

The Tragic Form in Faulkner's Fiction

Keiko Beppu

We have a perennial craving to see justice done. In a seemingly chaotic universe we must recognize a certain order, "a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs" — "Or else a man might just as well quit,"¹ as Mink Snopes says. The implication is that we cannot endure unless we believe that life is meaningful. To William Faulkner life is meaningful; it is not simply ridiculous. It may be "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury," but it does signify something. (Benjy's moaning has an important message.)

Looking at Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels in retrospect, we see a definite pattern emerge from the center of his major concern. His novels are concerned with man's desperate search for the meaning of existence, for which there is no ready answer. It is only sought after in our endless struggle against our destiny — the endurance test that life has thrown us in. We learn "humility through suffering" and we learn "pride through the endurance which [survives] that suffering."² If "his own bad luck had all his life continually harassed and harried [Mink] into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights,"³ Mink proves himself "equal to any, good as any, brave as any"⁴ of mankind. His faith in "a simple fundamental justice" makes his suffering not only endurable but also meaningful. And "the suffering of the tragic hero elevates us as well as arouses our compassion because it is meaningful."⁵

Faulkner's vision has its inspiration in a profound conviction of the inherent worth of human life — a conviction all the more keenly felt because of the presence of the violence and waste done by evil. He wrote on the assumption that man will not only endure, but also prevail, and believed that "it is the poet's privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice."⁶ Such an artistic credo and vision of life finds its best expression in the tragic form. It is the form Faulkner chose for *Absalom, Absalom!* and for the story of Mink Snopes in the Snopes trilogy. To illumi-

nate Faulkner's tragic vision, I would like to examine these particular works in the light of Shakespearean tragedy. Many passing analogies have been made between Faulknerean and Shakespearean heroes. It is now a cliché to call Quentin Compson Hamlet-like. Thomas Sutpen is compared with Macbeth in his "innocence" or with Richard III. There seems to be, however, a more fundamental common ground in their works than these comments may suggest.

Their first premise is that a work of art should always be on the side of life: the works of both Faulkner and Shakespeare are "a compassionate resounding yes" to life. They share the basic view of life that "the web of life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."⁷ Despite the squalor and evils of the world, they believe in the ideal of man and in man's capacity for great actions. They see man both as "the paragon of animals" and as "a poor, bare, forked animal."

They see man as existential questioner, naked, unaccommodated, facing mysterious, demonic forces in his own nature and outside, and the irreducible facts of suffering and death. These "problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" we see dramatized in Hamlet, Lear, Quentin, Henry Sutpen and Mink Snopes. They are all up against the evils of the world, trying to uphold "the old verities and truths of the heart. . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice."⁸ To these I shall add the sacred bond of blood or what Mink calls "the ancient immutable laws of simple blood kinship."⁹ It is because of filial piety that Hamlet is called upon to act. It is filial ingratitude that causes Lear's suffering. Henry Sutpen has to kill his half brother to defend his sister's honor and family name, which Quentin feels guilty of *not* defending. But more of this later.

Lastly, in the tragedies of both Faulkner and Shakespeare the idea of eternal justice is the governing principle in producing the catharsis of pity and wonder — or what Joyce Carol Oates calls "a therapy of the soul." We feel exalted with a sense of wonder at the way eternal justice works. Miss Oates claims that tragic forms are still possible: "if it is not always true that human life possesses value, it is at least true that some human life, or the abstract parody of human life as acted by gods, has a profound and magical value, inexplicable."¹⁰ And "the suffering of the tragic hero elevates us as well as

arouses our compassion because it is meaningful," if not for the hero, it is meaningful for us.

I

Absalom, Absalom! (1936) is acknowledged by many critics as Faulkner's greatest novel. There is a sense of dark, irrational forces haunting the novel. To a fatalist like Mr. Compson, Thomas Sutpen's drama is "a horrible and bloody *mischancing* of human affairs,"¹¹ a story of family fatality "which possessed, . . . along with all circumstances, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human beings for tools, materials."¹² In such a view, man is no more than a victim of fate. Faulkner's heroes, however, are not mere victims; they are rebels who kick against the pricks of their destiny, and like Mink, become an agent of eternal justice. *Absalom, Absalom!* is full of the sound and the fury made by the characters who grope for the meaning of existence. And the questioner alone is able to have a glimpse of meaning in the tragic moment, which Faulkner illuminates for us to see.

Cleanth Brooks' reading that the tragic burden of *Absalom, Absalom!* is to be found not in the story of Thomas Sutpen, but in that of his children¹³ is insightful. Considered in this perspective, the novel is more purely a tragedy. To be sure, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a complex human drama; it is also the tragedy of Thomas Sutpen, and it becomes Quentin's tragedy. Indeed, it is for Quentin and for us to get the full tragic meaning of the story.

Faulkner's title, *Absalom, Absalom!* is Sutpen's heart-rending cry for his lost son, Henry, at least we are tempted to so imagine; it is a cry out of an unreconciled man. The objection to Sutpen as tragic hero is that he lacks "soul" and therefore lacks inner conflicts essential to tragedy, and that he never learns from his experience. This is true, but since Faulkner dispenses with his inner consciousness, or with Henry's or Judith's for that matter, a case can be made for him. Sutpen's career resembles that of Macbeth or of Richard III, (but not that of Hamlet or King Lear.) The tragic hero need not be morally "good," but it is necessary that he should have a certain grandeur so that we may be able to see aspirations of human nature. He may be wretched and even evil, but he should not be "small".¹⁴ Sutpen has about him

the valor of a soldier. The valor he shows in fighting the rebellious sugar workers wins him the favor of the plantation owner in Haiti and ironically his daughter's hand. He also possesses a strong will: "Any one could look at him and say, *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything.*"¹⁵ His single-minded obsession with his design is a characteristic tragic trait like Macbeth's or Richard's passion for the glory and power of the crown, which is equivalent to the power and property of the plantation owner in the South of the 1830's. Unlike Macbeth's or Richard's, however, Sutpen's dedication to his design is, to a certain degree, disinterested. When he is told by the negro butler to go to the back door, he feels he has to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life. In other words, young as he is, he is pricked to defend "his own simple rights."

As he tells Quentin's grandfather, whether his design is good or bad is beside the point: There is nothing wrong about his design. The problem with Sutpen is his "innocence," as Quentin's grandfather sees it. Sutpen cannot understand where he has made the mistake. It is not because his design is bad that Sutpen fails in its realization, but because in its realization he violates "the ancient immutable laws of simple blood kinship." If he is justified in rejecting his Haitian wife, because he is tricked into marriage without the secret revealed to him, he is not justified in breaking the sacred bond of nature he owes to Charles Bon. Like Macbeth's or Richard's, his sin is a moral one. These tragic heroes invite their own destruction as well as the destruction of others.

Faulkner gives Sutpen enough of heroic proportions so that even in his downfall there is something of a tragic dignity. Even when he realizes that it is too late to start his design all over again, he first makes a gesture. In his pathetic attempt to beget a son on Milly — to perpetuate his design — there is a certain grandeur reminiscent of Macbeth's fight to the end or Richard's "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" In their downfall Macbeth and Richard lose their stature. Macbeth's superb imagination is so diseased that he is all too ready to believe the army with boughs to be a moving woods. Compare Richard's brilliant wit in wooing Lady Anne with his pathetic appeal to Queen Elizabeth (Edward IV's Queen) for her daughter's hand. This is not to belittle Skakespeare's heroes, but to make a case for Sutpen. They all deserve

our admiration for their resolute will to “fight the course” all the way down to hell, if you will. Like Macbeth’s or Richard’s, Sutpen’s story is a clear example of justice being done. For good necessarily retaliates, and evil is self-destructive. Miss Rosa is not, after all, so wide of the mark that Sutpen has a just end, though she is grossly mistaken to see Sutpen as nothing but a demon.

Sutpen is justly requited by Wash Jones. There is a great irony in his end — also a poetic justice. Sutpen reenacts the role of the white plantation owner of his boyhood memory. Wash Jones is Sutpen’s mirror image. The boy of fourteen did not kill the plantation owner. But since Wash Jones is a man, he must right injustice, if he is “good” at all. In a way Sutpen goads Jones to kill him, as Jack Houston makes Mink kill him. If Sutpen is justly requited, then, is Henry’s or Judith’s suffering justified? They are more “sinned against than sinning”; for the irreducible facts of suffering and death, we have to turn to Henry and Judith, and to Quentin, who goes through a tragic experience in telling the Sutpen saga.

As has been mentioned earlier, in Faulkner (and in Shakespeare) the bond of blood is upheld as sacred and its violation is a dire crime. The blood kinship on earth is a microcosm of the brotherhood of man. The woman Mink meets on the roadside tells him, “We’re all God’s creatures.”¹⁶ In *The Hamlet* Mink is called a “fratricidal murderer” and he literally becomes one at the end of *The Mansion*. Ike McCaslin in “The Bear” or in *Go Down, Moses*, sees the Civil War as the worst kind of inhumanity done to fellowmen, because it sets son against father and brother against brother. To correct such evil God “used the blood which had brought in the evil to destroy the evil as doctors use fever to burn up fever, poison to slay poison.”¹⁷ Thus Ike tries to justify the ways of God to men.

To redeem such violations of natural bond, Henry and Judith have to suffer. (But here I am not suggesting that they are the mere victims of Sutpen’s design.) Henry’s dilemma in his choice of action and his subsequent suffering makes him a real tragic hero. He forsakes his father and his right to inheritance, not because he realizes, as Ike McCaslin does, “it was never his to repudiate,” but because he loves Charles Bon, his avowed friend and his half brother. Yet he has to kill Charles Bon to defend his sister’s

honor. His choice is difficult to make, because both his sister and his friend or half brother claim his love, whereas the choice is easier for Sutpen, since he has no compassion whatsoever. Like Carothers McCaslin, Sutpen thinks it is much cheaper to provide for his first wife than say “son” to a Charles Bon. Quentin and Shreve reconstruct the crucial scene between Henry and Charles Bon as follows:

- Think of her. Not of me: of her.
- I have. For four years. Of you and her. Now I am thinking of myself.
- No, Henry says. – No. No.
- I cannot?
- You shall not.
- Who will stop me, Henry?
- You are *my brother*.
- No, *I’m not*. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with *your sister*. Unless you stop me, Henry.
- You shall not! 18

Much is involved in the above exchange as recreated by Quentin and Shreve. The whole burden of choice rests on Henry: “Unless you stop me, Henry.” Henry’s appeal to Charles Bon that “you are my brother” is not heard. Bon gets his revenge at last, if it helps him at all, denying in his turn his brother (who recognizes Bon as brother) and his sister. Or is he only testing Henry? Even though Charles Bon’s need for recognition can be tragic, he is too world-weary to demand our sympathy. The tragedy of *Absalom, Absalom!* is Thomas Sutpen’s, Henry’s, and by proxy Quentin’s. Henry’s dilemma is similar to Hamlet’s. The spiritual values involved are equally great and “good.” Unlike Hamlet, however, Henry does act and kills his brother. Henry is incensed to kill Charles Bon, because he chooses to disapprove of miscegenation. Bon’s “I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister” makes the decision for Henry. In a way he repeats his father’s mistake in that he *chooses* to disapprove miscegenation. With Sutpen, however, there’s no problem of choice, because he is devoid of compassion.

The tragic conflict that Henry undergoes is greater because he recognizes Charles Bon as his brother. Even greater reconciliation is realized by Judith.¹⁹ She invites Bon’s wife and his son to visit his grave, opening “the door” to them. And she dies of yellow fever, while nursing Charles Bon’s

child. Thus, she willingly sacrifices her life for them, without knowing – perhaps – that Bon is her half brother. She answers to the obligation she feels she owes Charles Bon as his unwedded bride, because Judith cherishes the sacred natural bond. In her mute suffering and sacrificial act, Judith Sutpen reminds us of the courageous woman of the Old Testament whose name she bears.

Henry leaves home not to avoid justice – human justice – though he might have been aware that such involves an exposure of the truth which his father risks his soul and he his brother's and his own life to conceal. He leaves to expiate his crime and lead a life of renunciation, which is more terrible than a suicide. After forty years of wandering and penitence he comes home to die. He is sixty-one; one is appalled at such waste of good life. The tragedy of the Sutpens ends when Miss Rosa tries to take Henry to hospital so that he can be taken care of. As prearranged by Henry, Clytie sets fire to Sutpen's Hundred, the symbol of evil and home of many sorrows and sufferings. The long divided conflict of human drama at last seals itself in its reunion with eternal justice. Quentin pictures Clytie looking at the deputy, driver and Miss Rosa "not even now with triumph and no more of despair than [her tragic gnome's face] had ever worn, possibly even *serene* above the melting clap boards before the smoke swirled across it again."²⁰ There is calm after storm, as it were.

Yet, the Sutpen saga would not have been a tragedy, if Quentin had not seen Henry. In his interview with the dying Henry, Quentin is asked to tell his story, as Horatio is asked to report "[Hamlet's] cause aright." For this is part of tragedy: the hero at his death wants to put his case before the world.²¹ It is in his reconstruction of the story (with Shreve) that Quentin understands and undergoes a tragic experience. The story he hears that September afternoon involves more than a Calvinistic crime and retribution story, more than a nihilistic view of man as tool of fate. Quentin looks into the abyss of evil, and learns the nature of "the fecundity of dragon's teeth," just as Ike sees the head of evil in "the sailfuls of the old world's tainted wind."²² Quentin realizes the paradox of his Southern heritage and the dilemma of man, as Henry Sutpen before him *perhaps* has done. From his consciousness the presence of evil shall never be effaced: "Nevermore of

peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore.”²³

Thus far and only thus far Quentin is committed — that is, he realizes the paradox of his Southern heritage and “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself.” His telling the story to Shreve, then, becomes his “taking action.” But still more poignant is his tragic realization that he is helpless to do anything with his knowledge except tell about it.²⁴ Quentin has nothing to repudiate: the pasture is already gone. (Neither is Ike McCaslin better off; he withdraws from the field of action; he survives, only to repeat the same mistake his grandfather has made.²⁵) Quentin barely survives to report Henry’s cause and five months later he commits suicide, as we know his end in *The Sound and the Fury*. We will have to wait for a long while yet, as Ike says, when a braver Quentin will do something about the problem. We have little hope; yet we hope. This is tragic. The suffering of Henry and Quentin thus becomes meaningful to us.

II

Quentin is a romantic and tragic hero, what Hoffman calls a “young esthete,”²⁶ who is unable to outgrow the notion of man as “the paragon of animals.” But the Faulkner who completed the Snopes trilogy, especially who wrote the story of Mink Snopes with such dramatic sympathy is one who “by the art of known and feeling sorrow, [is] pregnant to good pity.”²⁷ Faulkner explains in his preface to *The Mansion* (1959) that “the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago.” Age has a different perspective in which sufferings and passions of youth seem unreal; it has gained knowledge at the price of suffering, for living *is* suffering — taking responsible actions. Hence the altered tone and perspective in his later novels, which is attributed to the fact that the novelist was awarded the Nobel Prize and that he became self-conscious about his moral position. This is partly true. The artist’s career, however, is not disrupted; it is a spiral-like evolution growing out of one and the same center.

The Mansion deals, though in a vulgarized milieu, with the same “old verities and truths of the human heart” — honor, pride, and “the ancient immutable laws of simple blood kinship.” Faulkner dramatizes his belief

in man's ability to endure and prevail over circumstances and over his destiny in his most unhero-like hero. Faulkner agrees with Camus that "the only function of man, born into an absurd world, is to live, be aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom."²⁸ This is the stance the hero in question takes against his destiny. Much objection has been voiced to Mink Snopes as a hero,²⁹ more so as a tragic one. Indeed, Mink is a puny man; he is literally small, which is stressed and re-stressed, but, I think, only to enhance his heroic action. Mink grows in stature during the course of the trilogy. For "beauty is Protean in its shapes and may reveal itself in the grotesque when it is prompted by a genuine poetic impulse."³⁰

Faulkner dramatizes with "a genuine poetic impulse" man's ability to prevail over his destiny in Mink Snopes who is, as Ratliff observes, the out-and-out mean Snopes. Faulkner makes it clear that Mink has admirable qualities. He may be foolish in inciting Jack Houston, whom other Snopeses will have nothing to do with, because it does them no good. However, the very attitude of Houston, who treats a poor share-cropper like a dog, pricks Mink's fierce sense of pride. Mink shares much of Sutpen's defiant spirit. In Houston's arrogance Mink feels the brush of power and money that young Sutpen has felt. And since Mink is a man, not a boy of fourteen, he must assert his simple rights and be revenged on the man who has wronged him. His dedication to see justice done and his faith in "a simple fundamental justice" is as single-minded and fatal as Sutpen's passion for his design.

Curiously enough, Mink has the Southern gentleman's notion of virgin chastity, upheld by Quentin and Henry Sutpen. Mink "has been bred by generations to believe invincibly that to every man, whatever his past actions, . . . there was reserved one virgin, at least, for him to marry."³¹ Such a notion is wholly absent in Flem Snopes. His marrying the woman pregnant with another man's child is not Byron Bunch's taking care of Lena's baby; it is done on a strictly commercial basis, even though it ironically saves Eula's honor (which means nothing to Flem). Mink marries, however, not a virgin reserved for him, but "the confident lord of a harem," because her father's bankruptcy changes her mind to an idea of married life. Mink takes a responsible action, so to speak. If he seems to ignore his wife and treat her badly, it is because such dedication as his has no room for soft passions.

In *The Hamlet* Mink murders Jack Houston, but the motive is not given in any detail. Mink does not kill, however, without feeling; he is aware of “the irremediable instant which nothing but his own death would ever efface from his memory.”³² He comes to feel the weight of his crime: “I thought that when you killed a man, that finished it, . . . But it don’t. It just starts then.”³³ This sense of guilt is totally absent from Flem Snopes. Also, in the same novel Faulkner juxtaposes Mink’s sense of honor and self-respect against the sheer avarice of Lump Snopes, who noses around Mink for the fifty dollars which he knows is in Houston’s pocket, and which Mink leaves there untouched. His pride injured, Mink is too impassioned to think of such trivial matters; he will not kill for money.

In *The Mansion*, which Mink dominates as hero, more of the motives of the homicide is recounted. If Mink is mean, and so he is, in arranging to have his cow fed on Houston’s pasture during winter, it can be argued that he primarily wants to outwit the arrogant man. If his ruse succeeds, the mode of the novel becomes comic rather than tragic: the defeat of a pompous figure belongs to the comic form. Often the comic and the tragic merge in *The Mansion*, but here I am concerned with the tragic in the novel.

Mink works for the thirty-eight dollars he owes Houston, for “if that’s the Law, I reckon there aint nothing for a law-abiding feller like me to do but just put up with it. Because if folks dont put up with the Law, what’s the use of all the trouble and expense of having it?”³⁴ Mink endures even more than he can, it seems, working extra hours without sleep, while tending to his rented land, for Jack Houston can be really mean. The extra one dollar pound fee, however, puts Mink off his balance; Mink endures the test up to that point. But man can take only so much. He just has to kill Houston, because rightly to be great means to “find quarrel in a straw when honor’s at the stake.” Mink is entirely believable and human. He kills Houston, fully aware that it will do him no good. It is a most un-Snopes-like action in its lack of self-interest, and one which appeals to our sense of honor and pride — human dignity that makes man a man. Mink’s murder or homicide is, in a sense, less harmful than Sutpen’s pursuit of his design, though legally Mink is culpable and Sutpen is not, just as Flem escapes the net of laws.

As Ratliff points out, if Mink is foolish not to have waited for Flem’s

return, he is intuitively right not to, since Flem's presence would have made no difference. His flaw is not in his belief in "the ancient immutable laws of simple blood kinship" but in his expectation that Flem won't violate the sacred bond. This is the same kind of mistake King Lear makes in expecting his daughters to take care of him in his old age. Bookwright tells Ratliff, "Even Flem Snopes aint going to let his own blood cousin be hung just to save money."³⁵ But such is a wishful thinking: a natural bond has been and will be violated. Flem's negligence is as evil as Regan's and Goneril's, and good necessarily retaliates. Cordelia fights her sisters for her father's cause: "It is thy business that I go about."³⁶ Likewise, Mink's personal passion for revenge becomes a cause, unselfish and detached. It is good fighting evil embodied in Flem Snopes. It is a tragic conflict where spiritual values are involved. Mink goes through a series of endurance tests. He spends an unnecessary eight months in the Jefferson prison, waiting for Flem, and twenty years at Parchman, to which another twenty is added. He is unjustly accused of an escape attempt which is contrived by Flem. At his pathetic heroism in accepting the unjust sentence, Montgomery Ward is moved and feels proud to be kin to Mink. Through his suffering and endurance, Mink grows in stature and assumes a heroic dimension, if he does not have it at the beginning of the drama.

Mink simply waits for time to pass – in prison that is all one can do – to wait – because he is able to trust in "a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs." He is confident that *they* will finish Stillwell so that he can get out. So it turns out to be – an almost providential intervention. At this point Mink's faith in "a simple fundamental justice" becomes a faith in "Old Moster," the term he has deliberately avoided:

He had simply had to trust *them* – the *them* of whom it was promised that not even a sparrow should fall unmarked. . . he did not believe in any Old Moster. He had seen too much in his time that if any Old Moster existed, with eyes as sharp and power as strong as was claimed He had, He would have done something about

He meant simply, that *them*, – *they* – *it*, whichever and whatever you wanted to call it, who represented, a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs, or else a man might just as well quit. 37

This is a truly religious consciousness resulting from a profound experience.

Such moments of religious experience happen to Hamlet after he escapes from the ship bound for England. There is a certain calmness as he tells Horatio: "there is a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will."

If Flem fails to respond to Mink's appeal, he abuses his parenthood toward Linda, who desperately needs a father's affection. Simply grateful for his interest in her, Linda leaves everything to him. So her sense of injury is entirely justified, when she finds out that Flem cares for nothing but money. Like Sutpen's, Flem's concern is with "respectability," though he falls far short of Sutpen's grandeur. Flem does not build another Sutpen's Hundred. He first rents a house, and later lives, parasite-like, in De Spain's mansion, where he feels uncomfortable except in his room with his foot on the ledge.

Linda's return to Jefferson after eight or nine years is self-explanatory; she comes back to see justice executed on Flem, whom the law cannot punish. Flem commits all the conceivable evils, causes people much suffering and misery, but he is immune from the law as he works evil within the law. This is why Gavin Stevens (the law man) cannot directly cope with Flem, and must depend upon Mink and Linda to destroy him. Like Mink's, Linda's passion for revenge is abstract and disinterested.³⁸ It is also to avenge her mother, who dies an "honorable death." Cleanth Brooks calls *The Mansion* "Faulkner's Revenge Tragedy"; somewhat old-fashioned and even offensive as it may sound to some, Brooks' reading is valid because in this light the separate stories of Mink Snopes and Linda Snopes become a united whole. If Linda gets pardon for Mink so that he might execute justice for her, in so doing she acknowledges the blood kinship which Flem has denied Mink. (The petition must be signed by a member of his family, the ward tells Mink.)

Out of prison, Mink is dazzled with the changes that have taken place during the thirty-eight years he spends in prison. The changes must have been overwhelming to anyone less resolute than Mink. He is now sixty-three, which means he has wasted virtually his entire adulthood (Henry Sutpen his in wandering). It is noteworthy that Mink is mistaken for a prisoner from World War II, as if Faulkner meant it to imply that it is what war does: it wastes good. "The tragedy of war was that you brought nothing away from it but only left something valuable there."³⁹

In the store, where he stops for a can of sardines and soda, Mink muses: "At least twenty bottles. That would take all the ten dollars. Maybe that will save me."⁴⁰ But the bottle does not cost him ten dollars. If eternal justice has kept Mink in prison almost indefinitely, now it sees to it that Mink get "fairness." Mink just cannot quit now, for when "a Judgment powerful enough to help you, will help you if all you got to do is jest take back and accept it, you are a fool not to."⁴¹ When the money is stolen, he does not despair, waits another three days, gets the money, and proceeds to his destination. With the rusty gun, Mink fulfills his life's objective, thinking "not I've got to but It's got to," for "Old Moster dont play jokes." Thus Mink becomes an agent of justice.

Brylowski raises a question about the function of the episode of Goodhay and his crew who are engaged in the building of a church, and suggests that it might have given Mink an opportunity to give up his plan of vengeance and join with the group in a new integrated life.⁴² This may be relevant in another form, say a fable, but such a denouement is contradictory to the method and mode of *The Mansion*. It is enough that Mink is aware of the futility of his revenge: "What a shame we can't both of us jest come out two old men setting peaceful in the sun or the shade, waiting to die together, not even thinking no more of hurt or harm or getting even, not even remembering no more about harm or anguish or revenge."⁴³ Elmo Howell raises a strong objection to Faulkner's treatment of Mink in *The Mansion* that "by some curious moral inversion, Mink is exalted at the moment of his achievement and goes off to share an immortality with 'Helen and the bishops. . . .'"⁴⁴ To be sure, revenge is a violent justice, after all; it only starts another cycle. But in the context of the novel, it is right that Mink get his revenge. Our sense of justice is satisfied that Flem gets his due; we have a sense of reconciliation at the end of the novel. Mink is free and the divided conflict between man and his destiny is swallowed up in eternal justice.

In his hiding place, which used to be Mink's home, Gavin and Ratliff find Mink "half-knelt blinking up at them like a child interrupted at its bedside prayers."⁴⁵ Mink feels he could rest; his long and unflagging struggle to defend his simple rights at last comes to an end. He comes home to rest, a final rest, as Henry Sutpen comes home to die. So we would walk west,

Mink tells himself, since "that was the direction people always went"⁴⁶ — the inevitable course mortality takes. But face the east, when you lay down, he tells himself. Mink has had a full share of life; the only function of man is "to live, be aware of one's revolt, one's freedom, . . . and if the only solution to the human dilemma is death, then we are on the wrong road."⁴⁷ Mink's spirit becomes one with eternal justice. The land claims him now; he joins

the folks that had the trouble but were free now, so that it was just the ground and the dirt that had to bother and worry and anguish with the passions and hopes and skeers, the justice and the injustice and the griefs, leaving the folks themselves easy now, all mixed and jumbled up comfortable and easy so wouldn't nobody even know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave, right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recordings — Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim.⁴⁸

This is an appropriate way to end the trilogy and the whole of the Yoknapatawpha novels. Going over the Southern history, past and present, Faulkner has sought for the meaning of existence. He has found that the "old verities and truths of the human heart" are still valid and should be relevant to our world. Love and pride and pity and compassion and endurance and sacrifice, these are the spells by which we restore human dignity, which make life meaningful.

If I have made too much of Mink Snopes (or unduly glorified him), it is by no means to indicate that Faulkner upholds or defends criminals or ignores the laws. Mink himself would object to such a notion; he says, "if folks dont put up with the Law, what's the use of all the trouble and expense of having it?" Faulkner has dramatized man's ability to endure and prevail over his destiny in the out-and-out Snopes, which is the very act of faith on the writer's part. Such a reading as Mr. Howell's that there are no morals and only chaos in *The Mansion*⁴⁹ is misleading and a complete mis-

reading of Faulkner's novels considered in this paper. For the effect the novels leave on us is not depressing; it is even exalting, which is the function of tragic literature. In both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Mansion*, our sense of justice is satisfied, though it is accompanied with sadness and wonder, sadness for the loss of a Henry Sutpen, a Quentin, and a Mink, even a Sutpen, and wonder at the way eternal justice works.

As has been mentioned earlier, Faulkner sees man both as "the paragon of animals" and as "a poor, bare, forked animal." Brylowski writes: "As a rational-empiricist, Faulkner has a view of man which embraces the folly, misery, and corruption denying the ideal of man. On the other hand, he cannot and will not surrender his view of man as a being capable of an ideal."⁵⁰ It is this double vision that Quentin should have acquired in order to endure and prevail. Faulkner's understanding of the human condition has led him to seek a form that could present the hard reality of life and man without the pessimism latent in that vision. The tragic form Faulkner has used in his fiction provides human life with "a profound and magical value, inexplicable."

NOTES

1. William Faulkner, *The Mansion* (New York, 1959), p. 6.
2. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York, 1942), p. 295.
3. *The Mansion*, p. 7.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 435.
5. Joseph Gold, *William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse* (Norman, 1966), p. 191.
6. William Faulkner, "Address Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature," *Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters*. ed. James B. Meriwether (New York, 1965), p. 120.
7. William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, IV, iii, 83.
8. "The Nobel Prize Address," p. 119.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
10. Joyce Carol Oates, *The Edge of Impossibility: Tragic Forms in Literature* (New York, 1972), p. 3.
11. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York, 1964), p. 101.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
13. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, 1963), p. 319.
14. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Greenwich, Conn., 1965), p. 28.
15. *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 46.
16. *The Mansion*, p. 264.
17. *Go Down, Moses*, p. 259.
18. *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 357. My italics.
19. Cleanth Brooks, p. 304.
20. *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 376. My italics.
21. A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London, 1934), p. 74.
22. *Go Down, Moses*, p. 259.
23. *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 373.
24. Richard B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* (New Haven, 1959), p. 137.
25. *Go Down, Moses*, p. 361.
26. Frederick J. Hoffman, *William Faulkner* (New Haven, 1961), p. 35.
27. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV, vi, 224-25.
28. William Faulkner, "Albert Camus," *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, p. 113.

29. Elmo Howell, "Mink Snopes and Faulkner's Moral Conclusions," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. LXVII (Winter 1968), pp. 18-19.
30. A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 41.
31. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York, 1959), p. 242.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
34. *The Mansion*, p. 29.
35. *The Hamlet*, p. 270.
36. *King Lear*, IV, iv, 24.
37. *The Mansion*, pp. 5-6.
38. Cleanth Brooks, p. 232.
39. *The Mansion*, p. 354.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
42. Walter Brylowski, *Faulkner's Olympian Laugh* (Detroit, 1968), p. 210.
43. *The Mansion*, p. 94.
44. Elmo Howell, p. 14.
45. *The Mansion*, p. 432.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
47. See note 28.
48. *The Mansion*, pp. 435-36.
49. Elmo Howell, p. 21.
50. Walter Brylowski, p. 221.

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