

FAULKNER AND THE CLOSED SOCIETY

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B.A., St. Benedict's College, 25 May 1960

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas
1966

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FAULKNER AND THE CLOSED SOCIETY

On September 30, 1962, on the campus of the University of Mississippi, more than a century of racial conflict exploded into an insurrection against the federal government because of the admission of Negro James Meredith. The results were death, destruction, rioting, and increased hatred of U.S. officials by Mississippians. The events precipitated the crisis of conscience plaguing some Mississippians, especially that of Dr. James Silver, a history professor at the university since 1936 and president of the Southern Historical Association for the year following the rioting.

Silver, sickened by the shame brought upon his chosen state of residence by the unprovoked attacks of students and non-students

on the U.S. marshals, by the "cries of filth and obscenity" that proved "eighteen- and nineteen-year-old students had suddenly been turned into wild animals," by the other "frightening events of that unbelievable night of passion and fury," and by the succeeding flood within the state of "malignant propaganda about what happened at Ole Miss," felt a growing compulsion "to try to tell the truth, to relate in plain fashion what had taken place, and then to put it all in historical perspective."¹

In presenting his factual picture of the closed society,

¹ James Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society (New York), pp. vii-ix. The central thesis of Silver's book was presented in his valedictory address in the autumn of 1963 to the Southern Historical Association upon retiring as president. Silver's charge that Mississippi was a totalitarian state was a front page story in the November 8, 1963 issue of the New York Times. In a portrait article accompanying the news story, Silver is described by an acquaintance as "the oldest, living, practicing example of academic freedom in Mississippi" (p. 19 of the issue mentioned). Silver is pictured as a man disregarding his personal safety and his job security as history professor at Ole Miss in order to remain "one of the chief dissenters to the segregationist orthodoxy" in Mississippi. Time magazine gives a similar portrait of Silver in its November 15, 1963 issue. It notes the countless threats on Silver's life and the unsuccessful attempt made to have him dismissed from his position at the University of Mississippi on the alleged grounds that he was a communist. In his review of Silver's book (New York Times book review section, July 12, 1964, p. 6), Harrison E. Salisbury, director of national correspondence for the New York Times, says the book "is no aseptic dissertation from an academic white tower." Referring to Silver as a "fine scholar," Salisbury claims that the book offers "much clarity and comprehension" regarding the past, present, and future problems in Mississippi. Silver "has spoken out for 20 years, but never more eloquently than in this passionate polemic."

Silver cites ideas of William Faulkner, whom he knew personally. He makes occasional allusions to the works of Faulkner. By supplementing Silver's historical picture of the closed society with specifics from the novels of Faulkner a better understanding can be reached about the situation, attitudes, and motivations of Mississippians. Faulkner's subject matter certainly supports the factual closed society of Silver, for example, the lynching in Light in August, miscegenation and subsequent violence in Absalom, Absalom, the curse of white supremacy in "Go Down, Moses," and the disintegration of the aristocratic order in The Sound and the Fury.

While the rigid social structure of Mississippi demands and receives orthodoxy from the vast majority of its members, it cannot be claimed that the state is largely a monolithic society of barbarian rednecks, hypocritical politicians, indifferent citizens, and amoral youths, all organized to deny equality to the Negro except at bayonet point. The closed society, therefore, is not seen as indestructible by Silver or Faulkner. Through them the inner workings of the closed society can be understood.

Novels can give insight into the social and psychological aspects that produce a closed society and insurrection. Analysis of the Snopes trilogy and Intruder in the Dust can render a literary perspective to supplement the historical perspective of Silver. It is this double perspective on truth that concerns Warren French in his evaluation of The Hamlet as one of the most important social novels of the thirties, for the novel is "a painstaking and accurate revelation of the Mississippi state of mind" responsi-

ble for racial tensions and tragedies.²

This paper is an extended picture of the Mississippi mind that is partially shown in The Hamlet. French is concerned with Mississippi thinking patterns in his discussion of The Hamlet as a "social novel." He defines specifically what he means by the term.

By "social novel," I mean a work that is so related to some specific historical phenomena that a detailed knowledge of the historical situations is essential to a full understanding of the novel at the same time that the artist's manipulation of his materials provides an understanding of why the historical events involved occurred... The event need not have occurred close to the time of the writing if the novel deals...with a force...still active when the novel appeared....(pp. 7-8).

The four novels and Silver's book provide a lengthy picture of the forces that led to the Ole Miss rioting. Faulkner depicts the passions and prejudices of the Mississippian; French, in his literary analysis of one of the novels, and Silver, in his historical and personal account, show the men and means that manipulate these emotions. French believes The Hamlet, as a social novel, is more important than The Grapes of Wrath or For Whom the Bell Tolls because it

deals with the behavior that has had the strongest impact not just in making Mississippi the most backward and stagnant state in the nation but also in hindering the progress of the whole country and making the United States appear ridiculous through the presence in Congress of such megalomaniacs as Senator James K. Vardaman, Senator Theodore Bilbo, and Representative John Rankin. The Hamlet depicts the exploitation of the ignorant and paranoid "redneck" by utterly amoral persons motivated by a gross lust for personal power(p. 10).

Silver stresses the same idea as French. After noting that white supremacy, an idyllic view of the past, and authoritarianism

²The Social Novel at the End of an Era(Carbondale, Ill., 1966), p. 9.

are essential parts of the closed society, Silver says:

What has been said so far about Mississippi could, of course, be said generally about the six other deep-southern states that joined it to form the Confederacy in February, 1861. Our problem today is to try to understand why Mississippi has clung so much more desperately to its closed society: why, indeed, it has drawn into itself more than any other American state(p. 10).

The literary and historical pictures reveal such aspects of Mississippi as white supremacy, politics, law, violence, and pride. The fact that there is dissent from the orthodox attitude toward these aspects is one of the main reasons for dispelling the misconception that the state is monolithic in its thinking. Both French and Silver deny this single-mindedness while acknowledging that white supremacy is one doctrine that is pervasive. Silver says that the united front at present is a facade maintained by the silence of would-be dissenters due to threat of violence, economic reprisal, or ostracism. Individuals may silently dissent; however, the "essence of the closed society" is the establishment in the community of the orthodox view of Negro inferiority(p. 6).

On other matters in Mississippi there is disagreement, but the white supremacy issue is and has been used to prevent open discussion concerning regional differences and problems. French contends that such a difference forms the basis of the power shift that occurs in The Hamlet. The shift of power from Will Varner to Flem Snopes is a parallel to the exchange between political king Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar and James K. Vardaman. A product of the poor hill farming section of northeast Mississippi, Vardaman learned, after dismissing the agriculture reform issue, to manipulate the white supremacy issue and to force into the open the contempt that the northwest Delta "new Bourbons" held for the

rednecks. Vardaman was thus able, after many frustrations and much dubious political machination, to become governor in 1904. In 1911 he had completed the power shift from the corporation lawyers to the champion of the hill farmers by being elected U.S. Senator (pp. 27-29).

Lamar, who rose from the state legislature to the U.S. Senate, the cabinet, and the Supreme Court, is paralleled in The Hamlet by Will Varner, described early in the novel as the

present owner of the Old Frenchman place...the chief man of the country...largest landholder and beat supervisor in one county and Justice of the Peace in the next and election commissioner in both, and hence the fountainhead if not of law at least of advice and suggestion...a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box.³

Besides being a school trustee, Will owns the cotton gin, combined grist mill and blacksmith shop, and holds most mortgages. Will, like the extremely powerful Lamar, compromises with evil in order to preserve and promote economic progress. Prudence and fear motivate Will to allow Flem a foothold in the area by giving him a job in the village store. From here Flem advances to the presidency of a bank; by similar tactics Vardaman and Bilbo advanced to the governor's mansion and the U.S. Senate.⁴

FLEM

In order to view the various facets of the closed society, I will analyze characters of the four novels, some of whom appear more than once. Flem, of course, is a main part of the trilogy even when he is placed in the background. He first infiltrates

³The Hamlet (New York, 1958), p. 5. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴French, pp. 32, 38.

the power structure, an essential pillar of the closed society, by the use of fear, intimidating Will and his storekeeper son, Jody, with the threat of barn burning. In five months of clerking, Flem moves to the job of helping Will settle yearly accounts, a job Will usually did alone, without even Jody's help. Will compromises in a situation he cannot totally handle due to Flem's obsessive economic rapacity, and in the room with the hill farmers

waiting to accept almost without question whatever Varner should compute he owed them for their year's work, Varner and Snopes resembled the white trader and his native parrot-taught headman in an African outpost(H; 61).

Slowly, Flem increases his power and, like Will, he exerts economic reprisal on the recalcitrant. When he eventually becomes a member of the board of directors of the Jefferson bank in The Town, Flem economically squeezes his honest kinsman, Wallstreet, who seeks a loan to sustain his grocery business.

Similarly, the present Mississippi power structure, partly descended from people like Flem, and closely watched by the state-supported Citizen's Council, uses economic reprisal to maintain adherence to the code of white supremacy. Silver cites incidents of Council-directed reprisals against national products and four state newspapers. It is generally acknowledged, says Silver, that since 1960, the Citizen's Council "has exercised a position of power and prestige seldom if ever achieved before by an extralegal group in the history of Mississippi"(pp. 11, 36). And it has stayed close to "the imperishable wisdom of its spiritual father, Governor James K. Vardaman (1904-1908), Mississippi's greatest white supremacist"(p. 18).

Flem is able to become part of the power structure because he adds to his use of fear the use of his inhumaness, his unemotional

exploitation of the area's farmers, such as selling them worthless horses. Vardaman owed his 1903 gubernatorial victory to the white supremacy question and "the new primary law which allowed him to exercise his magnetism directly on the kind of backwood audience that buys the spotted horses in The Hamlet."⁵ French places Flem in the same breed as Vardaman and Bilbo. They are the type who prey on the "ignorance and passions of the peasants" (p. 34).

Flem works on the top and the bottom of the social structure in the hamlet. He moves from the store to supervision of the cotton gin, to yearly settlements with Will, to ownership of a blacksmith shop, land, and cattle. Bookwright, one of the farmers, tells Ratliff, Flem's moral antagonist, about the exploitation at the bottom. Bookwright relates the conversation of two Negroes about to borrow money.

Go to Mr Snopes at the store... He will lend it to you. He lent me five dollars over two years ago and all I does, every Saturday night I goes to the store and pays him a dime. He aint ever mentioned that five dollars (H, 71).

In The Hamlet, Flem is not only a personification of evil, but as French and other critics show, he represents this emerging social class that begins its contention for power with the "new Bourbons." Snopesism is the proliferation of Flem and his kinsmen in positions of influence.

Snopes have appeared in the County before; as small-time shysters or politicians, they are part of the landscape of Sartoris and Sanctuary; they appear as bushwackers behind the lines of Civil War battles, favoring no one and exploiting any who have the will to be "sold" in The Unvanquished.⁶

The hamlet is a "pastoral world" of play where bartering is enacted to maintain pride in making the best deal and to solidify

⁵French, p. 26.

⁶Frederick Hoffman, William Faulkner (New York, 1960), p. 89.

friendships. But unemotional Flem, "who is without youth and who displays a total indifference to sex and to nature, has no place in the world. He can only pervert, destroy, or exploit it."⁷ Flem not only doesn't fit into this world, he has no allegiances or principles, save those of self. Bilbo shows a similar attitude regarding political allegiance and principle in a remark to an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. "Son, when you can show me that you control any sizable number of voters, I'll be the damndest champion you've ever had."⁸ With Negroes gaining voting power, Bilbos will become their champion when politically expedient.

Fear, exploitation, and economic reprisal are not sufficient for advancement to high rank in the power structure outside the hamlet. The use of these means brings a temporary setback to Flem once he has utilized his rapacity to gain a foothold in Jefferson by marrying Eula Varner in trade for the "worthless" old Frenchman's place, which he sells to Ratliff, Bookwright, and Henry Armstid for money and part ownership in a Jefferson restaurant. Once in town, Flem tries his crude tactics to economically exploit his politically created position as superintendent of the power plant. But Flem's attempt to steal brass by threatening to fire the two Negro workmen is defeated, partly by the jealousy of a white worker, partly by the Negroes. Flem resigns from this position, as mayor Manfred de Spain would have said when still an army lieutenant, "for the good of the service."⁹ De Spain had created the job for Flem in order to

⁷Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (rev. ed., Baton Rouge, 1964), p. 198.

⁸Silver, p. 87.

⁹The Town (New York, 1957), p. 29. Subsequent references are to this edition.

facilitate an affair with Eula.

With one major exception, Flem changes his tactics in order to avoid a halt of his economic and social advancement. This exception occurs in 1922, about twelve years after the brass fiasco. In his rise towards the presidency of the De Spain bank in Jefferson, Flem exploits the tenant farmers into moving their meager savings from the De Spain bank to the Bank of Jefferson in order, not "to destroy the bank itself, wreck it, bring it down about De Spain's ears like Samson's temple; but simply to move it intact out from under De Spain"(T, 280). Gavin Stevens continues to speculate on how Flem makes the farmers worry about the safety of their money after they see Mr. Snopes, vice-president at this time of the De Spain bank, placing his money in the other. They "would contrive an accidental encounter for corroboration ...," speculates Gavin.

"Mawmin, Mister Snopes. Aint you strayed off the range a little, over here at this bank?"

"Maybe Mister Flem has done got so much money now that jest one bank wont hold it."

"No, boys, it's like my old pappy used to say: Two traps will hold twice as many coons as one trap."

"Did your pappy ever ask that smart old coon which trap he would ruther be in, Mister Snopes?"

"No, boys. All that old coon ever said was, just so it aint the wrong trap"(T, 280-281).

Within a week the men would move their savings to the Bank of Jefferson. Of much more significance, however, is the fact that during this twelve-year span in which he manipulates himself into vice-presidency Flem learns the necessity of respectability, and he accordingly refines his tactics. To effect the shift in money, he has to forego this respectability by actually consorting

with the moles and termites--not with Sartorises and Benbows and Edmondses and Habershams and the other names long in the county annals, which(who) owned the bank stock and the ponderable deposits, but with the other nameless tenants and croppers...(T, 280).

Flem still works at the top and the bottom, but now mainly at the top. Respectability is an expedient not only for attaining power but for maintaining power. Flem learns "that respectability is not necessarily identical with morality, that the popular ex-mayor, the president of a bank, the warden of the Episcopal church can also be an adulterer without losing his position in the town,"¹⁰ and the people will overlook the sin for the bank's sake and the reputation of the town. Just as Flem copies the mannerism of Will in his early rise to power, he now finds his model in De Spain. "He still wore the little bow tie..." Gavin tells us, "but now he wore a hat, a new one of the broad black felt kind which country preachers and politicians wore"(T, 138). Respectability has to be achieved and secured by ridding Jefferson of any Snopes who would tarnish his name, and this leads to Flem's expulsion from the city of Montgomery Ward Snopes, I.O. Snopes, and the four wild half-Indian children of Byron Snopes.

This eliminates the need for Ratliff and Gavin to oppose such an infiltration of the Snopes clan as occurred in The Hamlet. Both continue to oppose the rise of Flem. Edmund Volpe contends that Faulkner's moral vision broadened between writing The Hamlet and The Town, and the "theme shifts from a concern with the encroachment of an immoral new social class upon an established moral but weakened order, to an interest in the complex moral forces in the

¹⁰Vickery, p. 185.

human being and in the human community."¹¹

In The Town the technique of three narrators, Ratliff, Gavin and Chick Mallison, says Volpe, "is used to reveal the complexity of personality and to point up the difficulty of making moral judgments"(p. 318). A shift in theme, however, does not prevent using the latter two novels of the trilogy to find patterns of thinking or motivations for a better understanding of aspects of Mississippi past and present. Like Flem in The Town, the Vardamans, Bilbos, and their descendants have found it expedient to move from violence to the respectability of the law.

In 1890, a Republican candidate who tried to broach an issue other than white supremacy was murdered. The Clarion-Ledger, a Jackson newspaper, congratulated Jasper County when the bullet-riddled body was found.

Not that assassination was the right answer; there was a better method. Colonel B. F. Jones put it this way: "The old men of the present generation can't afford to die and leave their children with shot-guns in their hands, a lie in their mouths and perjury in their souls, in order to defeat the negroes. The constitution can be made so this will not be necessary."¹²

Silver shows that violence is thus reduced, but not eliminated, by poll tax, by requirements of literacy and "understanding" in order to vote, by judges who know how to interpret laws, and by laws which simultaneously condemn Negro economic boycotts in the state and condone white boycott of integrated Memphis stores(p. 42). The law then and now is part of the cult of respectability, a pillar of the closed society that necessitates another pillar of hypocrisy.

¹¹ A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner(New York, 1964), p. 317.

¹² Silver, p. 17.

In the court scene in The Hamlet Flem stays inside the letter of the law. The court is concerned with damages caused by the spotted horses. The sympathy of the judge is with the peasants; the law is with Flem. Flem wins. In The Town a coalition of the mayor, city judge, and Gavin saves Flem when he oversteps the law regarding his collection of brass, but the new, respectable vice-president Snopes later advances to rigging the law in order to rid Jefferson of Montgomery Ward Snopes's pornography enterprise. Planting whiskey in his kinsman's studio is Flem's contribution to preserving decency in Jefferson. "You're like me," Gavin says.

"You dont give a damn about truth either. What you are interested in is justice."

"I'm interested in Jefferson," Mr Snopes said, reaching for the door and opening it. "We got to live here. Morning, gentlemen" (T, 176).

Silver mentions various examples of rigged charges to silence or punish dissenters in the closed society, but this can be expected of men who resemble Flem. What adds moral complexity to the situation is the fact that Gavin and Sheriff Hampton, antagonists of Flem, conspire to legalize Montgomery out of town. They use the anachronistic^h law prohibiting the use of an automobile on the streets of Jefferson to jail Montgomery since no city law applies to pornography. At the end of The Mansion a much more serious moral question arises in the assistance given by Ratliff and Gavin to Flem's murderer. The complex situations that arise sometimes lead to law-rigging by the scrupulous as well as the unscrupulous.

The out-dated automobile law had been the reason for an adjustment in the power structure of Jefferson. De Spain had attained the position of mayor by campaigning against this law, which had

been passed by pressure of Colonel Sartoris because the first auto had scared his horses. But instead of repeal, the newly-elected De Spain and supporters

had it copied out on a piece of parchment like a diploma or a citation and framed and hung on the wall in a lighted glass case in the hall of the Courthouse, where pretty soon people were coming in automobiles from as far away as Chicago to laugh at it(T, 13).

De Spain further illustrates his contemptuous attitude toward law by having an ordinance passed to prohibit opening an auto cut-out inside town limits but then using a cut-out on his car in harrassment of Gavin for his quixotic endeavors regarding Eula. Laws are created and disregarded by personal whim of people in responsible positions, who at times also engage in sophomoric activities.

A town's respectability is the subject of the scene concerning the agreement of Gavin and his sister, Margaret, to invite Linda, Eula's teen-age daughter, to dinner. Gavin has been trying to "form" Linda's mind with new ideas. Margaret's son, Chick, narrates.

"...To save Jefferson from Snopeses is a crisis, an emergency, a duty. To save a Snopes from Snopeses is a privilege, an honor, a pride."

"Especially a sixteen-year-old female one?" Mother said.

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said. "Do you deny it?"

"Have I tried to?" Mother said.

"Yes, you have tried." He moved quick and put his hand on the top of her head, still talking. "And bless you for it. Tried always to deny that damned female instinct for uxorious and rigid respectability which is the backbone of any culture not yet decadent, which remains strong and undecadent only so long as it still produces an incorrigible unreconstructible with the temerity to assail and affront and deny it--like you..."(T, p. 182).

But those who would "assail and affront" the respectability of Jefferson and the closed society of the 1960's are few, and the price is high. Silver's book illustrates that the present facade of

respectability veils the decadence created by the one-party system, rampant demagoguery, and blatant hypocrisy.

Flem can say, "I am thinking of Jefferson." Manfred de Spain can present the decorous air of an uninvolved banker the morning after Eula's suicide, which culminates eighteen years of adultery. Flem, new bank president and still deacon in the Baptist church, can contribute a tombstone inscribed "A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband; Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed." Governor Ross Barnett can tell a Negro audience that "Here in Mississippi we are enjoying a wonderful and peaceful relationship," or can declare in a propaganda movie that "No student can get a better education than is offered the Negro children in Mississippi." Judge Sebe Dale can say, despite "Communist-inspired lies" to the contrary, "There is no ill feeling between the races in Mississippi." Senator James O. Eastland can state, "There is no discrimination in the South."¹³

But respectability can become a trap, and does for Flem. By the end of the trilogy Flem has attained respectability, power, and the mansion, symbol of his economic triumph, but it is an empty triumph. It is here that Flem offers no resistance to Mink's intention to kill him.

...He sits impassively even when the gun misses fire...He has simply lost his reason for living. He has surpassed his models and achieved his goals; life can offer him no hope, no challenge except the perfunctory one of preserving the status quo.¹⁴

Flem found preserving the status quo a hollow victory, Silver says the same feeling did not prevail before and immediately after

¹³Silver, pp. 8, 23.

¹⁴vickery, p. 204.

the Ole Miss riots. As before, preservation of the status quo is necessary for perpetuating the closed society and continuing economic exploitation. Silver agrees with Professor V. O. Key, Jr.'s assessment of the situation in 1949 that the white supremacy issue was being used to suppress the discontented whites. It was Key's opinion that "With a high degree of regularity those of the top economic groups--particularly the new industrialists--are to be found in communion with the strident advocates of white supremacy"(p. 21). As will be discussed later, industrialization in the lengthening years after the Ole Miss incident seems to loom as an enemy of the status quo.

EDUCATION

Silver lists the "distinguishing marks" of the closed society as the following assumptions:

- a) the biological and anthropological "proof" of Negro inferiority
- b) the presumed sanction of God as extrapolated from the Bible
- c) the present state of affairs as one that is desired and endorsed by Negroes and whites alike
- d) the repeated assurance that only through segregation can law and order prevail
- e) a view of history which declares that there has been a century of satisfactory racial experience in Mississippi
- f) a constitutional interpretation which denies the validity of the Supreme Court desegregation decisions(p. 149).

In their pronouncements, Mississippi officials will not admit that the rest of the world no longer accepts as valid these premises which are the foundation of the closed society. New ideas are generally anathema. In analyzing The Mansion, Mrs. Vickery shows Jefferson's motivation for the imperviousness to new ideas.

For to recognize any real change is to accept the breaking up of the world as one has always known it and the destruction of all that gave it an identity. Thus Mr. Nightingale, the unreconstructed Rebel, can and does repudiate his son for joining the Yankee army during the First World War. And Tug Nightingale, the son, who manages not only to join the army but to fight in France, yet shows his father's stubbornness when he refuses to acknowledge that the world is indeed round (p. 194).

The closed society, says Silver, has "two engines designed to insure the maintenance of white supremacy: the distortion of Mississippi's past and distortion of Mississippi's present"(p. 150).

Journalists, churchmen, and politicians expound the dogma. Members of the faithful control-lawmaking bodies and law enforcement agencies. "With such powerful forces of indoctrination at work it would be strange indeed if whites and blacks alike did not grow up prepared to accept and extol their heritage"(p. 151). The white is educated to believe he is superior; the Negro is educated to believe he is inferior. "I aint nothing but a nigger," laments Nancy in Faulkner's "That Evening Sun."

Flem represents those who would exploit the emotional weaknesses of the farmers who accept unquestioningly such premises. A look at the peasants will help show why exploitation is so successful.

Education in Frenchman's Bend is in the hands of Will Varner, school trustee. Gavin describes Will's attitude toward education. The one-room schoolhouse is

an integer of old Varner's princedom--an integer not because Old Varner or anyone else in Frenchman's Bend considered that juvenile education filled any actual communal lack or need, but simply because his settlement had to have a going schoolhouse to be complete as a freight train has to have a caboose to be complete(T, 37).

This attitude is reflected by Will's choice of teachers. Will has to find a replacement for the bibulous old man "who had been

driven still further into his cups by the insubordination of his pupils"(H, 102). The girls respected neither his ideas nor his means of conveying them; the boys lacked respect for his ability to discipline them. Houston is one example. Capable of managing his father's farm and six years older than other students, Houston is "competent for citizenship before he could vote and capable of fatherhood before he learned to spell,"knowing both whiskey and a mistress by the age of fourteen, "logically contemptuous, invincibly incorrigible, not deliberately intending to learn nothing but merely convinced that he would not, did not want and did not believe he needed to"(H, 209).

To provide a replacement, Will makes an offer to a farmer's son attending college. Will is not really confident that by starting time Labove will accept, but since the people own the school, nobody cares if it functions. It is for the children when they aren't needed at harvest or planting. Only a few like Labove see any need of college. After accepting, Labove manages, between his weekly rides to Oxford to attend the University of Mississippi and play football, to coerce "the curriculum itself into something resembling order... He was not proud of it, he was not even satisfied." But if it produces no increase in knowledge, it is progress "at least toward teaching order and discipline"(H, 114). Labove graduates from the university, still keeping "his hill-man's purely emotional and foundationless faith in education, the white magic of Latin degrees, which was an actual counterpart of the old monk's faith in his wooden cross"(H, 118). While soil-bound farmers consider education unnecessary and mostly impossible for themselves, they are deferential to those in authority with degrees.

Labove once tells Will of his ambition to be governor. What Labove never knows is that education certainly isn't a prerequisite, and won't be even in the middle of the 20th century. In fact, it is probably a handicap. Ross Barnett, "long-time Sunday School teacher firm in the knowledge that 'God was the original segregationist,' in 1959... pulled out all the emotional stops in his third and...final try for the prize he coveted."¹⁵ Silver says that Barnett, unaware of the meaning of academic tenure and loss of university accreditation for wanton firing of dissenting professors, "came into office militantly stubborn, more negative than conservative, an inflexible racist with a mind relatively innocent of history, constitutional law, and the processes of government" (p. 112).

Labove's replacement is hardly an improvement--I. O. Snopes, with his twisted saws and proverbs. Upon learning about the new schoolteacher, Ratliff says that I.O. "has found the one and only place in the world or Frenchman's Bend either where he not only can use them proverbs of hisn all day long but he will be paid for doing it" (H, 71). This schoolteacher serves, as do other Snopeses, to illustrate a relationship between education and demagoguery.

I.O. not only swindles his kinsman, Eck, but is hypocritical and insensitive toward his relatives. "Aint he a sight now?" I.O. cackles concerning the public display^a of Ike's making love to the cow.

I done often thought, since Houston give him that cow and Mrs. Littlejohn located them in that handy stall, what a shame it is some of his folks aint running for office. Bread and circuses, as the fellow says, makes hay at the poll-box. I dont know of no cheaper way than Lump's got to get a man--

"Beat," interjects Ratliff, forcing I.O. into taking action

¹⁵Silver, p. 43.

against the spectacle by pointing out that his job as teacher might be in jeopardy if the Snopes's name "aint pure as a marble monument...." "Sholy," I.O. replies, reversing his previous view.

That ere wont do. That's it. Flesh is weak, and it wants but little here below. Because sin's in the eye of the beholder; cast the beam outen your neighbors' eyes and out of sight is out of mind. A man cant have his good name drug in the alleys. The Snopes name has done held its head up too long in this country to have no such reproaches against it like stock-diddling(H, 203-204).

I.O.'s righteous proverbial response would do credit to any demagogue.

I.O. swindles Eck into paying more than his share for the cow so it can be taken from Ike to protect the Snopes name. "Cant you understand that?" I.O. tells Eck. The name "aint never been aspersed yet by no living man. That's got to be kept pure as a marble monument for your children to grow up under"(H, 207).

It is hardly a coincidence that I.O.'s twin sons are named Vardaman and Bilbo. His other son, Clarence, appears as a petty demagogue in The Mansion. Faulkner's frequently humorous tone concerning the minor kinsmen changes considerably in one passage in The Town where Gavin discusses another Snopes--Wesley, recently moved from county to town.

And now there entered that one, not whose vocation but at least the designation of whose vocation, I.O. Snopes had usurped. This was the actual Snopes schoolmaster. No: he looked like a schoolmaster. No: he looked like John Brown with an ineradicable and unhidable flaw: a tall gaunt man in a soiled frock coat and string tie and a wide politician's hat, with cold furious eyes and the long chin of a talker: not that verbal diarrhea of his cousin(whatever kin I.O. was; they none of them seemed to bear any specific kinship to one another; they were just Snopeses, like colonies of rats or termites are just rats and termites) but a kind of unerring gift for a base and evil ratiocination in argument, and for correctly reading the people with whom he dealt: a demagogue's capacity for using people to serve his own appetites, all clouded over with a veneer of culture and religion; the very names of his two sons, Byron and Virgil, were not only instances but warnings(T, 40-41).

The "base and evil ratiocination" pervades the closed society. It is one of the main means for distortion of the present. Because of this and the lack of adequate educational background, the people are unable to discern truth from propaganda. Presently, says Silver, "Fifty per cent of the adults over 25 in Mississippi have less than nine years of schooling" (p. 72). Silver cites examples of newspapers, state films, pamphlets, and official statements that distort the facts, with the public accepting the presentation. The U.S. marshals were cited as the cause of the rioting by state officials. "The genesis of the deception that shifted the blame for the insurrection from Mississippians to federal officials came from the University administration, attempting both to justify its own conduct and to appease the political powers" of the state (pp. 123-124).

Besides claiming that the Kennedys deliberately planned the rioting, influential Mississippians misinterpret the U.S. constitution to fit the situation. Two pamphlets advanced "legal arguments that cast a mantle of respectability on Barnett's unlawful conduct and challenged the validity of the federal government's actions throughout the Meredith affair" (p. 134). One was produced by the Mississippi Junior Chamber of Commerce and the other by John Satterfield, past president of the American Bar Association, Citizen's Council leader and intimate counselor of Barnett.

One of the claims was that through the doctrine of interposition the governor could interpose "the rights of the state of Mississippi between the people of Mississippi and the federal government" to overrule Supreme Court decisions, thus rejecting them as the supreme law of the land. Another claim was that the desegregation decision

of 1954 was binding only on the parties involved and carried no precedent for the Meredith case. Such legal arguments, says Silver, "however plausible to credulous Mississippians, are specious and untenable" (pp. 134-135).

The year after the insurrection, fifty professors--some natives, some segregationists--left the University of Mississippi, many being "literally forced from the state" because of the dim prospects of academic freedom. Hypocritical cries about suppression of personal freedom by Washington are combined with the DAR's surveillance of text books and purge of those that fail to teach states' rights, racial integrity, and free enterprise.¹⁶

Distortion of the past is perpetuated by the educational system. Silver cites three parts of this distortion. The ante-bellum myth pictures the Old South as a classical Golden Age; the Confederate myth pictures the South "as a humane society risen in spontaneous self-defense of its sanctified institutions, its family and country life, against wanton northern aggression"; the Reconstruction myth presents a "society laid waste by an unprovoked war...a society that is finally redeemed by the virtuous southern patriots..." (p. 150).

Concerning this obsession with the past, Silver turns to Light in August to illustrate his point, saying it is no accident that Faulkner has the Reverend Gail Hightower's life "shaped by his vision of galloping horses and slanted lances, whereas his Confederate grandfather had been in fact killed by a shotgun blast while raiding a henhouse" (p. 5). Similarly, Flem is affected by the sense of the past. After attaining the bank presidency, he has the old De Spain house

¹⁶Silver, pp. 72, 142, 65.

remodeled into an ante-bellum Southern mansion. Ratliff describes the mansion.

...it was going to have colyums across the front now. I mean the extry big ones so even a feller that never seen colyums before wouldn't have no doubt a-tall what they was, like in the photographs where the Confederit sweetheart in a hoop skirt and a magnolia is saying good-bye to her Confedrit beau jest before he rides off to finish tending to General Grant(T, 52).

Chick points out that about the time of Flem's arrival in Jefferson the South was full of men called "General or Colonel or Major because their fathers or grandfathers had been generals or colonels or majors or maybe just privates" in the Confederate army, or had contributed money to the campaign funds of successful state governors. Gavin mentions in The Town the sentimentalization of "the heroes of our gallant lost irrevocable unreconstructible debacle, and those heroes were indeed ours because they were our fathers, and grandfathers and uncles and great-uncles..."(T, 10, 42). Gavin further discusses this blood tie to the past in Intruder in the Dust, telling young Chick:

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think This time. Maybe this time...¹⁷

However, this sense of the past can have its good effects, as will be seen later in discussing Gavin and Chick, both victims

¹⁷Intruder in the Dust(New York, 1948), pp. 125-26. Subsequent references are to this edition.

and worthy products of their sense of history. The past is an essential part of their struggle toward moral maturity, but the majority do not engage in the struggle. This struggle is a vital factor of Faulkner's writings. He has

dramatized, as have few other American novelists, the problem of living in a historical moment suspended between a dead past and an unavailable future; dramatized it in his own terms, as a clash between traditional mores no longer valued or relevant and a time of moral uncertainty and opportunism.¹⁸

Linda's education illustrates how this distortion is perpetuated.

Her time is wasted in Melissa Hogganbeck's Academy, where Miss Hogganbeck

still taught stubbornly to the dwindling few who were present, that not just American history but all history had not yet reached Christmas Day, 1865, since although General Lee (and other soldiers too, including her own grandfather) had surrendered, the war itself was not done and in fact the next ten years would show that even those token surrenders were mistakes---... (T, 288).

The center of struggle between Flem and Gavin is Linda's education. Gavin vigorously tries to fill Linda's mind with new ideas in order to help her escape the trap of moral stagnation and ignorance. On the other hand, Flem views Education as an enemy he must oppose. It is this attitude that produces the difference between Mississippi and the South. Silver considers Mississippi's views on the Negro as merely an exaggerated Southern trait. Mississippi is the closed society because of "its refusal to allow freedom of inquiry or to tolerate 'error of opinion'... Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the closed society is the refusal of its citizens to believe that there is any view other than the orthodox" (pp. 154-55).

¹⁸Irving, Howe, William Faulkner: a Critical Study (New York, 1952), p. 298.

THE PEASANTS

Paradoxically, the Mississippian's individualism has been partially responsible for the development of an environment where non-conformity is forbidden. The farmers are poor, ignorant, but proud and obsessive. Farmers like Bookwright, Tull, and Mink are honest, generous, and, as Howe says, "unpretentious, hardworking, violently and even blindly independent" (p. 87). These men are the peasants; the name "redneck" is more appropriate for the Gowries, an intermarried 'species' of "brawlers, farmers, foxhunters, stock and timber-traders" and moonshiners, violently disrespectful of local, state, or federal law, living in the lonely pine hills of "tilted farms and peripatetic sawmills" (ID, 25).

The peasants are the farmers whose emotions are exploited by the Texan. Flem's front man entices the farmers into buying the wild ponies brought from Texas by him and Flem. The men, especially Henry Armstid, have an uncontrollable impulse to make a good bargain. Impulsive and irrational, their "naive trustfulness made them perfect victims of less emotional and shrewder minds."¹⁹ Armstid's monomania for a bargain, like Flem's monomania for money and Labove's for Eula and Houston's for his dead wife, leads him into bidding, especially motivated by seeing Eck Snopes get one of the horses free. This obsessive nature will lead him to insanity and fruitless digging for gold on the Frenchman's place; Armstid and his shovel become a distorted monument to Flem's advancement to the town by exploitation of the weaknesses of others.

Armstid is so obsessed with buying a horse that he uses money

¹⁹Hoffman, p. 86.

intended for purchasing shoes for his children. The reason the other men fail to interfere with Armstid when he beats his wife for protesting is not one of apathy or indifference, but the principle of non-interference in another man's trade.²⁰ There is no absence of feeling on their part. Ratliff expresses this attitude when he thanks Bookwright for warning him about dealing with Flem. Ratliff says that Bookwright, who regrets his inability to stop Flem, "done all he could to warn me. He went as far and even further than a man can let his self go in another man's trade." It is inaction, then, rather than indifference that causes the men to hang their heads while Mrs. Armstid is beaten by her husband. "With this awareness of limit goes a fierce assertion of individuality; precisely the individuality...that hinders them from acting in concert against the Snopes."²¹

Ratliff will have no part of the horse trading, being frustrated by the fact that the impulsiveness of the men will lead them to continually let themselves be exploited, even in this instance when it is certain that Flem is the real owner of the horses. This attitude of the peasants to "bare their backsides" is illustrated by Mrs. Armstid, who, after being exploited by Flem, calls him "'right kind' when he buys her off with a nickel bag of candy, the same kind of 'little sweetening for the chaps' that Vardaman and Bilbo so often handed out to the adoring throngs."²²

French contends that "The Hamlet suggests through the portrayal of characters like Henry Armstid and Mink Snopes and Wall Street Panic

²⁰Vickery, p. 173.

²¹Howe, pp. 87-88.

²²French, p. 37.

Snopes that many of Mississippi's 'peasants' were paranoid; here art follows reality"(pp. 24-25). In the middle of the twentieth century, reality is even more harsh, for the state has control of mass media to distort past and present and maintain a climate of fear for political exploitation. Silver testifies that the NAACP is presented as trying to mongrelize the state before turning it over to Communism. The South is presented as being under attack by a fascist-like Yankee press which is a tool of the northerners jealous of Mississippi's industrial expansion. There is a "deliberately manufactured outside enemy" that is used to solidify the people behind the politicians and vested interests. This paranoia, says Silver, has led the Citizen's Council to list "as subversive to the Mississippi way of life" the Red Cross, FBI, Order of Elks, Jewish War Veterans, Methodist Church, National Lutheran Council, Air Force, Interstate Commerce Commission, and the YWCA. It is also believed that the "black-hearted" Supreme Court has distorted the constitution to aid in the federal encroachment, and that the Kennedys' plan was the deliberate provocation of the Ole Miss students into attacking the marshals so troops could be sent in.

Truth cries out that the orthodox Mississippi view is false, that cleverness in shifting the culpability for defiance of law from those creating the violence to those enforcing the law could only succeed among a people suffering from a touch of paranoia.²³

This paranoid attitude--the obsession of Mississippians concerning "outlanders"--is seen in The Town and Intruder. The Chinese laundryman and two Jewish clothiers in Jefferson are viewed in terms of whether or not they constitute a threat. The Chinese, although a

²³Silver, p. 123.

non-white, is considered "as threatless as a mule"(T, 306). When Ratliff describes the legal proceeding against Flem for his misadventures in brass, he tells of the attitude of the "folks" who gather in the town square to observe the happenings of the special meeting of the board of aldermen, at which two bondsmen from St. Louis appear. Ratliff says the people didn't take sides, "but jest mainly enjoying it, jest being in principle on whichever other side from them two foreign bonding fellers for the simple reason that they was foreigners..."(T, 87). To even greater degree, the Gowries are suspicious even of people outside Beat Four. Forrest Gowrie resorts to a gun to defend his freedom from the federal government in order to avoid being drafted. Gavin, moral opposite of the Gowries, asserts his opposition to the non-South, saying he is "defending Sambo from... the outlanders who will fling him decades back not merely into injustice but into grief and agony and violence" by forcing laws on the South to achieve sudden equality(ID, 131).

With this type of attitude pervasive, it is understandable why civil rights workers, both natives and foreigners, are met with hostility and death. An analysis of Mink Snopes can help to understand even more fully why the rise of the Negro evokes such a violent response from the peasants and rednecks.

Mink is very representative of the poor, ignorant, industrious tenant farmers who scratch out an existence from exhausted soil. He tries to escape his fate by going to sea, but marriage brings him back to farming. The extent of his ignorance is shown by his belief that people eat fatback, coarse meal, and molasses unless they can shoot

squirrel. Mink's childhood is mirrored by that of his children.

Mink

would watch them as they approached across whatever sorry field or patch, fetching his cold meagre dinner or the jug of fresh water, or as they played with blocks of wood or rusted harness buckles or threadless and headless plowbolts which even he could no longer use, in the dust before whatever rented porch he sat on...(H, 243).

Despite being shackled to the grim existence of a sharecropper, Mink maintains a sense of pride and integrity. Mink shows this integrity when he refuses to steal money from Houston after killing him, refuses money his wife obtained by submitting sexually to Will, and refuses money from Linda for his escape from prison. Mink is willing to subject himself to his shackled existence as part of his bargain with life. But this decision to accept his fate is thrown out of balance by Houston.

Because of the death of his bride, Houston turns his "cold, bitter arrogance" on Mink. The fee forced upon Mink for grazing his cow on Houston's land "is to Mink the ultimate joke of that 'maniacal Risibility' which has dogged the existence of both men." Grazing the cow and killing Houston are Mink's assertions against cosmic injustice. Houston is the agent of this force "beyond man which violates basic human rights and dignity."²⁴

The farmer from whom Ike steals feed for his cow acts similarly, for this theft is a "moral outrage, the crass violation of private property"(H, 193). The farmer subdues his outburst of wrath when he discovers the stolen feed. This middle-aged man had developed a "fair farm" through his "sound health and a certain grim and puritanical affinity for abstinence and endurance." His children reject this

²⁴Volpe, p. 313.

austere existence and leave the farm. The farmer cannot contain his wrath when more feed is stolen. For him, the second theft of feed is a flagrant abrogation of the ancient biblical edict (on which he had established existence, integrity, all) that man must sweat or have not, the same embattled moral point which he had fought singly and collectively with his five children for more than twenty years and in which battle, by being victorious, he had lost" (H, 193).

His pent-up fury is released by this theft which goes beyond the status quo of primal injustice. It is this fury that the demagogue exploits and directs. In 1962 the state was still filled with people of this disposition, some more educated than others, but equally exploited. These people have been raised with the belief of Negro inferiority and the solemn pledge that segregation will remain. If a fee or theft of grain will imbalance the status quo of primal injustice, the imbalance caused by the admission of a Negro to the hallowed halls of the university is almost beyond understanding for a non-Mississippian. The propaganda machine, says Silver, claimed university accreditation would suffer if Meredith was enrolled, and that there were some who would be willing to die for an honorable cause, a cause which stood opposed to the dictatorial and "communist-inspired" Kennedys, the socialistic Supreme Court, the leftist teachers not yet purged from the schools, and the jealous Yankee pressure groups. Considering the appeals to the young to have the courage of their ancestors who fought and died gloriously to preserve their way of life, one can see why the students could attack the marshals and "later compare themselves to the Hungarian freedom fighters."²⁵

For the rednecks and peasants--already subjected to the same propaganda since childhood and frustrated by the shackled economy--

²⁵Silver, p. 45,

their response has to take a violent direction. Nothing could be more dishonorable to their personal integrity than to idly watch Negroes display equality by voting or attending college. U.S. marshals and civil rights workers are visible agents of this cosmic injustice, agents at whom the Mississippian can strike with vengeance.

THE DISSENTERS

The lives of these poor farmers are ruled to a great extent by stock responses to situations and people. Although Negroes are not involved in The Hamlet, the white farmers would respond to the black race as do the people in Jefferson since both groups have been raised on the belief of white supremacy. Ratliff, however, does not respond in a stock manner. A man of native intelligence and wit, his emotions are almost always ruled by rationality. While Bookwright and Tull know that the Snopes invasion is not right, they are not competent to actively oppose Flem; Ratliff is.

Ratliff defends Ike against Flem and against public exploitation. He assists Mink's wife and, in The Town, helps Wall Street Panic Snopes by investing in his grocery business. Unlike Gavin, Ratliff is not quixotic. He doesn't give Armstid the five dollars lost to Flem; there is a limit to his intervention. He is too realistic to help those who are addicted to baring their backsides to the Snopeses.

Paradoxically, the factor that is a source of weakness for Ratliff, Chick, and Gavin is also their main strength. It is Ratliff's illusion of the past--the legend of gold buried on the Frenchman's place--that gets the better of his rationality. This allows Flem to

defeat Ratliff and gain a foothold in the town.²⁶

While the sense of the past can become distorted, still it emphasizes honor, courage, and integrity. After helping Lucas, Chick learns that his aspirations, passions, beliefs and hopes have been specifically shaped by six generations of ancestors and land. His past has shaped "ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race," and even more; " since it had also integrated into him whatever it was that had compelled him to stop and listen to a damned highnosed impudent Negro..." (ID, 98).

Chick's psychological struggle involves a conflict of a distorted past and a sense of decency developed by Southern tradition. While the distorted past makes him believe that he has betrayed his manhood and native land by failing to make Lucas act as a "nigger," his sense of decency simultaneously works to the contrary and prevents him from blinding himself to the fact that Lucas is a dignified human being. Chick sees that Lucas's face is

pigmented like a Negro's but with a nose high in the bridge and even hooked a little and what looked out through it or behind it not black nor white either, not arrogant at all and not even scornful; just intolerant inflexible and composed (ID,11).

Chick is young enough to be psychologically impressed by the dignity of a Negro before the orthodox view of the "nigger" blinds him to truth. Lucas's composure, erect walk, and grief for his dead wife serve to prevent Chick from succumbing to the stock response. When he hears different men and also his uncle express their views on Lucas's deed in almost identical words, he remembers Gavin

saying once how little of vocabulary man really needed to get comfortably and even efficiently through his life, how not

²⁶French, p. 38.

only in the individual but within his whole type and race and kind a few simple cliches served his few simple passions and needs and lusts(ID, 33).

Chick is not totally free of stock responses. Like Gavin and the rest of Jefferson, he assumes that Lucas is guilty of murder and takes some consolation in the fact that the town will finally make a "nigger" out of Lucas, thus making reparation for his own failure to do so. Typically contradictory is the breakfast scene in Sheriff Hampton's house when five whites gather to eat and discuss saving Lucas, a situation resulting from Chick's inability to deny Lucas's human dignity. Simultaneously, Chick has no qualms about his Negro companion, Aleck, eating alone in the kitchen. When riding with Gavin, Chick later sees a dissenting Negro plowing a field while the rest of the Negro race is hiding due to the lynching atmosphere that pervades the county; Chick, in a stock manner, remarks, "There's a nigger" (ID, 96).

It is Gavin's stock response that forces Lucas to turn to Chick for help. Lucas realizes that Gavin is conditioned to assuming his guilt, but Chick might be penetrable. Gavin can bring only due process of law; Chick can bring justice since he and Aleck and Miss Habersham have not been calcified by the orthodox view.

While the past has conditioned Gavin's response here in a negative manner, in The Town the past's influence is both positive and negative. Gavin's romanticism makes him a crusader for Eula and Linda. His Southern heritage shapes his ethical response to a situation that demands action, and Gavin becomes a knight without horse or armor, but a knight all the same, exhibiting courage, honor, and decency. Unfortunately, Gavin is affected negatively into being quixotic, trying to

produce a Guinevere out of Eula by having women accept her socially.²⁷ He, thus, denies reality. Gavin's sister questions him about Eula and De Spain. His response illustrates this trait.

Just what is it about this that you cant stand? That Mrs Snopes may not be chaste, or that it looks like she picked Manfred de Spain out to be unchaste with?

Yes...I mean no! It's all lies--gossip. It's all--(T, 49).

Eula comments to the same effect. While talking to Gavin about her father's knowledge of the affair with De Spain, she says:

But I dont think Papa knew. He's like you. I mean, you can do that too....Be able to not have to believe something just because it might be so or somebody says it is so or maybe even it is so(T, 329).

Self-delusion is found in the townspeople who try to forget the Eula-Manfred affair for the sake of the bank and reputation of Jefferson. Some will delude themselves to the extent of doublethink, delighting in the gossip and simultaneously accepting the new bank president's chosen inscription on Eula's tombstone. With this attitude added to paranoia, it is understandable that Mississippians can delude themselves about the state culpability regarding the Ole Miss rioting. With the extensive reportorial and interpretive media's coverage of the event and its causes, Silver maintains that

Those who wished to know have had spread before them a reasonably trustworthy record of events. This is true for all the world except Mississippi. With their long history of being on the defensive against outside criticism, and with their predisposition to believe their own leaders can do no wrong, the people have been almost completely deceived(p. 123).

Mississippians refuse to recognize that there is an indigenous race problem: they have surrounded themselves with an atmosphere called by one state lawyer a "cesspool of sanctity"(p. 24).

Gavin explains to Chick the South's hostility toward outside criticism: he tries to bring Chick to a proper perspective after

²⁷Volpe, p. 325.

the youth repudiates his fellow Mississippians for their treatment of Lucas. Gavin helps Chick realize that it is proper for a Southerner to criticize his own kind. This is not only right, but necessary, says Gavin, if the South is to free the Negro without the interference of federal legislation which will compound the problem, not solve it. Chick has developed regarding his fellow Southerners "that fierce desire that they should be perfect...." This is added to "that furious almost instinctive leap and spring to defend them from anyone anywhere so that he might excoriate them himself..."(ID, 135).

Gavin has taught Chick that it is proper to be proud of his South, but that he must go beyond mere pride and boasting. Prior to Chick's realization about self-criticism and about the error of his own righteous attitude, Gavin had told him that he must continue to resist evil (Silver cites this quotation as representing the attitude necessary for destruction of the closed society).

Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them(ID, 133).

Ratliff also is one of Chick's instructors. Together the three assume the obligation of constructing a decent, healthy society. They become

part of that archetypal pattern which Faulkner sees in society and its history. Knowing that their victories are at best temporary and their ultimate defeat inevitable, they yet offer that same resistance to society in the name of human values that was found in Horace Benbow, Isaac McCaslin, or the Christ-like Corporal of A Fable, Theirs is the voice of protest which keeps society from becoming moribund.²⁸

Resistance to evil brings frustration. "I wont," Ratliff says in regard to going beyond a certain limit in opposing Snopesism, but

²⁸Vickery, p. 185.

he doesn't stop. In weariness, Gavin wonders why he is the one who has to oppose Flem. Chick lapses into despair in The Mansion, saying that "Man stinks." Still, none of the three avoid the existential commitment to resist injustice. One of the reasons for this weariness is illustrated in Chick's response to the dissipation of the crowd at the news that Lucas is not guilty. Chick "now recognized the enormity of what he had blindly meddled with" and that his first impulse to flee on horseback rather than help Lucas was the right reaction

because it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas' crucifixion(ID, 90).

The pressure on dissenting Mississippians before and after the Ole Miss rioting was much greater than that on Chick. Silver himself found it necessary in his introduction to detail his affection for the state and to list his previous contributions to Mississippi education. He was well aware he would be called a traitor. Despite pressure, Silver established a friendship with James Meredith while he attended the university. The professor's weariness is expressed in one of his letters included in the book, a letter revealing that involvement in the Negro problem reaches a point where one "can't well get out"(p. 214). Thus, Gavin's concept of extensive self-criticism is impossible due to the pressure of conformity and reprisal. Four months before moving to Texas, a dissenting rabbi expressed well the price when he wrote, "Some of us are very lonely."²⁹

What then, is the future of the closed society?

²⁹Silver, pp. 57-58.

HOPE

Howe maintains that the peasants are, for Faulkner, "a source of hope"(p. 88). Bookwright, disappointed because he cannot stop Flem, and Houston, full of grief for his lost wife, are defeated men but persistent in their integrity. Silver's view, however, is contrary to Howe's. Hope for the future of Mississippi exists, but "not because of the assistance of men of good will"(p. 146).

Men like Bookwright and Houston exhibit good will in their generosity, friendliness, and the inactive or silent opposition to the likes of Flem. Houston offers to give Ike the cow; Bookwright, after warning Ratliff about Flem's treachery, refuses to watch the idiot make love to the cow; Eck Snopes evenly shares food with his son. The farmers show a degree of good will when they hang their heads as Mrs. Armstid is beaten by her husband. Some of these men are opposed to indecency and injustice. Similarly, some modern Mississippians, says Silver, are ashamed of the actions of those who throw rocks at their own neighbors wearing National Guard uniforms, are ashamed of murder, lynching, and nightriding(p. 146). But both groups generally remain silent and inactive.

While the closed society is not absolute, it has been strong enough to receive the silent support of these men of good will when a dissenter needed their assistance. The dissenters, both Negro and white, are a major factor in the destruction of the closed society. The education of Chick by Gavin and Ratliff "implies Faulkner's belief as observer of men that some of them, neither naive, fanatical nor eccentric will...accept engagement in midst of uncertainty..." The

presence of perceptive people is the "most hopeful" thing Faulkner has said about the South and humanity.³⁰

Silver's book shows that such perceptive people in the 1960's include legislators, editors, student editors, lawyers, labor leaders, educators, ordinary citizens, business men, and civil rights workers. Despite applied pressure, editors and lawyers openly accused the state leaders of being responsible for violence because of defiance of law, common sense, and justice. Despite the fact that the churches have supported the status quo, individual ministers and ministerial groups have expressed unorthodox views. Seventy members of the Ole Miss chapter of the American Association of University Professors signed a document protesting the state's attempt to blame the marshals for the riots on campus. The excellent conduct of the 3000 federalized Mississippi national guardsmen speaks well for ordinary citizens. The conduct was explained partially by the comment of one guardsman who was treated roughly by agitators. "It was just a matter of an oath I took."³¹

This sense of honor displayed by the guardsman is similarly seen in the action of the constable who prevented the Gowries from lynching Lucas following the shooting. Will Legate, guarding Lucas in jail, says, "I got to resist. Mr. Hampton's paying me five dollars for it." The jailer, another man of good will who will not passively assent to all aspects of the orthodox code at the cost of personal integrity, tells Gavin:

Dont mind me. I'm going to do the best I can; I taken an oath of office too....But dont think nobody's going to make me admit I like it. I got a wife and two children; what good am I going to be to them if I get myself killed protecting a goddamn stinking nigger?(ID, 37).

³⁰ Warren Beck, Man in Motion:Faulkner's Trilogy(Madison, 1963), pp.58, 168.

³¹..... 142 145

Lucas, who is another type of dissenter, also illustrates an important change in the self-appraisal of the Mississippi Negro that presents hope through dissent. Lucas is at the opposite extreme from Nancy. Lucas refuses to accept the deferential attitude which is imposed on the Negro. While Lucas is not a person who would be a^acivil rights leader, he does exhibit the sense of personal dignity that is essential to the movement. As Silver points out, the United States as well as Mississippi is becoming a multiracial society "not because Christianity has suddenly been overwhelmed with success but because the imperatives of the American dream have been demanded by a growing and sizable number of American Negroes who refuse to accept their traditional place at the bottom of American society"(p. 3).

Civil rights workers are able to convey to young and old this sense of dignity and hope. This is shown by the success of voter registration drives despite the threats of violence and reprisal.

In his novels, Faulkner dramatizes the Negro ability to endure injustice. However, Lucas, "a man whose irascible desire for justice-- he demands nothing else from white society--is quite distant from the style of 'endurance.'"³² The combination of dignity and the armament of patience, which Faulkner says the white man cannot match(ID, 64), are the attitudes that allow the Negro to patiently demand "Freedom Now." It is this patience and this hungering for justice and prosperity that help him to achieve progress through non-violence.

Non-violence is one reason why the editors of Look speculate in a special issue that the South may solve its racial problems sooner than the North or West. Silver saw little hope in Mississippi for a

³²Howe, p. 131.

few years. Two years after Silver's book (1964), prospects for faster change in Mississippi and the South are evident because of the necessity for making conscious decisions about segregation, a choice that is not readily forced by the subtle, frequently unadmitted segregation of the North. Look editors see in general only isolated remnants of the Old South. Other reasons they give for the hopes of a New South to replace the Old South include 1) the boom of industry, motels, super-highways, developing resort facilities, especially the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and tourist increase; (2) increase in Negro voter registration that is eliminating the white supremacy issue and sending Negroes into the state legislatures; (3) birth control aid for the poor and ignorant who marry as early as twelve and don't realize that pregnancy can be avoided; and (4) acceptable desegregation plans for 3500 of 3900 Southern school districts receiving U.S. aid.³³

The distorted sense of the past is difficult to maintain amid the roar of jets, construction, and mass media. Economic prosperity diverts the full attention of the Southerner from defiant last-ditch stands in school doorways.

Both Silver and the Look editors see the South as an area where kind people live, not entirely the backward habitation of social degenerates. Faulkner's characters also reveal the assets of the Southerner as well as the faults. Like his dissenters, Faulkner criticizes those he loves. In fact, Faulkner moves away from his original harshly critical attitude concerning Flem. Volpe, discussing the expansion of Faulkner's moral vision between writing the parts of the trilogy, says Flem moves from an archetype of evil to a human being,

³³"The Fast Changing South," Look(Nov. 16, 1965), pp. 33-144.

for the view of Snopesism as evil personified is too simple and abstract "to withstand the deepening sympathy with which Faulkner has come to view human beings"(pp. 316-317).

Flem becomes victim, too. The Snopeses, including Mink and Flem, are welcomed to the human family because all men are caught in the "iron web of life"(pp. 331-332). From the moral indignation of The Hamlet, Faulkner moves to compassion in The Mansion for the "poor sons of bitches" struggling against cosmic injustice, fearful tenant farmers who transfer bank accounts in cash not check, men and women composed of good and bad, people beyond moral judgment of others.

Faulkner, Volpe further points out, does not deny immorality but sees the complexity of the human heart. Although Faulkner's overall vision of life is not optimistic, for he sees man as victim of self and maniacal Risibility, Faulkner maintains a defiant hope(p. 340).

Granville Hicks helps point out why Faulkner had difficulty in adjusting to the times. Faulkner was "not at home in the modern world...." He blamed loss of individualism on Social Security, failing to understand that "individualism had been undermined not by Social Security but by the technological developments that had made Social Security necessary."³⁴

That Faulkner did not cling to a dead idea of old-fashioned anarchical individualism in his time as did Dos Passos and Dalton Trumbo is a major contention in French's argument that Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Hemingway tried with varying success "to make a statement about the possibility of man's enduring in an atomic age"(pp. 165-166). As the world of the late 1930's was bringing upon itself

³⁴"Faulkner on Faulkner," Saturday Review (Jan. 8, 1966), pp. 77-78.

war and prophecy of the destruction of civilization, in The Hamlet Faulkner was praising and longing for a type of highly personal government like that of the hamlet outside Jefferson. This desired situation became impractical after the development of the atomic bomb and the post-war complex industrial society that necessitated a faceless government(pp. 162-163). A withdrawal by Faulkner into "an irrelevant past" is seen in The Town as well as in Requiem for a Nun and A Fable, but The Mansion is a dramatization of the Nobel Speech ideas and the "renewed faith that he had expressed in interviews in Japan and Virginia"(p. 167).

French concludes that Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Hemingway

moved away from their earlier position that there was no hope at all for the individual in the complex and ruthless modern state to a somewhat rueful recognition that this state, like the sharks that plague old Santiago, is here to stay and that the individual must develop like Santiago the fortitude, like Mink Snopes the patience, and like Ethan Allen Hawley the ability to endure loss of innocence in order to survive in a situation from which he cannot practically disassociate himself(p. 170).

Faulkner thought that federal intervention via the Supreme Court desegregation decision would, as Gavin expresses years before in Intruder in the Dust, complicate the situation by having legislation bury the awakening conscience of people like Chick. Despite his reservation concerning the 1954 decision, and contrary to the insistence of Time, Silver says "that Faulkner realized before his death (a few months prior to the Ole Miss rioting) that southerners would never really give up segregation without outside force"(p. 211).

While Faulkner publically regretted the court decision, in 1956 he wrote to The Reporter and Time denying that he would take part

in armed resistance in event of federal intervention.³⁵ Time's cover story following Faulkner's death cites a quotation attributed to Faulkner in an interview with British newsman Russell Warren Howe. Faulkner was quoted as saying: "If it came to fighting I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out in- to the street and shooting Negroes."³⁶

Time says that Faulkner insisted in letters to newspapers that he had been misquoted. Time implies that Faulkner was not misin- terpreted even if he was misquoted. Time says:

What the letters naturally did not mention was the fact that at the time of the interview Faulkner had spent several days working his way through a demijohn of bourbon, a bout set off by a running quarrel with his brother John Faulkner, who was a die-hard segregationist(p. 48).

In its conclusion, the article says Faulkner "desperately urged on his fellow Southerners--and himself--a change of heart." Faulkner "never, on the evidence, quite managed that change himself. But if he left a message and a legacy, it was to urge upon his fellow Southerners and the nation the imperative necessity for that change"(p. 48).

It should be noted that Time's article is a good presentation of Faulkner's concern in his novels with the beliefs, behavior, and the crisis of conscience of his characters, and Faulkner's hopes that voluntary recognition of the dignity of the Negro would be made by the whites. But is it valid to conclude that he even needed to undergo a change of heart? Not only does Silver say that Faulkner changed his mind on the need for federal intervention, but Faulkner's

³⁵Hicks, p. 77.

³⁶"The Curse and The Hope" Time(July 17, 1964), p. 47. The article is the joint effort of Time's senior editor A. T. Baker, writer Horace Judson, and researcher Martha McDowell.

novels don't advocate violence as a solution.

The only evidence cited by Time for a refusal to change on Faulkner's part is a disputed quotation. Time itself says Faulkner's 1956 articles in Ebony and Life lament forcible integration, but are not a call to arms. It was federal intervention that troubled Faulkner at this time, not any doubt about the need for the freedom of the Negro. A year earlier Faulkner, at Silver's request, wrote a short introduction for a publication of the Southern Historical Association, Three Views of the Segregation Decision, a legal and moral analysis of the court decision which deviated from the orthodox view of Mississippi. Faulkner wrote in part:

The question is no longer of white against black. It is no longer whether or not white blood shall remain pure, it is whether or not white people shall remain free... We speak now against the day when our southern people who will resist to the last those inevitable changes in social relations, will, when they have been forced to accept what they at one time might have accepted with dignity and goodwill, will say, "Why didn't someone tell us this before? Tell us this in time?"³⁷

This, of course, has been the essence of the inner struggle of Faulkner's characters--to gain freedom from unreality, freedom from guilt, freedom from hate and injustice.

Faulkner's novels and personal statements are contradictory if he could be a segregationist and still endow Lucas with so much dignity and endow the three main dissenters of the trilogy with so much courage, honor, compassion, and sacrifice.

Mississippi remains the most recalcitrant and backward state in the South because close to a century of negative politics--with dissimulation of its propaganda from press, pulpit, and platform--

³⁷Silver, p. xii.

has bred excessive authoritarianism, delusion, irrationality, paranoia, violence, poverty, hate, apathy, and fear. These elements plus the emigration of talented people, the exploitation of the ignorant and gullible, hypocrisy through law, silence of churches, inadequate education, and decades of lethargy by the federal government equal thought control and loss of freedom for black and white.

Hope for the future lies in a type of individualism that still consists of existentialistic involvement and decision that is characteristic of Ratliff, Gavin, and Chick. Hope lies in those dissenters who facilitate the economic, social, and educational changes that will make it easier for the men of good will to actively express and live their convictions.

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FAULKNER AND THE CLOSED SOCIETY

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements of the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1966

A literary and historical look at Mississippi can produce a double perspective on the situation, attitudes, and behavior of the people who have made Mississippi the most backward state educationally and economically. Through four novels of William Faulkner and Dr. James Silver's historical picture of Mississippi: The Closed Society, this paper presents the various elements that combine to make many Mississippians actively resist integration despite federal laws and enforcement.

The elements that led to the bloody clash between Mississippi and the federal government over the enrollment of Negro James Meredith into the University of Mississippi include the following: a history of violence, ignorance, gullibility, poverty, and economic exploitation; corrupt politics; ruthlessly enforced white supremacy code; thought control; self-delusion, including a distorted sense of the past and present; lack of dissent from the orthodox view of segregation by most businessmen, churchmen, journalists, lawyers, and ordinary citizens.

In The Hamlet, Faulkner depicts a parallel transfer of power from the "new Bourbons" to the demagogic leaders of the rednecks, and the subsequent exploitation of the poor white farmers as well as the Negroes. The Town shows the aura of self-delusion and the facade of respectability of Jefferson, Mississippi. The Mansion touches on the hollowness of economic success at the expense of others. Intruder in the Lust, like parts of the other novels, illustrates the need for an extended atmosphere of decency in Mississippi, and also the necessity of voluntary recognition by whites of the dignity of Negroes, with their subsequent release from bondage.

Silver and Faulkner present strikingly similar pictures of Mississippi as a closed society where dissenters are few, and where refusal to accept the orthodox view demands courage, honor, compassion, and sacrifice. The three main characters of Faulkner's four novels--V.K. Matliff, Gavin Stevens, and Chick Mallison--are such dissenters. The hope for Mississippi moving from a totalitarian society to an open society rests in the ability of dissenters to improve the situation so that the silent men of good will who favor decency and progress will not fear to voice their opinions and act accordingly.