleonic duchy whose founder had been a butcher then a republican then an imperialist then a duke." In this minor character Faulkner offers a foil not only to the Norman, with his genuine devotion to the golden youth, but to the youth himself. Only "five years out of St. Cyr," the staff captain seems to "three of the four watching and listening to him" to be "the true golden youth which that other one of eleven years ago whom he was talking about had refused to be." He brings to mind what the nephew might have achieved by this point, "since this one had behind him only the simple proprietors of banks and manipulators of shares." The "burly blunt brutal" staff captain talks glibly of "the almost forgotten sublieutenant . . . who should have been the ideal pattern and hope not merely for
all career officers but for all golden youth everywhere," as Napoleon was for "ancestorless," impoverished, conscienceless Frenchmen—a remark that foreshadows the symbolic embodiment of hope the general becomes for the people by the end of the novel. The captain notes the paradox of the youth's sense of something so grand that he would sacrifice for it his unparalleled opportunities, yet "so ephemeral" as to keep him there for only six years—another of Faulkner's ironic images for man's perspectival condition. The staff captain, his point of view skewed by his status as a sort of sybarite manqué, wonders what can be "so incipient with satiation and at last revulsion that after only six years the subaltern master must vacate it."

In the opinion of the staff captain, the youth enjoys the benefits of his relation to the powerful Comité de Ferrovie (pp. 255–56). Yet what kept the youth there, and what induces him to leave, is not personal gratification, but his sense of duty to his countrymen.

Having learned that the youth must relinquish the post, the Norman classmate, thirteen days later, "looked from the back of the camel across the glaring markless intervening miles, as a thousand years later the first pilgrim must have looked at the barely distinguishable midden which the native guide assured him had been, not Golgotha of course but Gethsemane," a "nest of ragged and meagre palms." Yet the "outpost" where the youth is stationed is a garden only in
the mythos of the Norman, and in a terribly ironic sense, as the novel will soon disclose the general's affinities with Pontius Pilate. Like the "first" pilgrim, the Norman pursues the apogee of his spiritual sensibility, which is embodied in a charismatic individual whom he actually perceives to be a re-incarnation of God. At first viewed as the liberator of France from Prussian occupation, in the classmate's evolving mythos, which Faulkner broadly reports rather that depicts, the future general incarnates the long-anticipated second coming of Christ. The irony here is stark since the old general is a usurper of the legend, not, as the Norman thinks, its embodiment or fulfillment. Yet he is the embodiment of a legend, a sustaining, albeit not a Christian, one. The Norman is "passionate for suffering, sick with hope," thus recalling Isaac McCaslin's hope and belief in the eventual realization of his vision of Christian mythos (p. 258). In the relationship of the Norman to the youth, the self-made proselyte, true to his ancestor's outstanding characteristic, addresses the incarnate God. In effect, the quartermaster general is a would-be prophet, a John the Baptist. Like Isaac McCaslin, he understands mythmaking, yet fails to see its limitations, especially as prophecy. He reads the youth as God returning in "the shape of man's living hope," but only from the broadest, most coldly ironic vantage point of the novel does the youth embody the
realization of anything like "man's hope" (p. 263).

In contrast to the Norman classmate's reading of Christian mythos into ongoing events, the old general recognizes the basic analogy, but remythologizes it to suit his end of establishing order. The general's remythology reaccentuates, as it were, the dominant biblical version of the sociopolitical archetype of rebellion versus authority, stressing its currently relevant elements. I borrow the term "re-accentuate" from Mikhail Bakhtin, who defines it as one of two processes whereby the transformation of language phenomena occurs "at a very rapid rate of exchange." The process "involves the tact with which an author assigns his accents, sometimes smudging and often completely destroying for us their finer nuances." Reaccentuation occurs as the result of "a change in the background animating dialogue." One of Bakhtin's goals in uncovering this process is to show the tensional interplay of authorial intentionality with the "living word," which, as it were, cuts its own semantic path "and is therefore in all things true to itself." Due to the intentional residue "embedded in them," language phenomena (i.e., the kerygma) "have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning."21 The process

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is analogous to Hans-Georg Gadamer's view of hermeneutics, which reads "understanding" as "mediation" rather than "reconstruction": "Understanding itself is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as the entering into an event of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated."²² Both Bakhtin's concept of reaccentuation and Gadamer's hermeneutics of mediation parallel Faulkner's emphasis on the sociopolitical interplay of art and interpretation in A Fable and Heidegger's postulation of the aesthetic strife between world and earth that results in the disclosure of truth. Making decisions characteristic of Nietzsche's concept of the "grand style" and publicly establishing his image in a manner that parallels Heidegger's conception of the "origin" of art, the old general invents a reaccentuated image of Christian mythos that effectively palliates the anxious people.

Faulkner's allegory of the masses versus authority in "Wednesday Night" indicates the old general's identification of the current crisis with the biblical pretext and his awareness of the potential for abuse that inheres in both unbridled freedom and tyrannical power. The masses at the bottom of the war-time hierarchy in Chaulnesmont figuratively parallel the masses of old Jerusalem, just as

the old general parallels the power structure in Rome. But if this is so, then my argument that the old general embodies the primary point of view of the novel means that this perspective is figuratively lodged in Roman values. This is true, but in the qualified sense that by the end of the process of writing Faulkner had overcome his earlier expressed conviction that absolute pacifism is a viable moral option in a complex world. He is neither wholly critical nor wholly supportive of the spiritual power embodied in the image of the ancient city of Jerusalem and represented in the novel most prominently by the runner, the corporal, and the quartermaster general. Yet in the extreme positions taken by these characters, spirituality, in attempting to establish itself absolutely, is equally dangerous as unrestrained, inappropriately value-centered power. While Faulkner does not altogether repudiate attempts to realize such abstract ideals as justice and honor, he images his recognition that man in general lacks the political sensibility, practical wisdom, and detachment that are necessary for absolute freedom. Without the constraint of law and the embodiment of order in a highly visible authority structure, chaos will hold the day. In effect, in this allegory occurring in the mind of the old general, Faulkner underscores his re-reading of the kerygma in A Fable. He underlines power, but it is power predicated on a particular value.
At the bottom of the social hierarchy are "anonymity's absolute whose nameless faceless mass cluttered old Jerusalem and old Rome too while from time to time governor and caesar flung them bread or a circus as in the old snowy pantomime the fleeing shepherd casts back to the pursuing wolves fragments of his lunch, a garment, and as a last resort the lamb itself" (p. 242). This metaphor apparently points to the corporal as the lamb of God or, ideologically, as complete righteousness being grossly sacrificed by self-serving, avaricious authority. The larger point, though, which is only available upon a holistic consideration of the novel, is that such a reading (and, by implication, the Kerygma's reading of the sociopolitical world) oversimplifies the conditions of human existence and postulates the impossible as highly probable and realizable if mankind will recognize and take appropriate steps in relation to certain correctable flaws. Here the political entity is cast in the guise of the shepherd, while the hungry masses are seen as pursuing wolves--the laborers, beggars, and thieves who do not "always understand that what they do constitutes beggary and theft" (p. 242). In his sympathetic, though detached, reading of the people's situation, the general acknowledges to himself that these unaware "wolves," "whose luck is out always" and who have no nexus to power, "are denied any opportunity whatever to share in the rich carnival of their country's wasting
lifeblood" (p. 242). A desperate and largely despairing group, they have "nothing in fact save a reversion in endurance without hope or pride even in the endurance to endure." Here the general postulates the possibility of stoic pride in one's capacity to endure, but suggests that these people lack even the consciousness of this capacity. They simply endure, without self-congratulation or solace in the virtue. They exist as "tolerated and rightless aliens" from the power and comfort superstructure, "without hope of betterment," wanting only "permission to exercise" endurance (p. 242). The last resort, the sacrifice of the lamb, appeases them and suggests the old general as shepherd of the people's needs in his decision to execute his son, the corporal.

Understanding the importance of predictability to the sustenance of order, the general's war-contextual usurpation of Christian mythos counters the community's fear-driven incapacitation by yoking, in a powerful single image, "the primal chaos of wilderness and the primordiality of law." It is the general's life-centered valuation, however, in contrast to the arrogant national solipsism of the "Austrian paper hanger," that aligns the general with the primary authorial voice in A Fable.²³ Evident in the grand style,

²³Referring derogatorily to Hitler, Isaac McCaslin tells Roth Edmonds that "when the time comes and some of you have done got tired of hollering we are whipped if we dont go to war and some more are hollering we are whipped if we do, [the country] will cope with one Austrian paper hanger, no matter

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writes Heidegger, is "resistance to external pressure to change" (cf. the general's resoluteness in the face of the arguments of Gragnon, the German general, the quartermaster general, Marthe, and the corporal) and to "what is animated" (the frenzied mass). The general's tragedy involves the conflict between his primary value, life—dependent in his view upon maintaining the existent political order—and the claims of his biological family. Through the personal shortcomings evinced in his relationship with the corporal's mother, the general paradoxically suffered into the truth of a new value that necessitates aggravating his relation to his eastern family in the interest of the preservation of his culture, his sense of guilt and the need to make reparations for his past irresponsibility being overridden by the higher value, the sustenance of man in genere.

One may say of the corporal that he seeks, through an aestheticist strategy like that of the general, to cultivate and establish a particular value—absolute pacifism—in the observing Western consciousness. He prefers the future-oriented symbolism of his martyrdom to his own existence. His "crucifixion" will be an "irruption into the midst of beings" that will, like all such emergences, assume its particular significance on the basis of the interpretations

it receives.\textsuperscript{24} Yet the general's decision goes "forward in the midst of \textit{physis} and on its basis," letting what is "already coming to presence arrive" in the course of events that began with the mutiny of Gragnon's regiment.\textsuperscript{25} The corporal, by contrast, like his protege the runner, attempts to force the issue. His actions constitute over-reliance on the ability of the aesthetic to establish a particular condition within man's existent realm of contingency. He embodies the same propensity for deleterious embrace of illusory ideals that Faulkner recognized as a young man and studied in such early characters as Bayard Sartoris and Quentin Compson. D. H. Lawrence speaks to this problem in his analysis of Doestoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" episode in \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}, Faulkner's paradigm for the relationship between the corporal and the old general. Lawrence recognizes in the episode "the final and unanswerable criticism of Christ," whose "inadequacy . . . lies in the fact that Christianity is too difficult for men, the vast mass of men." It "is impossible because it makes demands greater than the nature of man can bear. And therefore, to get a livable, working scheme, some of the elect, such as the Grand Inquisitor himself, have turned round to 'him,' that other great Spirit, Satan, and have

\textsuperscript{24}Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, I, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{25}Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, I, p. 82.
established Church and State on 'him.'" Faulkner's re-reading of the paradigm presents the old general as one who, like Ivan Karamazov's Inquisitor, understands that "to be able to live at all, mankind must be loved more tolerantly and more contemptuously than Jesus loved it, loved, for all that, more truly, since it is loved for itself, for what it is, and not for what it ought to be." The ideology of A Fable's primary voice is not contained in the question of what happens if the corporal succeeds, but of what ought to be made to happen given the impossibility of his success.

The general embodies the same capacity for protective patronization, but ultimately evinces confidence in man's capacity to create himself, as it were, beyond problems--many of his own devising--with which he is perpetually, contingently confronted. The general asserts that man has "that in him" which will, paradoxically, enable him to free himself from "his enslavement to the demonic progeny of his own mechanical curiosity," namely, his "deathless folly" (p. 352) for creative response to his own deleterious creations--"a voice planning still to build" something beyond what currently exists (p. 354); "he must endure, at least until he himself invents evolves produces a better tool than he to substitute for himself" (p. 347). Implicit

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in this expressed respect for man's capacity for invention is the general's sense of his high responsibility to guard against man's creating himself out of existence. The general appreciates the tension between his position or "articulation" and the idealistic one represented by the corporal (p. 347). Underscoring the importance of dream, desire, and imagination, the general tells the corporal that his championing "of an esoteric realm of man's baseless hopes and his infinite capacity . . . for unfact . . . can exist side by side together" with the general's ideology of "this mundane earth" (p. 348). For, ultimately, man's creations, be they "tanks bigger and faster and more impervious and with more firepower than ever before" (p. 353) or strategies (such as the corporal's and the runner's) designed completely to eliminate conflict, are "inherent with the same old primordial fault since [man's creations] in the end will fail to eradicate him from the earth" (p. 354).

The general's ideology of preservation, then, in tune with that of the primary voice of A Fable, appreciates the strife of contingency and creativity that inheres in the relation of consciousness to the world. It accepts idealism, be it of Jesus or of Hitler, as an inevitably recurring form of that strife. Its fundamental ideology, however, flows from a concept of valuation that, while eschewing tyranny, limits nonetheless his propensity for
self-harm by establishing a framework of responsible order. In *A Fable*, Faulkner manipulates the perspective of the reader in the same manner that the general manages the people's perspective in the construction of his mythopoeic legend--by misdirection, suspense, and, finally, irony which discloses the ideology of the dominant point of view. The symbolic public autobiography the general establishes by a remythology of the kerygma is literally false and illusory, but on a pragmatic level it contains the paradoxical truth that the nation can sustain itself by belief in the general as the receptacle of its aggregated power. If the general's image is illusory yet true, *A Fable* as Faulkner's remythologized image of Christian mythos, designed with a far more detached audience in mind, embodies the truth that all metastatic myths are inherently illusory. As a narrative image of the inevitability of conflict, the novel asserts the ambiguous, value-dependent potential that inheres in man's ontologically secure capacity for freedom.
Works Cited


Vita

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