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Affirming the Void:
Futilitarianism in the Fiction of Conrad and Faulkner

by

Philip Loring Hutcheon

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Wilfred D. Dowden

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I

INTRODUCTION: AFFIRMING THE VOID

"There's no lack of void."--Waiting for Godot

In the first of his interview sessions at the University of Virginia in 1957, William Faulkner was asked the following question about his famous 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech in relation to his fiction: "Mr. Faulkner, in your speech at Stockholm you expressed great faith in mankind . . . not only to endure but prevail. . . . Do you think that's the impression the average reader would get after reading The Sound and the Fury?" Faulkner responded to this question, involving a book he had written nearly thirty years earlier, in terms very similar to those of the Nobel Prize address:

I can't answer that because I don't know what the average reader gets from reading the book. I agree that what I tried to say I failed to say, and I never have had time to read reviews so I don't know what impression people might get from the book. But in my opinion, yes, that is what I was talking about in all the books, and I failed to say it. I agree with
you, I did fail. But that was what I was trying to say—that man will prevail, will endure because he is capable of compassion and honor and pride and endurance.¹

The concluding cluster of honorific abstractions, heart-stirring if somewhat tautological (man will endure because he is capable of endurance), is, of course, virtually a carbon copy of the section in the Nobel Prize address wherein Faulkner expresses, as he does here, his belief that the existence of these lofty qualities in mankind has always been his theme.² His emphasis on his "failure" to communicate his theme must be considered in the light of his continually reiterated contention that all writers inevitably fail to say what they are trying to say;³ in other words, we should recognize the limited significance of this line of defense when Faulkner uses it in his own behalf. The real question that confronts us, along with the hypothetical "average reader," is whether or not we believe that Faulkner does in fact attempt in The Sound and the Fury and the most important of his other novels to present the theme developed in the Stockholm speech.

This problem is comparable to the one created by the discrepancy between our reaction to The Sun Also Rises and Hemingway's statements about the
theme of that novel. Hemingway wrote to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at Scribner's, that the book was a tragic novel whose point was, "as the Biblical lines say in part, that 'the earth abideth forever.'"4 Philip Young has expressed what is surely the reaction of most readers to Hemingway's contention by observing that "the strongest feeling in the book is that for the people in it . . . life is futile, and their motions like the motion of the sun of the title (as it appears to our eyes): endless, circular, and unavailing."5 It is my conviction that Faulkner's major fiction, particularly his great novels of the late twenties and thirties, characteristically presents a view of the world and of man's life in it that is essentially the same as the philosophy which Young imputes to Hemingway's novel.

There is an arresting contrast between Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech and the famous passage in A Farewell to Arms wherein Frederick Henry proclaims his abhorrence of eulogistic abstractions in reaction to an Italian ally's assertion that their efforts in combat "cannot have been done in vain":

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice, and the expression in vain. We heard them, sometimes standing in the rain
almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.6

Hemingway's outlook changed over the course of his career—indeed, by the time he came to write The Old Man and the Sea he was expressing a faith in mankind's invincibility similar to the attitude of Faulkner's Stockholm speech—but the pessimistic outlook of his outstanding early novels has generally been recognized and proclaimed. On the other hand, there is a surprising amount of controversy among critics about the philosophy that emerges from Faulkner's books.7 This problem is similar to the ongoing debate among Conradians about the ultimate meaning of Heart of Darkness, and whether the book is essentially pessimistic or whether Marlow's
charitable lie to Kurtz's Intended at the end of the tale redeems the world of the novel. Hemingway's simple style, of course, tends to encourage a less diverse range of interpretations; in Conrad and Faulkner, conversely, there is almost always a high degree of moral ambiguity, and fuel for critical controversy has been found throughout their fiction. It is my intention to resolve insofar as I am able to some of the existing controversies about the philosophical positions taken by Conrad and Faulkner in their most important works, and to show in so doing that these two supreme modern novelists view the human condition in an essentially similar way. The futility of life as we live it in this world strikes me as the fundamental theme of the major work of both Conrad and Faulkner, and I am very much disturbed by the tendency of many interpreters to stress "affirmation" or "redemption" as the dominating ethos of this fiction. If we examine the work objectively I think we can see clearly (as clearly, at least, as the abundant ambiguity allows) that in their indisputably central novels Conrad and Faulkner, while often rendering individual persons in ennobling ways, continually undercut the value of human endeavor and finally project a vision of the world which is very far removed from any affirmation
of mankind's worth.

There is, to be sure, a popular school of thought which holds that all literature must be somehow ultimately affirmative of human worth if it is to be any good, and presumably this kind of thinking had something to do with the attitudes displayed by Hemingway and Faulkner in their comments about The Sun Also Rises and The Sound and the Fury. Leslie Fiedler subjects this popular philosophy to ridicule while stating categorically his own antithetical position in the typically uncompromising title essay of his No! in Thunder:

... the problem of the nonacceptance of serious fiction lies ... in the fact that to fulfill its essential moral obligation, such fiction must be negative. There is a dim sense of this in the popular mind, reflected in the over-the-bridge-table charge that certain great books, whatever their merits, are too 'morbid' and responded to by the publishers' defensive assurances on the book jackets: "But beneath the shattering events of that book ... lies a passionate affirmation" or "This is a book of great themes, of life, death and regeneration, of the dignity and triumph of man." Like the more particular religious assurances of another age, these vaguely pious assertions are rooted in a profound distrust of art itself; and before them I am moved to
resentment and anger... I run... before the book whose jacket assures me that the author is committed to affirmation, or love, or a belief in the dignity of man.9

The title of Fiedler's volume is taken from a passage wherein Melville remarks of Hawthorne's work that it says "No! in thunder"; Melville also says that "all men who say yes, lie,"10 and clearly this is the position that Fiedler adopts. He is particularly incensed by Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, which he would relegate to the "high school anthologies," and by the movement of Faulkner's later fiction away from the honest confrontation with futility to "the shapeless piety of A Fable" and "the maudlin falsity of The Town."11 Fiedler's denunciation of Faulkner's later works is perhaps the most emphatic statement of this kind, but his argument that the attitude of the Stockholm speech is transplanted to Faulkner's fiction with disastrous results has not gone unsupported. Some critics, it is true, notably Olga Vickery, have endorsed even A Fable with few reservations: indeed, it was one of the supreme ironies of Faulkner's career that a novel like A Fable, very possibly his worst, should receive the acclaim conferred by the winning of the National Book Award when his much greater earlier novels had been sadly
neglected, and one of them, Absalom, Absalom!, perhaps
now most commonly called his finest, had been "hailed"
at the time of its publication as "the last blow-up
of what was once a remarkable, if minor, talent." ¹²
Fiedler's denunciation of A Fable has, happily, more
or less carried the day by now, and the book is
commonly dismissed as, in Robert Penn Warren's phrase,
"a colossal failure and a colossal bore." ¹³

These are harsh terms to apply to a work of the
writer now widely considered our greatest, yet as
Fiedler reminds us, this kind of blunt assessment of
Faulkner's later failures must not cause us to forget
the "terrible impact" of his earlier triumphs.

Returning to The Sound and the Fury, which he calls
"the exemplary American novel, perhaps the greatest
work of fiction produced in the United States in the
twentieth century," ¹⁴ Fiedler describes the vision
projected in this novel in terms (from which I take
my title) very different from those of Faulkner's
response to the collegiate interviewer:

"... it is no accident that its title comes
from the bleakest passage in Shakespeare, or
that its action begins inside the mind of an
idiot. The point is insisted upon bluntly,
almost too obviously: life is a tale told by
an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying
nothing. Here is the ultimate negation, the
Hard No pressed as far as it will go. Yet "nothing" is not quite Faulkner's last word, only the next to last. In the end, the negativist is no nihilist, for he affirms the void. Having endured a vision of the meaninglessness of existence, he retreats neither into self-pity and aggrieved silence nor into a realm of beautiful lies. He chooses, rather, to render the absurdity which he perceives, to know it and make it known. To know and to render, however, mean to give form; and to give form is to provide the possibility of delight—a delight which does not deny horror but lives at its intolerable heart.\(^{15}\)

Fiedler's emphasis on Faulkner's confrontation with the "horror" of human existence neatly suggests the affinities of Faulkner's fiction with the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness*. Just as Fiedler places The *Sound and the Fury* at the center of modern American fiction and its tradition of affirming the void, so have other major critics placed Conrad at the fore of the twentieth-century preoccupation with this same theme. Hillis Miller, in *Poets of Reality*, uses Conrad to introduce the exploration of nihilism in modern literature as it is developed by the era's major poets. "In novel after novel," says Miller, "Conrad presents characters driven to passivity or death by a confrontation with darkness."\(^{16}\) Just as Fiedler sees Faulkner striving "to render the absurd—
ity which he perceives, to know it and make it known," so Miller sees that "the aim of all Conrad's fiction is to destroy in the reader his bondage to illusion, and give him a glimpse of the truth, however dark and disquieting that truth may be." Murray Krieger in *The Tragic Vision* accords to *Heart of Darkness* a position of archetypal importance in the development of the modern novel's vision, comparable to the status assigned to *The Sound and the Fury* by Fiedler. The vision which Krieger calls tragic is virtually inter-changeable with what Fiedler calls affirming the void. Krieger's book seems to me especially important because it systematically examines the tendency (which Fiedler merely ridicules) to demand affirmation of serious literature; in essence Krieger's argument is that the vision of modern tragic literature diverges widely from the traditional notion of tragedy as ultimately uplifting and affirmative. Since Krieger's theories about the vision of the modern novel are so clearly connected with what I shall be saying about the vision of Conrad and Faulkner, I shall discuss *The Tragic Vision* in some detail at this point.

The terms "tragic" or "tragedy," of course, bring with them all sorts of complications now. In the introductory chapter to his recent collection of essays, *The Idea of Comedy*, W. K. Wimsatt offers the
generalization that "literary works for the stage in the Western tradition have tended to divide more clearly than other kinds (epic poems, lyrics, or prose stories) into those which are sad and painful (tragedies) and those which are funny and pleasant (comedies)." 19 Wimsatt goes on to remark that in comparison with comedy the genre of tragedy has been relatively unexplored, except for the topic of catharsis, since the age of Aristotle. It is perhaps proof of this contention that such a flimsy definition, encompassing all that is "sad and painful," could be offered in even the most introductory way as a demarcation of tragic content. This kind of vague inclusiveness is just what Krieger wars against when he notes the "general lay usage of 'tragedy' or 'the tragic,' which somehow broadens out to synonymity with catastrophe, the sorrowful, that which stems from or leads to 'pessimism.'" 20 Conceding that the term tragedy itself is or ought to be "well enough defined in our critical tradition" as a result of the labors of Aristotle, Krieger declares that this outmoded traditional definition refers mainly "to an object's literary form," and then he launches his own effort to find for the tragic "a meaning beyond that of Aristotle." 21

Krieger's effort begins with a fundamental
recognition that the pronouncements of the Poetics, helpful as they may be in the interpretation of classical tragedy, are not adequate for our attempts to understand the tragic genre in the modern age. Like playwright Arthur Miller, whose defense of Willy Loman as a bona fide modern tragic hero includes the expressed conviction that Aristotle's rules governing the stature of tragic figures are no longer useful, and that, indeed, "there is no more reason for falling down in a faint before his Poetics than before Euclid's geometry," Krieger contends that

... the reader who as a modern is obsessed with notions of the tragic ought in a way to find himself disappointed on turning for the first time to Aristotle's celebrated definition in the Poetics. We have been so accustomed to doing this treatise deference—and rightfully so from a formalistic point of view—that we can no longer approach it freshly and feel the letdown that should be ours as we glance over its superficial formal prescriptions that are to pass as a description of so sacred and revered a literary genre. All this about magnitude and completeness and catharsis—are these to do justice to the profound complex of metaphysical and psychological forces which the tragic unleashes? Or so, at least, we ought as moderns to say superciliously. But probably we should have expected no more than this from the Poetics. Perhaps it was not for the Greek
theoretical consciousness—even in as late a representative as Aristotle—to be as self-consciously aware of the disturbing implications of the tragic mentality as it was of the formal requirements which transcended, or rather absorbed, this mentality and restored order to the universe threatened by it. ²³

This restoration of order at the end of traditionally tragic works is "evidence of the need in tragedy to have dissonance exploded, leaving only the serenity of harmony behind," ²⁴ in accordance with the Aristotelian dictate that fear and pity must not merely be aroused but also ultimately purged. This final purgation is the essential formal element which Krieger finds most definitive of ancient or classical tragedy, and, not incidentally, most irrelevant to modern efforts to deal with the tragic. Accordingly, Krieger evolves his own definition of tragic vision based not on formalistic aesthetics but on the argument that "a view and version of reality" emanating from a "tragic visionary" attains more impact and importance in modern tragic works than any formal resolution of conflicts. This view of reality is essentially a negativistic one, based on a realization of "the complete futility of human existence." ²⁵

Krieger acknowledges that the modern tragic vision which he describes was born inside classical
tragedy, but he argues that in the ancient tragedies "the vision needed the ultimate soothing power of the aesthetic form which contained it--of tragedy itself--in order to preserve for the world a sanity which the vision itself denied."\(^ {26} \) Modern tragic literature, conversely, does not deny the truth of the tragic visionary's experience, and therefore dispenses with the artificial preservation of the appearance of sanity and order--the world is shown to be insane and chaotic. Whereas classical tragedy can "witness all that befalls its hero without sharing in his disavowal of the meaning of our moral life,"\(^ {27} \) modern novels putting forth the tragic vision do share in the disavowal of the meaning of our moral life, and as a result the "unresolvable tension" between the tragic visionary and the ethical norms of the insane world in which he lives replaces "tragedy's more sublime catharsis as the principle of aesthetic control."\(^ {28} \) Finally, concluding his formulative introductory chapter, Krieger offers a judgment which strikes me as utterly crucial in the development of literary criticism: he indicates his own belief in the superiority of the modern tragic vision to traditional tragedy, posing "fearfully and even unwillingly" the question of "whether we have not been beguiled by aesthetic satisfactions and whether the utterly stripped
tragic vision may not after all be less illusory than
the fullness which shines through tragedy." 29

Krieger briefly couples Conrad and Faulkner when
he makes a minor point of comparison between the
tragic visions of Heyst of Victory and Hightower of
Light in August. Faulkner, however, is given very
little discussion in The Tragic Vision. Among
Faulkner's works only Light in August is dealt with,
and that by way of exit, since it is offered at the
end of Krieger's book as an example of a novel which
transcends the tragic vision; indeed, Light in August
points the way to Krieger's subsequent book, The
Classic Vision, wherein he discusses that novel in
more depth along with other literary works which in
his view exemplify a retreat from the tragic's
confrontation with extremity. Naturally Krieger
could not possibly deal with all important modern
novels in his earlier book, yet it seems to me that
to omit totally a discussion of such novels as The
Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! from a
consideration of tragic literature in the modern
era is a serious shortcoming. Krieger's excellent
discussion of Conrad also leaves room for additional
development of his own critical theses, especially
since he elects to discuss (in addition to Heart of
Darkness and Lord Jim) Victory instead of Nostromo,
the novel which such varied Conradians as Leavis, Warren, and Guerard have all placed at the top of Conrad's achievement. 30

In his concluding chapter Krieger addresses himself effectively to the problem of critics' tendency to find affirmation where there is none. One important example of this errant tendency pointed out by Krieger is R. W. B. Lewis' overly optimistic reading of *Billy Budd*. Lewis thinks that in his last book Melville recanted of the overwhelming pessimism of such earlier novels as *Pierre* and *The Confidence Man* and "salvaged the legend of hope both for life and for literature." "There will be salvation yet," Lewis concludes, for Billy's "Christlike nature of innocence and love can save the world." 31 But in fact, as Krieger suggests, Billy cannot save either himself or the world, and Melville's equation of Billy's role with that of Christ is really an undercutting element of parody. That Billy cries out on the brink of death, "God bless Captain Vere!" in no way exonerates Vere or any of the others who have participated in the drumhead-court proceedings through which Billy has been condemned. The echo of Christ's "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" is clear enough, but it is also almost surely ironical, for there is nothing to suggest that Melville himself
forgives or that he promises salvation; indeed, he seems to suggest precisely the opposite (that is, that there will be no salvation) when "Starry" Vere falls before a cannonball fired from the symbolically named French warship, the *Athéée*. As Edgar Dryden points out, "the appalling truth of Billy Budd is ... that innocence is destroyed by the forces of chaos and darkness..." The novel, Dryden concludes, does not signal a late mellowing on the author's part: "Herman Melville's vision remained apocalyptic to the end."32

The temptation to subvert bleak novels like *Billy Budd*, *The Sound and the Fury*, or *Heart of Darkness* into affirmations is not merely a problem for critics; it can also palpably damage fiction itself, as Fiedler argues that it damages Faulkner's later works. A prime case in point unmentioned by Krieger is Zola's *Germinale*, the novel often ranked as the greatest of the Rougon-Macquart series. Zola, of course, is mainly identified with naturalism and a deterministic view of the human condition; he perhaps as much as any other writer moved the modern novel away from the comic tradition of the nineteenth century, and he must be credited along with Hardy for achieving what Alan Friedman has called the "turn" of the novel to its characteristically
twentieth-century preoccupation with futility and meaninglessness. In view of his importance in the establishment of this theme which the novels of Conrad and Faulkner carry forward, I shall discuss at this point and at some length the problems posed by the ending of *Germinal*.

In this novel, after five hundred pages documenting in heartbreaking detail the desolate lives of impoverished Montsou coal miners, and after repeated emphasis on the failure of these oppressed workers to improve their living conditions by strike or by riot, Zola's pessimism yields to a final affirmation of an impending destruction of the unjust social structure of the world, which will be replaced overnight by the flowering of an equitable social order. Having accumulated a vast body of evidence which appears to prove that all efforts to procure human happiness are inevitably doomed to futility, Zola appends to it a sunny conclusion which stands in stark contrast to the spirit of the bulk of the novel. As the protagonist, Étienne Lantier, leaves for Paris at the end of the novel to join in the socialist organization there, Zola abandons the ironic detachment which has characterized his earlier treatment of Étienne and partakes of the same facile optimism which he has previously held up to scorn:
... one morning, confident in their solidarity, millions of workers against a few thousand idlers, they would take over power and be the masters. Ah, then indeed truth and justice would awake! Then that crouching, sated god, that monstrous idol hidden away in his secret tabernacle, gorged with the flesh of poor creatures who never even saw him, would instantly perish. 33

The notion that truth and justice can be suddenly awakened and that the massive problem of unfair distribution of wealth symbolized by the avaricious mine will "instantly perish" is, of course, foolish and simplistic. Compare the foregoing inflammatory passage with Zola's earlier deflation of the similar rhetorical excesses of the zealous cleric, Ranvier:

The Church, he declared, was on the side of the poor, one day she would cause justice to triumph by calling down the wrath of God on the iniquities of the wealthy. And that day would soon dawn, for the rich had put themselves in the place of God and were ruling without him, having wickedly usurped his power. . . . Within a week the world would be cleansed of evil-doers, the unworthy employers would be hounded out and the true kingdom of God would come, where each man would be rewarded according to his worth and the law of labour would be the foundation of universal happiness (p. 373).

When Zola speaks of Ranvier's "contempt of mere facts" (p. 374) it is obvious that the author here
rejects the facile promise that the injustices of the world can be righted "within a week."

While clearly ridiculing Ranvier's reliance upon otherworldly intervention to resolve human problems, Zola also consistently undercuts the efforts of secular man to ameliorate his condition. It is Étienne who raises the possibility of a non-religious answer to the miners' dilemma. "Why do you need a God and a paradise to be happy?" he asks. "Can't you make your own happiness in this world?" (p. 163) This question becomes the central issue of the novel and, indeed, as Hillis Miller has observed, the point of departure for much of the literature of the twentieth century. 34 Zola tries at the end of Germinal to provide an affirmative answer to this question, but no affirmative answer can be supported by the weight of the evidence in the novel.

In his quest for the means which will bring about justice and happiness in this world, Étienne encounters essentially two non-religious alternatives. One is offered by the International, the union represented by Pluchart, who puts his faith in solidarity: by banding together, he proclaims, the workers of the world can overthrow the ruling classes. The second alternative is the anarchism of Souvarine, the displaced Russian revolutionary who believes that the
only way to improve the lot of man is to "raise fires in the four corners of the cities, mow people down, wipe everything out, and when nothing is left of this rotten world perhaps a better one will spring up" (p. 144).

The alternative offered by Pluchart and the International, which Zola seems to endorse at the end of the novel, is so forcefully debunked earlier that its ultimate viability is far from convincing. When the miners suffer a wage reduction Étienne urges them to go on strike and invites Pluchart to encourage them to join the International. In his speech Pluchart reveals himself to be as rhetorically unrealistic as Ranvier: the priest's proclamation that the world could be rid of wrongdoers "within a week" is only slightly amended in Pluchart's claim that if the International were to be supported by the workers "the whole world would be conquered in three years" (p. 242). Unlike Ranvier, Pluchart elicits a show of enthusiasm, but when the Montsou miners do go on strike and are forced to call upon the International for its promised aid, the union is scarcely more effective than the Church. Four thousand francs sent by the union provide food for only three days in Montsou. Later Étienne learns of the general failure of Pluchart's movement:
It appeared that the Association, having begun by enrolling the workers all the world over by a vigorous propaganda campaign, at which the bourgeoisie was still shivering in its shoes, was now being undermined and steadily destroyed by internal dissensions through vanity and ambition. . . . Already it was easy to foresee that this mass rising, which for a brief moment had threatened to sweep away the corrupt old world, was simply going to peter out (p. 380).

Since dissension instead of solidarity characterizes the socialist movement, it is difficult if not, indeed, impossible for us to share Étienne's faith at the end of the novel, when he returns to Paris to join Pluchart in "a coming revolution." "This time it would be a real one" (p. 496), thinks Étienne, but there is simply no evidence in the novel to support the notion that "this time" will be any different from the last time.

The alternative presented by Souvarine is equally unsatisfactory. Embittered by the execution of his fiancée in Russia, Souvarine, like the Professor in Conrad's The Secret Agent, dedicates himself absolutely to destruction. When Étienne suggests that the implementation of Souvarine's theories will shed the blood of innocent people, the anarchist responds, "Oh, blood. . . . What does blood matter? The earth needs some blood" (p. 235).
Havelock Ellis apparently imputes this willingness to wipe out the world to Zola as well as to Souvarine:

All are the victims of an evil social system, as Zola sees the world, the enslaved workers as much as the overfed masters; the only logical outcome is a clean sweep—the burning up of the chaff and straw, the fresh furrowing of the earth, the new spring of a sweet and vigorous race. . . .

In fact, however, Zola hardly seems to be supporting this plot for a "clean sweep" of the world when he describes its chief advocate, in the midst of one of his anarchistic harangues, "with his features twisted into a horrible expression, the expression of one of those fanatical religious passions that can exterminate whole nations" (p. 383). Zola's contemptuous tone clearly dissociates the author at this point from the fanaticism which leads Souvarine to the acts of sabotage keying the action at the end of the novel.

It seems clear enough that Zola's vision is not to be identified with Souvarine's, but how are we to interpret the author's relation to Étienne? Of the protagonist one critic aptly observes, "at times, he is Zola's mouthpiece," and another critic seems accurately to account for these times when the visions of author and character coalesce: "Zola and Lantier
step into the novel together on the first page. Although a rift develops when Lantier becomes a demagogue who brings about the death of his friends, the rift is healed and the pair walk out of the novel on the last page. . . ." The problem with this inconsistency is that while the rift exists and Zola is able to view Étienne objectively, the novel is quite credible; but then when the rift heals, Zola sinks into the boggy ground of romanticism and makes claims for the power of solidarity to transform the world—claims which the rest of the novel clearly repudiates.

Critical discussion of *Germinal*, however, perhaps motivated by a desire to combat the popular conception of Zola as an utter pessimist, has tended to accept without objection or even to embrace enthusiastically Zola's unwarranted ending affirmation. Ellis observes that "the very earth itself, in the impressive pages with which *Germinal* closes, is impregnated with men, germinating beneath the soil, one day to burst through the furrows and renew the old world's failing life." Another critic praises the novel's rendering of "regeneration and eternal life," and a third asserts, in what seems to me a drastic perversion of the spirit of the novel, that it is "dominated, in spite of the conflict between workers and
management, by a strong sentiment of human solidarity."
The same critic adds that the novel's "theme is essentially optimistic, suitable to the idea that the Naturalistic novelist wants to arouse interest and inspire reform thereby improving the lot of humanity."\(^{40}\)

For all of these critics the focus at the end of the novel on images of fertility and the renewal of spring seems to promise happiness. Much has been made of the scene wherein Étienne, trapped and near starvation in a mine sabotaged by Souvarine, copulates with young Catherine Maheu, whose emergence into womanhood is represented at this time by her first menstruation. Jean Borie observes of this scene that

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à la suite de la catastrophe, Étienne et Catherine s'uniront, se trouveront l'un l'autre dans une victoire certes ambiguë puisque sans lendemain, mais irréfutable tout de même, car leur union est vraie, authentifiée par la puberté miraculeuse de Catherine. Et, même si Catherine doit mourir, cette semence-là ne sera pas perdu, la fécondation malgré tout aura lieu. . . .\(^{41}\)
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The plain fact, of course, whatever the romantic significance of the copulative act, is that the semen will be lost. The seed will not bear fruit, and Catherine's "miraculous" menstruation is ulti-
mately immaterial. Indeed, the coition borders on necrophilia, since Catherine's death from starvation ensues immediately and is described in the succeeding paragraph. It is common among Zola's critics to conclude that "in the unending conflict between the forces of life and death the sexual instinct stands for life and ensures the continuance of the human race"; however, it is important to see that throughout the novel sex is also the culprit responsible for the fact that "more children were planted than anybody wanted" (p. 120). Indeed, strolling in the fields among copulating couples early in the novel, Étienne laments that the girls are "silly enough to come here at night and make babies, more flesh to toil and suffer," and he concludes that their misery "would never end while they went on getting themselves filled with starvelings" (p. 130). This is hardly an affirmation of the life force.

Furthermore, if we pay attention to the fates of those characters in the novel who are specifically associated with the sexual instinct, we see that the pattern is one of death rather than of life. The lecherous Maigrat falls at the feet of the mob during a riot, dies, and then is castrated by the women whom he has abused; the young lovers Bébert and Lydie are shot by soldiers on the day
following the night of their initial coition; Mouquette, noted for her bounteous bosom and buttocks and for her carefree sexual habits, gives her life in a noble but rather futile sacrifice for Catherine, who dies shortly afterwards in the mine; and Cécile, a daughter of the mine-owners who is on the brink of matrimony, is killed by the oldest of the miners, Bonnemort, in a symbolic act which recapitulates the conflict between the classes and destroys the life of one of the few members of the upper class sympathetic to the plight of the miners. Cécile's death also works against the "fertility myth" that Borie and other critics try to impose upon the novel, for now her fiancé will presumably continue in his barren sexual union with his much older aunt, Madame Hennebeau. Monsieur Hennebeau's reaction to Cécile's death—"This tragedy settled things nicely: better keep his nephew, for fear it might be the coachman" (p. 468)—focuses attention once again on the sordid rather than regenerative uses of sexuality.

The clearest example, though, of the degradation of the fertility symbol is surely in the fate of Catherine's mother, Maheude. Étienne's fascination with her "great pendulous breasts" (p. 92) calls attention to her fertility at the beginning of the novel, but by the end of it she has lost most of the
large family associated with her fertility. She loses her husband to the gunfire of soldiers quelling a riot; two daughters starve to death; and her eldest son dies trying to rescue Catherine. Her own survival and the welfare of her youngest children are threatened, too, at the end of the novel when Maheude returns to work in a mine even though she has been told by doctors that she would "stay down for good" (p. 99) if she went back. The mining company, of course, as Zola ironically informs us,

touched by the poor woman's sad plight, had made a special exception in her favor and allowed her to work underground at the age of forty. But as it seemed difficult to put her back on to tramming she had been given the job of working a little hand ventilator that had been installed in the North Gallery, in those infernal regions under Le Tartaret, where the air never circulated. And there, for ten back-breaking hours, she turned her wheel in a tunnel of fire, roasting in a temperature of over a hundred degrees. She earned thirty sous (p. 491).

Maheude's return to the mine is the proper end of the novel, since it perfectly symbolizes the defeatism which the bulk of the book overpoweringly presents: "She earned thirty sous" would have been an admirable end-line. Zola, however, unwilling to
commit himself to such a high degree of pessimism, has Maheude imply to Étienne that the "big day" (p. 495) of the workers' victory is coming, and then the author uses Étienne as his mouthpiece to describe this impending triumph, for which the novel has certainly not prepared us. When Zola writes that "one morning" all the evils of the world will "instantly perish" he falls back on the same sort of demagoguery that he has so effectively ridiculed earlier in the novel. Zola speaks in a letter of his last chapter as a "flight into the springtime," but the arrival of spring and the renewal of the earth by the sun cannot prevent our awareness that the seasons of rebirth are followed by the fall and by "the hard winter, pitiless for the poor" (p. 355). We are no more satisfied by the facile optimism of Zola's ending than by the sudden appearance of the "golden ray of sun through the hosts of leaden rain clouds" in the last line (of disputed authorship) of The Red Badge of Courage. It has been observed that in Zola's work at times "le propagandiste triomphe de l'artiste," yet the same critic who makes this key admission purports to find in novels like Germinal "une conscience poétique de l'harmonie et de la beauté du monde." In truth it is the very attempt to assert the dominion of harmony and beauty in a world which
countenances the fates of Maheude and her family that sounds the false note at the end of *Germinal*.

We might account for the triumph of the propagandist over the artist at the end of *Germinal* by inverting Eliot's phrase about James and saying that an idea violated Zola's mind, and we could say much the same thing about the later fiction of Faulkner. In view of subsequent critics' tendency to affirm and embrace the optimism of *Germinal*'s conclusion, it is somewhat ironic that James, in "The Art of Fiction" (written in 1888, three years after the original publication of Zola's novel), declared that in Zola's work "we see an extraordinary effort vitiated by a spirit of pessimism on a narrow basis."\(^{45}\)

Equally disturbed, on the other hand, by the shallow optimism bestrewing the ground of English fiction especially, James tells the would-be novelist, "do not think too much about optimism and pessimism; try and catch the color of life itself... If you must indulge in conclusions, let them have the taste of a wide knowledge. Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible—to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize."\(^{46}\)

It is easy enough, and rather amusing, to envision Zola or Faulkner snorting in disgust at the
notion that a writer should be "delicate." Zola's forthright portrayal of the sexual mores of the lower classes shocked many readers when his novels began to appear, and Faulkner's indelicacy in the selection and treatment of his subject matter accounted for the mainstream of adverse criticism about him in the thirties and early forties. But whereas it is still common to take James's view of Zola as an unrefined genius who wrote of great themes compellingly but in a raw and unsophisticated style, Faulkner, like Conrad, has come to be viewed as one of the principal stylistic innovators of the modern novel. Conrad and Faulkner inherit from Zola and the naturalistic tradition an overpoweringly fatalistic worldview and then sharpen its presentation by means of formal ingenuity at times surpassing even James's.

Yet it is almost certainly true that Faulkner would strenuously object to the emphasis placed by James, and by the whole formalist tradition in his wake, on the formal aspects of a literary work over and above the ideas or "conclusions" presented in it. "I think that the theme, the story, invents its own style," Faulkner told a group of interviewers in Japan. "I think that if one spends too much time bothering too much about his style, he'll finish with having nothing left but style." The anti-
ethical position in this problem of the relative importance of form and content has been given perhaps its most emphatic expression by Mark Schorer, who declares in "Technique as Discovery" that "when we speak of technique, . . . we speak of nearly everything." Philip Rahv has attempted to rebut Schorer in "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction," and in "The Ideology of Modernism" Georg Lukacs has reversed Schorer's terms by declaring flatly, "content determines form." Yet the persistence in Faulkner criticism of the formalist attitude exemplified by Schorer is borne out by the recent publication of Joseph Reed's Faulkner's Narrative. Based on an application to Faulkner of the principle that "the means are more remarkable, at least in American letters, than the ends," Reed's book illustrates what can happen when we lose sight of the themes of literature and devote ourselves exhaustively to the analysis of technique: the charts and diagrams and the endless distinctions in narrative devices cataloged by Reed in Faulkner's fiction very quickly lose their power to compel our interest, and we find that when we "wind up having nothing left but style" we have very little indeed.

Unlike Faulkner, who once remarked that "Henry James to me was a prig," Conrad was clearly a great
admirer of James, \textsuperscript{54} and he makes the famous (and quintessentially formalistic) proclamation in the opening line of the preface to \textit{The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'} that "a work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line." Yet Conrad surely violates this rather absurdly pompous dictum many times in the course of his literary career if not, indeed, many times with the course of \textit{The Nigger} itself. James Guetti's controversial \textit{The Limits of Metaphor} attempts to show the limitations and even outright defects of the stylistic complexities employed by Conrad, along with Faulkner and Melville, and numerous other critics have complained of the bundle of ambiguities arising from the often obscure diction and syntax of these writers. Leavis' famous complaint in \textit{The Great Tradition} about the excessive ambiguity of \textit{Heart of Darkness} is remarkably similar to the complaint about Faulkner by Walter Slatoff, who argues in \textit{Quest for Failure} that "Faulkner's fictional world is in many respects even more ambiguous and complex than the real one."\textsuperscript{55}

Faulkner defended himself against charges of this sort by indicating that he sacrificed grace and clarity in his fiction for the sake of inclusiveness. He often compared his work with that of the most
unabashed of all the self-proclaimed "putters-in,"

Thomas Wolfe:

We tried to crowd and cram everything, all experience, into each paragraph, to get the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience, of all the recaptured light rays, into each paragraph. That's why it's hard and clumsy to read. It's not that we deliberately tried to make it clumsy, we just couldn't help it.\(^56\)

Many readers would undoubtedly agree that Conrad's prose is also often "hard and clumsy to read," and Guerard points out that while Conrad was professionally and passionately concerned with style, . . . he was even more concerned, as he insisted repeatedly, with sincerity of expression—which means, among several other things, writing as one feels compelled to write. His highly original structures and methods were, possibly, the ones he would have used under any circumstance. For they were necessary to 'sincerity': they responded to certain peculiarities of temperament and they managed to organize and express the essential Conradian dreams.\(^57\)

It is not made quite clear here why Conrad's particular methods were "necessary to 'sincerity,'" but obviously the critic lays emphasis on "the essential Conradian dreams" over and above the technical means by which they are rendered. Many
critics, no doubt including Guerard, would rank Conrad and Faulkner among the foremost formal innovators in the history of the novel, and a comprehensive study could well be made to compare in depth their technical contributions; my intention, however, is to deal almost exclusively with the philosophical vision of the two writers. Without attempting the staggering task of effectively refuting the formalist credo with respect to form and content, I shall simply say that my own view of this dichotomy is far closer to Faulkner's and Lukacs' than to Schorer's or to Reed's, and that in the fiction of both Conrad and Faulkner the means, however remarkable, seem to me certainly no more interesting and important than the ends.

It is difficult to say with any specificity how much Conrad may have influenced Faulkner in either technical or philosophical matters. The inevitably tricky problem of determining literary influence is compounded in this case by Faulkner's outrageous unreliability (of which the best example is surely the story that Faulkner claimed he had never read *Ulysses* at a time when his bride was claiming that he had made her read it twice on their honeymoon). When Guerard in 1946 asked Faulkner "whether he did not feel he had been influenced by Conrad, and ... *Nostromo* in particular," the author replied, "I can
see why you would think so." Guerard calls this "a good Faulknerian answer"; certainly it is a typically elusive one, and it prompts the critic to avow forthwith his lack of interest in the problem of proving or disproving degrees of influence. Guerard is concerned instead, as I am, with the "kindred temperaments" of the two novelists.

A slightly spectacular example of similarity in conception of character between Conrad and Faulkner is provided at the end of Knight's Gambit when Gavin Stevens tells Chick Mallison how to understand the bereavement of Melisandre Harris, whom Gavin has apparently jilted:

"You can do that here," his uncle said. "In the library. Simply by opening the right page in Conrad: the same waxed red-and-black tiled floor, the ormolu, the faience, the buhl; even to the long mirror which seemed to hold as in a silver dish the whole condensation of light, of afternoon, in whose depths seemed to float, like the lily upon its own concordant repetition, that forehead innocent and smooth of thought, ravaged only by grief and fidelity--".

Direct allusion of this sort is rare in Faulkner, yet another example of it, although involving Eliot rather than Conrad, is helpful in identifying the similar thematic preoccupations of the two novelists. The first chapter of Faulkner's Pylon refers to the
nameless reporter who is the novel's protagonist as "an etherized patient in a charity ward, escaped into the living world"; the allusion to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is clinched when Faulkner uses the poem's title (altered to "Lovesong of J. A. Prufrock") for the title of his own sixth chapter. Later in his career, in devising the arrangement of his stories for the Collected Stories, Faulkner chose the title "The Wasteland" for the section of tales dealing with the arid aura of World War I and its aftermath. Eliot, of course, in the original draft of the poem whose title became the central metaphor for the plight of man in the modern world, had used for his epigraph the passage in Heart of Darkness culminating in Kurtz's gasp, "The horror! The horror!"

And "The Hollow Men," put together from rejected scraps of the ur-Waste Land, has for its epigraph the wonderfully undercutting announcement of Kurtz's death-- "Mistah Kurtz, he dead!"

Again, it is not my purpose to prove in detail the chain of influence from Conrad to Eliot to Faulkner; what I think is important is simply to recognize their common preoccupation with the theme of the Waste Land, with the "etherized patients" and the "hollow men" of the modern world. Septimus Warren Smith of Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway gives this
pervasive theme perhaps its most explicit statement when he returns to England from the battlegrounds of World War I thinking, as if for the first time, that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning." The characters depicted by Conrad and Faulkner in their greatest works continually are forced to face a world which is, if not meaningless, then filled with perverse meanings which horrify when they are confronted honestly. In Conrad's "honest pessimist's universe" and in the barren world typifying Faulkner's magnificent early novels, the void of our lives is relentlessly affirmed. Instead of soothing us with traditional tragedy's formal resolution of conflicts or with the facile optimism ending a novel like *Germinal*, Conrad and Faulkner at their best persist in unveiling the void so that we may see and acknowledge it: in the words of a memorable character created by Flannery O'Connor, a writer obviously stamped in Faulkner's mold, "all of us are damned, but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation."
II

GOOD MEN EVERYWHERE

There are good men everywhere, at all times. Most men are. Some are just unlucky, because most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be. And I've known some that even the circumstances couldn't stop. --Ike McCaslin

The kind of salvation resulting from a recognition of the void is not the only brand in which Conrad and Faulkner deal, and as I turn to the close examination of their fiction I am obliged to admit that both writers offer numerous works, and not all of them clunkers on the order of A Fable, which project a more optimistic view of the human condition. A critic like Fiedler, ready to ride his hobby-horse to hell and back, often drastically distorts meanings in order to satisfy the needs of his own theses; for example, in discussing Faulkner's brilliant short story, "Barn Burning," Fiedler speaks of it as "a tale of unrelieved evil, told through the eyes of a boy watching his criminal father, the aboriginal Ab Snopes, founder of the whole Snopes clan."2

Now "Barn Burning" is indeed told through the eyes of a young boy (Colonel Sartoris Snopes) watching
his criminal father, and it does deal with the evil of the father's arson, but the essential point of the story (which Fiedler ignores completely) is that the boy repudiates his father's villainy and transcends the atmosphere of evil at the end of the story by walking away from his family and into a new life untainted by the past. By informing his father's victim, Major de Spain, of the burning of his barn, the boy shows that he has freed himself from the constraint imposed by the command to "Honor thy Father." Like Huck Finn, another ethical son of a disreputable father, Colonel Sartoris is forced to redefine for himself the moral code by which he will live, and to risk hellfire, perhaps, for the sake of doing the right thing. "Barn Burning" is therefore a classic example of the initiation-story genre, documenting the emergence of independence and manhood in a time of trial.

Nevertheless, we must remember that the protagonist created in this stirring story disappears from Faulkner's fiction thereafter. The story serves not, as one might have anticipated, as a seed for the chronicle of an admirable character, but instead becomes the starting point for the Snopes trilogy centered not around Colonel Sartoris but around his older brother, the demonic Flem Snopes. The story of
Flem's relentless rise to power in Frenchman's Bend (The Hamlet), his extension of dominion to Jefferson (The Town), and his attainment of the pinnacle of prestige (The Mansion) is one of the clearest examples in Faulkner's fiction of the triumph of a character whose personality is totally bereft of the exalted qualities of honor and compassion and pity. Witness the remarkable scene in The Hamlet when Flem is confronted with Mrs. Armstid's desperate plea for the return of five dollars taken from her foolish husband in return for a horse he cannot catch and needed for the sustenance of her struggling family: by offering her instead of the five dollars five cents worth of candy ("A little sweetenin' for the chaps"), Flem reveals completely the utterly ruthless ethos which enables him to rise from abject poverty to the presidency of the Jefferson bank.

Flem's tactics, of course, are combatted throughout the trilogy by virtuous characters, mainly V. K. Ratliff and Gavin Stevens, but their efforts are frequently ineffectual, and even Flem's death at the hands of the vengeful Mink Snopes appears to come about largely as a result of his own willingness to die rather than as a result of effective action taken against him. When Mink comes to kill him at the end of The Mansion, Flem simply sits and waits, watching
as his assailant's gun misfires. Flem makes no effort to flee or to defend himself; eventually Mink's gun fires properly and the little impotent man who has been at or near the center of attention for 1200 pages is dead. Flem's passive acceptance of death, implying that there is nothing worth living for, is a fitting end to a trilogy whose previous volumes have been climaxed by Henry Armstid's being driven mad by one of Flem's profitable schemes (The Hamlet), and by the suicide of Flem's wife, Eula (The Town). \(^3\) Madness, suicide, and unprotected murder aptly characterize the chaotic fictional world which grows from the unfulfilled promise of affirmation in "Barn Burning."

To come to terms adequately, however, with the allegedly affirmative fiction of Conrad and Faulkner one must unavoidably deal with two books: The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Light in August. The former has been called by Paul Wiley the "most affirmative allegory" Conrad wrote,\(^4\) while Faulkner's novel, as I indicated earlier, is seen by Krieger as a significant departure from the tragic vision and an exemplar of the classic (or comic) vision, and has been viewed in a similar way by other major critics, notably Cleanth Brooks.\(^5\) Faulkner's great admiration for The Nigger suggests the special importance of this short
novel in a comparative study of the two writers, and the focus in each of the two books on a Negro outsider who dies after disrupting the community into which he enters adds another aspect of similarity. What I am especially concerned with, though, here as elsewhere, is the question of the final philosophical tone that the books project.

Wiley's traditional reading of The Nigger asserts that the novel is primarily characterized by a "steady vision" and a "heroic tone." The ability of the crew of the Narcissus to withstand the difficulties imposed upon it by the dangers of a violent storm at sea is generally seen as an inspiring example of the triumph of human solidarity over the natural challenges which inevitably beset mankind. It is clear enough that Conrad's narrator at times in the novel, and especially at the end of it, adopts this affirmative or celebrative tone; yet it seems to me very doubtful, whatever Conrad's intentions may have been, that the novel as a whole achieves any kind of convincing affirmation of the transcendent value of human solidarity.

Looking back on The Nigger at the end of his career, Conrad called the book "my effort to present a group of men held together by a common loyalty and a common perplexity not with human enemies, but with
the hostile conditions testing their faithfulness to the conditions of their own calling. . . .--the crew of a merchant ship, brought to the test of what I may venture to call the moral problem of conduct."10 In fact, however, the test that the novel imposes upon the crew of the Narcissus cannot merely be classified as a creation of non-human forces, for it prominently involves the dissension created by two distinctly "human" enemies of solidarity: the ostensibly gold-bricking Negro, James Wait, and the veteran agitator, Donkin. No thorough reading of the novel can be made without taking fully into account the significance of these two characters; their powerful impact upon the rest of the crew and, ultimately, upon the meaning of the book, cannot be ignored.

Of the depiction of James Wait one must say immediately that Conrad does not offer any very penetrating analysis of the implications of this character's racial status. Certainly there is no attempt to examine Wait's relationship to the rest of the crew with the kind of psychological complexity with which Faulkner frequently renders relationships between blacks and whites. Wait arrives on board the Narcissus at night, and we learn with the crew first that he is extremely tall and then that "his eyes and his teeth gleamed distinctly, but the face was undistinguish-
able." This rather obviously suggestive (in view of the book's title) introduction to Wait illustrates the stereotypical account of him that we shall receive throughout the novel. The narrator, along with the rest of the crew, immediately upon clearly seeing Wait refers to him as "the nigger," and shortly thereafter hints at the depths of his own prejudices when he speaks of the newcomer's "pathetic and brutal" face, "the tragic, the mysterious, the repulsive mask of a nigger's soul" (p. 71). And when Wait, descending to stow his gear, puts his head through the galley door to greet the ship's cook, the reaction admitted afterwards by the startled cook typifies the response of the entire crew to the black man: "I thought I had seen the devil" (p. 72).

Wait's disruptive role is heralded shortly after he comes aboard ship by his prodigious fit of coughing, an outburst anticipating the apparent malingering which continually characterizes Wait's behavior and which leads him to be exempted from duties and to exercise a strange and troublesome power over his fellow crew members. His self-appointed caretaker, Belfast, steals a pie for him, and the theft marks the beginning of a series of incidents which shake the "mutual confidence" of crew and officers in matters which, though minor in themselves, prefigure coming crises:
Soon, unofficially, the information was spread about that, should there be another case of stealing, our marmalade . . . would be stopped. Mr. Baker ceased to heap jocular abuse upon his favorites, and grunted suspiciously at all. The captain's cold eyes, high up on the poop, glittered mistrustful, as he surveyed us troop-ing in a small mob. . . . Such stealing in a merchant ship is difficult to check, and may be taken as a declaration by men of their dislike for their officers. It is a bad symptom. It may end in God knows what trouble. . . . (p. 85)

This ominous outlook is intensified by the confusion among the rest of the crew over Wait's ability to dominate them:

All our certitudes were going; we were on doubtful terms with our officers; the cook had given us up for lost; we had overheard the boatswain's opinion that "we were a crowd of softies." We suspected Jimmy, one another, and even our very selves. We did not know what to do. At every insignificant turn of our humble life we met Jimmy overbearing and blocking the way, arm-in-arm with his awful and veiled familiar. It was a weird servitude (p. 88).

It is true that Wait eventually provides the crew with a test in which it shows genuine heroism: trapped below the deck and nearly drowned in the course of a violent storm, Wait is rescued by members of the crew at the risk of their own lives. The
act of rescuing Wait, however, clearly does not dispel the crew's disenchantment over his peculiar status: "We ain't goin' to work this bloomin' ship short-handed if Snowball's all right" (p. 140), cries one crew member, evidently expressing the view taken by many of his fellows. But their demands are flatly rejected by Captain Allistoun. Allistoun, of course, is the figure of authority set against the disruptive influences of both Wait and Donkin, and his behavior is the apparent inspiration for what Conrad and most of his critics have called the loyalty and solidarity which enable the crew to survive the storm. I think, however, that if we examine closely Allistoun's role in the novel, particularly in relation to his crew and especially Donkin, during the crises of the storm and the subsequent abortive mutiny, we must question the degree of solidarity that the novel truly depicts.

Allistoun is characterized in terms which emphasize his role as authoritarian:

He had commanded the Narcissus since she was built. He loved his ship, and drove her unmercifully; for his secret ambition was to make her accomplish some day a brilliantly quick passage which would be mentioned in nautical papers. He pronounced his owner's name with a sardonic smile, spoke but seldom to his officers,
and reproofed errors in a gentle voice, with words that cut to the quick (p. 80).

Counterpointed against this figure of authority, in addition to the challenge presented by the enigmatic Wait, is the disreputable Donkin, whose description in the opening pages of the novel clearly indicates the narrator's utter absence of sympathy for him:

He looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth. . . . He was the man that cannot steer, that cannot splice, that dodges the work on dark nights; that, aloft, holds on frantically with both arms and legs, and swears at the wind, the sleet, the darkness; the man who curses the sea while others work. The man who is the last out and the first in when all hands are called. The man who can't do most things and won't do the rest. The pet of philanthropists and self-seeking landlubbers. The sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company (pp. 65-66).

The loyalty knitting together the Narcissus' company is suggested almost as the novel begins, in Belfast's account of the crew's battle with the members of a rival ship. "If it wasn't for us sticking together" (p. 65) he begins; he leaves the sentence
hanging, but the implication is clearly that the crew's cohesive spirit has carried the day. This spirit is then exemplified when the crew responds immediately and without protest to an unexpected mustering of all hands. Donkin, however, disturbed by what he thinks is a failure on the captain's part to allow the crew its proper period of rest, exclaims prophetically, "if that's the way of this ship, we'll have to change all that" (p. 68). It is characteristic of Conrad's conservative ethos that this "votary of change" is ridiculed by the narrator. The categorical denial of Donkin's worth stamps him in the mold of other quintessential Conradian villains: one thinks of Nicolai, the fiendishly grotesque executioner of Under Western Eyes, or of the barbarous stump-armed Frenchman (a creation right out of Titus Andronicus) who darkens the pages of "Because of the Dollars." When Conrad is out of sympathy with a character he minces no words and makes no effort to evoke compassion on that character's behalf. It is instructive to compare The Nigger with a novel like Melville's White-Jacket, wherein the voices of dissent among the seamen are accorded more respect. In Conrad's novel, conversely, even though Allistoun drives the ship (and presumably the crew) "unmercifully," the nar-
rator shows no sympathy whatsoever for any changes which Donkin might wish to institute.

Donkin's dissatisfaction comes to a head as a result of the near-fatal storm. It is important to see, especially in view of critics' tendency to stress the crew's survival of the storm as an exemplar of human endurance, that many of the other seamen react to the crisis as Donkin does:

They could see the ship putting her side in the water, and shouted all together: "She's going!". . . Men were slipping down while trying to dig their fingers into the planks; others, jammed in corners, rolled enormous eyes. They all yelled unceasingly: "The masts! Cut! Cut!". . . (p. 98)

They all yelled; it is not just Donkin who, instead of exhibiting "courage and endurance," panics and screams to the captain to scuttle the ship. Allistoun, however, refuses to yield to the mass pressure: "They all believed it their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his gray head and shouted 'No!' without giving them as much as a glance" (p. 99). The repetition of all emphasizes the isolation of the captain against the crew. It is ultimately Allistoun's perseverance in spite of the sentiment massed against him, rather than the instinctive solidarity or loyalty of the crew, that inspires the effort to save
the Narcissus.

It is important also to see that the result of saving the ship is not an enhancement of the crew's feeling of loyalty to the captain. Indeed, the effect is precisely the opposite: "We remembered honorable episodes: our devotion, our indomitable perseverance—and were proud of them as though they had been the outcome of our unaided impulses" (p. 126). After this period of exaggerated self-congratulation, the crew begins for the first time to pay serious attention to Donkin's agitations: "We decried our officers—who had done nothing—and listened to the fascinating Donkin" (p. 126).

Coupled with the discontentment over Allistoun's treatment of Wait, Donkin's inflammatory speeches lead the crew to a mutinous confrontation with the captain. When Allistoun demands to know the cause of the turmoil, the members of the crew are at first unable to articulate their complaints, but finally one man speaks up: "'We don't want to go short-handed, sir,' began at last Davies in a wavering voice, 'and this 'ere black . . .'' (p. 150). Allistoun's response to this stammering objection is perfectly illustrative of the true ruling spirit of the novel: the captain does not appeal to the crew's sense of loyalty and solidarity but instead belittles his men and bluntly
threatens to punish them unless their dissent ceases forthwith:

"Enough!" cried the master. He stood scanning them for a moment, then walking a few steps this way and that began to storm at them coldly, in gusts violent and cutting like the gales of those icy seas that had known his youth. "Tell you what's the matter? Too big for your boots. Think yourselves damn good men. Know half your work. Do half your duty... I tell you--your best is no better than bad. You can do no more? No, I know, and say nothing. But you stop your caper or I will stop it for you. I am ready for you! Stop it!" (p. 150)\textsuperscript{17}

Allistoun proves his point by forcing Donkin, who has earlier thrown a belaying pin at him, to replace the pin in its proper place; Donkin's outward defiance is quickly crushed, and his submission to the captain's will symbolizes the crew's capitulation to authority and marks the end of the mutiny. After giving the order for breakfast, to signal the reinstatement of normal order aboard ship, Allistoun observes, "I suppose it's all right now," and then compares his quashing of this disturbance with a previous experience, in a manner that is especially revelatory of the real reason for his success in handling men:

"Years ago, I was a young master then--one China
voyage I had a mutiny; real mutiny, Baker. Different men tho'. I knew what they wanted; they wanted to broach cargo and get at the liquor. Very simple. . . . We knocked them about for two days, and when they had enough—gentle as lambs. Good crew. And a smart trip I made" (p. 152).

Allistoun's remarks must be accorded their full significance when we come to the question of determining what estimate of man is made in *The Nigger*. Echoing Wiley, John Palmer expresses the standard critical reaction to this question when he states that "the essential direction of the novel is optimistic and romantic" and quotes in support of this contention the final sentences of the book:

Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives? Good-by, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fistled with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale.  

Ironically, the similar phrasing of Allistoun's "good crew" and the narrator's "good crowd" calls attention to the very great disparity between the two views of seamen's worth. The narrator's elegiac diction is clearly intended to elevate the crew to a lofty plane and to celebrate its achievement; Allistoun,
conversely, relegates the men he commands to the level of submissive animals whose only apparent virtue is the ability to obey orders after they have been sufficiently "knocked about." Wiley's assertion that the novel is characterized by "steady vision" and "heroic tone" is certainly hard to countenance in the light of these disparate commentaries. Whom are we to believe? Obviously Conrad in commenting on the novel assumed a position very close to his narrator's, and this is the position that has generally been adopted by the novel's critics; Fleischman, however, has perceived that the judgment which the novel makes of the seamen is "a confused and unsatisfactory one." 19 It seems to me that Fleischman's view of the novel's judgment is absolutely correct, and, furthermore, that this confusion in the novel's estimate of man drastically undercuts any attempted affirmation of human capacities. Conrad clearly wishes to affirm in his grandiloquent closing paragraph and in numerous other passages throughout the novel, but this desire is continually counterbalanced by the attitude of Allistoun, a paragon whom we are given no reason to distrust.

Indeed, the "skipper's no fool" (p. 147), as the crew is told by Singleton, the elderly sailor who (though unheeded in this instance when he tries to prevent the confrontation with Allistoun) is generally
viewed by his shipmates as a source of "barbarian wisdom" (p. 63), the possessor of "a sharper vision, a clearer knowledge" (p. 146). Like Allistoun, Singleton shows little respect for the worth of the crew: early in the novel, asked by Donkin "what kind of ship" the Narcissus is, the old man replies, "Ship! . . . Ships are all right. It is the men in them!" (p. 75), implying that the men may not be all right. A voice of gloom throughout the novel, Singleton is most pointedly cynical in his reflections following his unprecedented collapse in the wake of the storm:

Old! It seemed to him that he had broken at last. And like a man bound treacherously while he sleeps, he woke up fettered by the long chain of disregarded years. He had to take up at once the burden of all his existence, and found it almost too heavy for his strength. . . . He looked upon the immortal sea with the awakened and groping perception of its heartless might; he saw it unchanged, black and foaming under the eternal scrutiny of the stars; he heard its impatient voice calling for him out of a pitiless vastness full of unrest, of turmoil, and of terror. He looked afar upon it, and he saw an immensity tormented and blind, moaning and furious, that claimed all the days of his tenacious life, and, when life was over, would claim the worn-out body of its slave (pp. 125-126).
Allistoun's mockery of his men and Singleton's vision of unrest, turmoil, and terror are not the only factors undercutting the jubilation of the novel's final paragraph; the very narrator who speaks so rhapsodically at the end of his tale adopts a much less cheerful position at many earlier points in the novel, and not merely when he is commenting upon the disruptive influences of Wait and Donkin. The bleakest passage in the novel is surely the narrator's account of the arrival of the Narcissus in London; the city is seen as though in a nightmare, anticipating the famous vision of London enveloped in gloom in *Heart of Darkness*. As the Narcissus enters the port,

a low cloud hung before her—a great opalescent and tremulous cloud, that seemed to rise from the steaming brows of millions of men. Long drifts of smoky vapors soiled it with vivid trails; it throbbed to the beat of millions of hearts, and from it came an immense and lamentable murmur—the murmur of millions of lips praying, cursing, sighing, jeering—the undying murmur of folly, regret, and hope exhaled by the crowds of the anxious earth. The Narcissus entered the cloud; the shadows deepened; on all sides there was the clang of iron, the sound of mighty blows, shrieks, yells. Black barges drifted stealthily on the murky stream. A mad jumble of begrimed walls loomed up vaguely in the smoke, bewildering and mournful, like a
vision of disaster (p. 170).

The "vision of disaster," furthermore, can apparently be dispelled only by intoxication: once ashore, the crew heads immediately for a tavern "where men, in fur caps with brutal faces and in shirtsleeves, dispense out of barrels the illusions of strength, mirth, happiness; the illusion of splendor and poetry of life, to the paid-off crews of southern-going ships" (p. 175). Strength, mirth, happiness, and the splendor and poetry of life are merely illusions produced by alcohol; the implication, clearly, is that reality reveals antithetical characteristics. Despite the narrator's closing paragraph and despite Conrad's comments on the novel, we have seen the crew of the Narcissus exhibit weakness, sadness, and despair rather more often than strength, mirth, and happiness, and the composite vision of life which the novel presents is certainly not one of unmixed splendor. The "poetry of life" is offset by a view of life's sordidness, and the result is a novel of unsteady vision, inconsistent tone, and severely qualified affirmations.

Faulkner at times spoke about Light in August similarly to the way in which Conrad discussed The Nigger. At Virginia when he was asked how he "got
the idea for this novel, Faulkner replied,

that story began with Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to find her sweetheart. It was—that was out of my admiration for women, for the courage and endurance of women. As I told that story I had to get more and more into it, but that was mainly the story of Lena Grove.20

Later, when he was asked whether the novel argues "for the acceptance of an inevitably tragic view of life," the author responded,

I wouldn't think so. That the only person in that book that accepted a tragic view of life was Christmas because he didn't know what he was and so he deliberately repudiated man. The others seemed to me to have had a very fine belief in life, in the basic possibility for happiness and goodness—Byron Bunch and Lena Grove, to have gone to all that trouble.21

Critics of Light in August have offered a wide range of analyses of the novel's ultimate philosophical position, some essentially sharing the view that the author expressed and others taking quite an opposite approach. Perhaps the most clearly antithetical positions are those of Cleanth Brooks, who says of the novel that "finally and generally ... the mode is that of comedy,"22 and Alfred Kazin, who says that the novel is characterized by a "profoundly tragic cast."23
Krieger asserts that the novel occupies a somewhat balanced position between tragedy and comedy, but his very inclusion of the bulk of his discussion of it in *The Classic Vision* rather than in *The Tragic Vision* aptly indicates his tendency to stress the importance of the comic Lena Grove/Byron Bunch plot as opposed to Joe Christmas' tragic story. My own view of this problem is that Faulkner significantly distorts the actual impact of the novel when he speaks of Christmas as the only character who "accepted a tragic view of life" and then throws out a blanket statement that "the others" exhibit a commitment to a more hopeful vision. Negativism in a novel can be achieved not merely by showing the characters consciously "accepting" a tragic view of life but also by portraying their lives as barren or futile. Under this category in *Light in August* we would have to include just for starters in addition to Joe Christmas the women in his life--Mrs. McEachern, his frustrated foster-mother; Bobbie, the prostitute who introduces him to sex and then spurns his love; and Joanna Burden, the spinster who is his last "lover" and who dies by his hand. Some provision must also be made for the attitude exemplified by such a character as Percy Grimm, Joe's murderer, who surely does not belong in the "courage and endurance" camp when we
come to the question of determining what qualities the novel's characters embody. That the novel does dramatize the qualities of courage and endurance in some characters I would certainly not deny; whether, however, the novel is primarily a dramatization of these qualities is not so clear.

Curiously enough, earlier in the same interview session wherein he described *Light in August* as "mainly the story of Lena Grove," Faulkner also countenanced apparently without objection a question referring to the ambiguous racial status of "the central character Joe Christmas"; Faulkner said in response, "I think that was his tragedy--he didn't know what he was, so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was. That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic, central idea of the story..."²⁵ It is somewhat exasperating to encounter the author on one page speaking of Joe Christmas as the center of the story and on the next of Lena Grove in that position; possibly he is only trying to describe the attitude that dominates the individual story of each character (as his choice of "story" instead of "novel" may suggest). Nevertheless, when Faulkner goes on to speak of the decision that Joe is a Negro as a "rationalization" made by "the people that destroyed him,"²⁶
this simple recognition that Joe is indeed destroyed by others is enough to remind us that the novel's indictment of humanity cannot be accurately dismissed as merely the acceptance of a tragic view of life by a single character.

Faulkner's treatment of Joe Christmas is much different from Conrad's handling of James Wait. Whereas Conrad's narrator never appears to transcend the crew's stereotypical view of Wait as a devilish "nigger," Faulkner is specifically concerned with attacking the racial bias which is the key to Joe's destruction. Joe's lack of identity is in Faulkner's terms "the most tragic condition a man could find himself in,"\(^{27}\) and, indeed, Kazin has called Joe "the most solitary character in American fiction,"\(^{28}\) but it is important to see that Joe's solitude is not something for which he alone bears responsibility but is instead largely the product of his mistreatment by other people. Some readers may have felt that Faulkner himself believed that Joe's "black blood" destroyed him, but Brooks rightly warns against confusing the author's vision with that of Gavin Stevens,\(^{29}\) who propounds metaphorically the whole rather ludicrous theory that the vicissitudes of Joe's conduct are determined by the fluctuating dominance within him of his "black" or "white" blood. Faulkner's comment that
Stevens' theory was merely a rationalization suggests the author's detachment, and the same sort of narrative distance is evident in the account of Joanna Burden's attitude toward Joe while they are sexual partners, and, afterwards, in the account of the townspeople's attitude toward Joanna's death.

Joanna has dedicated her life to the cause of civil rights and is directly involved in providing funds for Negro education; logically it might be assumed that she of all people would treat Joe as a human being. However, when they become sexually involved with one another we see clearly that Joanna participates very strongly in her culture's racial bias:

Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania, her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another of such formally erotic attitudes and gestures as a Beardsley of the time of Petronius might have drawn. She would be wild then, in the close breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!" \(^{30}\)

Joanna treats Joe exactly as the society does: he is
the potent black phallus. By reducing him to a mere sexual organ and then by pestering him to proclaim publicly his Negro-ness by enrolling in one of the colleges she supports, Joanna denies Joe's need and desire to be recognized first and foremost as a human rather than as a Negro. She thus furthers his alienation, set in motion originally by the brutal religiosity of his foster-father and by the betrayal of his first lover, and eventually this alienation leads him to kill her. After he does kill her, we get another clearly ironical account from the narrator (an apparent persona for Faulkner), this time of the town's reaction to the discovery of the murdered woman:

They crowded to look down at the body on the street with that static and childlike amaze with which adults contemplate their own inescapable portraits. Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward (pp. 271-272).

The ultimate symbol of this diseased attitude—in which we clearly discern the utter absence of compassion
and pity—is of course Percy Grimm, the civilian-soldier who kills and castrates Joe Christmas. In the famous interview exchange wherein Faulkner spoke of Grimm as a "Nazi Storm Trooper" created before the author had ever heard of one, he answered the question about whether the type of person exemplified by Grimm is "prevalent" in the South by saying that "he's not prevalent but he's everywhere."31 In Light in August Grimm's attitude prevails at least insofar as to allow him to complete the destruction of Joe Christmas. One of the cohorts in helping Grimm chase Joe down is sickened by the sight of the castration, but the vomiting vigilante symbolizes only Jefferson's after-the-fact moral awakening: there is no effective action taken to prevent Grimm from administering his rough justice on Joe.

Only Byron Bunch and Gail Hightower try to help Joe; both men are also deeply involved in the story of Lena Grove, the birth of whose child is counterpointed against Joe's death to underscore the structural duality which is the basis of the novel. Byron, who drags Hightower out of his death-in-life and into action on behalf of both Joe and Lena, is an important character who has often been neglected unfairly by those critics who have seen the novel as simply tragic. Byron's kindness and compassion make of his
life an exemplar of the concept of community which Faulkner offers as the alternative to Joe's isolation. John W. Longley, Jr., in The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes, makes a provocative comparison between the tragic plights of Christmas and Stephen Dedalus; one is almost obliged to complement the comparison by noting the equally important similarities between Byron Bunch and Leopold Bloom.

Like Bloom, a Jew in a Catholic nation, Byron is an outsider. His social life prior to the arrival of Lena Grove has consisted of leading the Sunday choir in a country church thirty miles from Jefferson; otherwise he has spent "six days of every week for seven years at the planing mill, feeding boards into the machinery" (p. 42). His co-workers speculate that Byron works the extra hours for the overtime pay, but Faulkner's narrator insists on a cryptic stance: "Perhaps this is the reason," he acknowledges, but then he undercuts the acknowledgment by adding, "man knows so little about his fellows" (p. 43). Byron is known in any depth only by Hightower, the failed minister whom Byron has befriended while the rest of Jefferson has ostracized him.

Byron's solicitude for Hightower is duplicated in his attitude toward Joe Christmas. Just as Bloom
takes it upon himself to look out for the alienated Stephen Dedalus, so Byron attempts to take care of Joe. Byron and Joe are introduced on the same page at the beginning of chapter two, when Byron recalls how they met, three years prior to the present of the novel. Faulkner immediately sets them in sharp contrast with each other. It is Saturday, and the custom is for all employees at the planing mill except Byron to quit work at noon. Christmas, in his first day on the job, approaches Byron when the others leave and, with no word of greeting, demands, "how much do they pay for overtime?" (p. 30) Immediately perceiving that Christmas is impoverished, Byron responds to the virtual stranger with a gesture which illumines his own good will: "Almost with the thought Byron was offering his own pail, the action as reflex as the thought" (p. 31). Similarly, Bloom offers Stephen a cup of cocoa to commemorate their communion in "Ithaca." Christmas, however, spurns Byron's gesture of friendship: "I ain't hungry. Keep your muck" (p. 31). Joe's contempt where gratitude would normally be expected shows at once his denial of humanity and even of self; later in the novel his refusal of food recurs as an emblem of his isolation. Like Joe's foster-mother, Byron tries unsuccessfully to breach the wall that Joe has built around himself.
Byron's efforts on Joe's behalf continue later. Byron is drawn into Joe's defense, after the murder of Joanna, by his sympathy for Mrs. Hines, Joe's grandmother and the long-suffering wife of the insane Doc Hines whose bigotry is largely responsible for their grandson's tragic life. Again there is a parallel with Bloom, who sympathizes with the unfortunate Mrs. Breen while the rest of Dublin is having a loud laugh at the expense of her daft husband. Also like Bloom, who speaks up for tolerance and love in the "Cyclops" episode when those around him are decrying England and fanning the flames of chauvinism, Byron tries to prevent Joe's slaughter when the rest of Jefferson is calling for him to be lynched on the basis of the testimony of a single highly unreliable witness. And just as Bloom appears to become Joyce's spokesman when he says that what he believes in is love, so Byron seems to speak for Faulkner when, in asking Hightower to join in the crusade to save Joe, he appeals to his friend's essential goodness:

"I mind how I said to you once that there is a price for being good the same as for being bad; a cost to pay. And it's the good men that can't deny the bill when it comes around. They can't deny it for the reason that there ain't any way to make them pay it, like a
honest man that gambles. The bad men can deny it; that's why don't anybody expect them to pay on sight or any other time. But the good can't" (p. 369).

Byron and Hightower fail to save Joe; they also meet the "bill" that Lena Grove presents, and with her they are more successful. Byron's immediate sympathy and care for the pregnant Lena recall Bloom's concern for Mrs. Purefoy during her troubled childbirth, and the balance of life and death in Light in August is comparable to the balance achieved in Ulysses when the birth of Mrs. Purefoy's child sets off the funeral of Bloom's friend which opens the novel. Byron's relationship to Lena, however, becomes much more than that of a concerned friend; it is finally closer to the relationship between Bloom and Molly.

Byron's union with Lena in the last chapter of Light in August is hardly a romantic conquest that would befit a traditional hero, but it is a triumph nonetheless. The humorous furniture dealer who narrates the chapter belittles Byron repeatedly: he recalls thinking, when Byron with Lena and the baby in tow first asks for a ride in his truck, that he "couldn't imagine anybody, any woman, knowing that they had ever slept with him [Byron], let
alone having anything to show folks to prove it" (p. 470). Like Bloom, Byron has his manhood called into question and is subjected to excessive ridicule because of his apparent inadequacy to his buxom mate; however, just as Bloom begins to assert his manhood at the end of *Ulysses*, so Byron insists at the end of *Light in August* that Lena recognize and return his love for her.

C. Hugh Holman argues that Lena will not return this love fully; Byron, he says, at the end of the novel "earns the right to go with Lena, like another Joseph going with Mary, as she continues her journey on into Tennessee, but without real hope of other pleasures than those of serving her." Holman's argument, typical of one-sided interpretations of the novel, seems to me to reveal a flagrant misreading of Faulkner's final chapter, a conclusion which is, in effect, a celebration of sexuality reminiscent of Molly's soliloquy in the "Penelope" chapter concluding *Ulysses*. When his wife, in bed with him, interrupts the furniture dealer's comical account of his traveling companions to ask what it was that Byron "desperated himself up" to do to Lena, he responds, "I just showed you once. You ain't ready to be showed again, are you?" (p. 472): he is not talking here
about anything that Joseph ever did with Mary. Somehow Holman fails to see that what Byron finally does is what, according to the narrator, Lena has been waiting for him to do all along—he asserts his manhood and exploits his sexuality as a means for establishing closeness and communication.

Ridiculous as he seems when Lena sends him away with a scolding after his first fumbling effort to come to her bed in the truck, Byron nevertheless by perseverance achieves his goal. "I done come too far now," he tells Lena, coming back to her in the truck and adding, "I be dog if I'm going to quit now" (p. 479). Byron has indeed come a long way from the planing mill, and, having glimpsed a life more meaningful than that of feeding boards into machinery all day long, he stubbornly refuses to relinquish his vision. He does not sweep Lena off her feet and carry her away; his declaration is not much more dramatic than Bloom's request that Molly fix his breakfast in the morning, but it is sufficiently forceful to elicit from Lena the response he seeks. "Ain't nobody never said for you to quit," (p. 479) she tells him, implying that she is now ready to accept Byron as her husband rather than as her servant. Her declaration also is perhaps not as clear
or dramatic as "I love you" would be, but the meaning it conveys is much the same as Molly's emphatic final "Yes" at the end of Ulysses. One implication of Molly's affirmative burst is that Bloom will now perhaps end the seven years of barrenness in his marriage; Byron, outgrowing his case of near-terminal virginity, will at last participate in a family with Lena and her son and will presumably fulfill High-tower's prophecy (p. 356) by engendering Lena's next child. Byron ends his isolation before it is too late: unlike Joe Christmas, suggests Faulkner, Byron will not die a lost and lonely man.

Longley's analogy notwithstanding, there is nothing in Joyce's "jocosserious" book that quite equals the tragic intensity of Joe Christmas' life and death; ultimately Light in August is closer to the tradition of contrapuntal novels like Anna Karenina and Bleak House which counterpose the promise of happiness of one group of characters against the utterly tragic fate of another character or characters. The final union of Byron and Lena works to much the same effect as the marriage of Levin and Kitty or that of Esther Summerson and Alan Woodcourt: the tragedies of Joe Christmas and Anna Karenina and Richard Carstone are to some extent
offset by the happy fruitful marriages of these other important characters. What this extent may be is uncertain. Longley thinks that Byron and Lena represent Faulkner's "small side bet on mankind," and that their happy ending bears out the author's repeatedly expressed conviction that man will endure. Minter, also taking up the terms of the Nobel Prize address, acknowledges that Lena endures but adds emphatically that "she does not prevail." Her story, he contends, "does not balance the bleakness of the stories juxtaposed to it." Kazin's similar view is based on the observation that within the novel "man never thinks of changing the world."

Kazin's critique closely resembles much of the commentary on *Bleak House*, of which it is commonly said that Dickens fails to justify his comic ending because he presents a world that is for the most part miserable without offering any program for transforming it into a better place. Now I am not at all convinced that a novelist is under any obligation to show his characters engaged in changing the world or even in thinking of doing so, but the very fact that we as readers can plainly see that the world of the novel needs changing suggests that there is something other than "affirmation" going on. Dickens does in fact present the alternative of the "circle
of duty," the admirable ethos (suggestive of Candide's resolution to cultivate his garden) which enables Esther and Alan to improve the world around them, and Faulkner's Byron Bunch obviously lives by a similar code even if he would not be able to articulate it. Yet the depiction of these small ameliorative circles does not—and, it seems to me, is not intended to—purge us of the horrifying effect achieved by the accompanying portrayal of crushing poverty and the stagnation of the legal system in Dickens' novel or the denial of human identity in Faulkner's. Shaw's famous remark that he read Little Dorrit and became a socialist indicates the negativistic impact of another novel which ends in a happy marriage of central characters. Dickens does not show man changing the world controlled by the absurd Circumlocution Office, but, like Shaw, we can read the novel and see the need for changing the world it depicts. And the world of Light in August as well is certainly in need of change. Even if we believe the self-contradicted statement by its author that the novel is "mainly the story of Lena Grove," and even if we recognize (as we should) the courage and endurance displayed by several characters involved in her story, we are still forced to see the absence of the equally exalted qualities of compassion and pity in the general
treatment of Joe Christmas.

I do not dispute, then, that there is affirmation of human capacities in *Light in August*; I simply warn against distorting that affirmation to the extent that the later Faulkner distorted it in talking about his books. In response to a question about *Intruder in the Dust* he once said, "People can always be saved from injustice by some man. ... Anyone can save anyone from injustice if he just will, if he just tries, just raises his voice." What we have seen, however, in *Light in August* is that Byron Bunch and Gail Hightower and Mrs. Hines cannot save Joe Christmas from injustice, and their failure is illustrative of the central pattern of Faulkner's major fiction. It is true that in *Intruder in the Dust* he presents the saving of a falsely-charged Negro (Lucas Beuchamp), and that in *The Reivers* he shows a young boy pointing the way to a new life for a fallen woman (Everbe Corinthia); yet these stories hinge on the implausible elements of a seventy-year-old woman running around in the middle of the night digging up bodies, and of a whore—with-a-heart-of-gold who is ready and able to "go straight" the moment she gets a chance. I do not wish to join in the sweeping condemnation of these tales that critics of Fiedler's intolerant ilk have made: I think that they are good
stories—heartwarming, if you will—but certainly it must be admitted that they are also sentimental in a way that Faulkner's earlier fiction is not.

The earlier fiction does not embody the belief that "anyone can save anyone from injustice if he just will." In Sanctuary Horace Benbow makes a concerted effort to save Lee Goodwin; he fails, and Goodwin is killed by a mob. In "Dry September" Hawkshaw attempts to save a Negro falsely accused of rape; he fails, and the Negro is lynched. In the somewhat similar "Pantaloons in Black" the relatives of the Negro protagonist, Rider, attempt to save him after he kills a white man in self-defense; they fail, and Rider is left to face certain death.

Examples abound of Faulkner's preoccupation with injustice and failure, and it is understandable why Slatoff said of Faulkner that his primary reaction to the world is "outrage," and why Malraux spoke of his obsession with the "irreparable."\(^\text{40}\)

It is true that in Faulkner's fictional world there are always good men like Bunch and Benbow and Hawkshaw. There are "good men everywhere," as Ike McCaslin says, and occasionally these good men transcend their circumstances, as when Byron overcomes the disadvantages of his slight build and sober personality to win Lena. Usually, however, Faulkner's
good men do not transcend their circumstances, and none of his characters is a better example of this tendency toward failure than Ike McCaslin himself. A major figure in Faulkner's effort to invest the Negro with dignity, Ike is a white Southerner who proclaims of black people, remarkably, that "they are better than we are." He even renounces his inheritance because it is tainted by his forebears' ownership and abuse of slaves. Yet in the crucial confrontation in "Delta Autumn" when Ike, now in his seventies, is brought face to face with a Negress who has been his nephew's paramour, he betrays himself revealingly. "You're a nigger!" he blurts out, and then he urges her to marry a man of her own race, eliciting a caustic response: '"Old man,' she said, 'have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love!'" (p. 361)

It is likely that Ike has indeed forgotten something about love, for his wife had refused herself to him sexually since shortly after their marriage in punishment for his repudiation of the estate in which she had wished to share. Ike's movement is thus the opposite of Byron's, from union to barrenness, and his acquiescence to his wife's refusal illumines his essentially passive nature.
In response to interviewer Cynthia Grenier's statement that Ike was her favorite among Faulkner's characters because he rejected his tainted inheritance, Faulkner said, "I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people."

Ike should have been more affirmative; he was good, but he was not good enough, and he is guilty of the same prejudice which he has tried to combat. "Sometimes guilt seems to inhere to the very fact of being alive in a world where 'nobody is good enough,'" observes Guerard in summarizing the themes of Conrad's major work. To say that nobody is good enough is something of an overstatement when applied to the fictional world of either Conrad or Faulkner, for there are exceptions (Captain Allistoun, Byron Bunch), but in the main the generalization holds true. Good men are present in almost all the works, but goodness is no guarantee of happiness or success or even of endurance. In The Rescue and "Because of the Dollars" Conrad is at great pains to show that a good man cannot exercise his goodness sufficiently to control the adverse circumstances affecting his life and the lives of those he loves; both works deal with the murder of his friends which the protagonist is helpless to prevent and which appear to change his view
of life from an optimistic one to a tragic one. "The science of living consists in seizing every chance that presents itself,"\(^44\) says Marlow at the end of *Chance*, echoing Strether's advice to Little Biliham in *The Ambassadors*; but the facile plot twists that are employed in Conrad's novel and in shorter tales like "Falk" to produce happy endings for the chance-takers are far from convincing.\(^45\) "Woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!" declares Heyst at the end of *Victory*\(^46\)—and then he promptly commits suicide, signalling the failure of his own life and love. Suicide and murder play a remarkably conspicuous role in Conrad's world as they do in Faulkner's, and few characters in either are shown to place their faith in life and love; those who do, as I shall show in subsequent chapters, seldom reap any palpable reward.
III

THE ILLUSION OF VICTORY

The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. —*The Sound and the Fury*¹

Heyst's suicide at the end of *Victory* is an appropriate indication of the irony conveyed by that book's title; Faulkner, interestingly enough, has a short story called "Victory" which deals with the degeneration of a World War I hero into a vagrant, and another story called "Mountain Victory" which recounts the ambush and slaughter of a Confederate officer and his faithful slave shortly after Appomattox and the apparent end of the Civil War.² The fondness of both writers for undercutting our expectations with perverse titles³ exemplifies their recurring obsession with forcing us to see the hard and bitter reality beneath the illusory happiness or fulfillment that the world appears to hold out to us. Critics of such novels as *Heart of Darkness* and *The Sound and the Fury* have frequently overstressed the illusory affirmation and neglected to acknowledge fully the harsh reality; special attention to key
passages and to the endings of these novels, along with Lord Jim, "Youth," and As I Lay Dying, will demonstrate, I think, the predominance in each of these major works of a vision of life's futility.

The germ for both Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim is present in Conrad's early story, "An Outpost of Progress." Again the title is clearly ironical, since there is nothing in the story that could by any imaginative leap be construed as "progress."

Kayerts and Carlier are products of Western society who, when left to their own devices in a primitive African trading post, are unable to cope with the problems imposed by their isolation from the culture they have known. Both men are inspired by propaganda which speaks in "high-flown language" of "the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and . . . the merits of those who went about bringing light and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth." Reading this sort of propaganda leads the two men to form grand illusions about how they will be remembered:

Carlier said one evening, waving his hand about, "In a hundred years, there will be perhaps a town here. Quays and warehouses, and barracks, and--and--billiard rooms. Civilization, my boy, and virtue--and all. And then, chaps will read
that two good fellows, Kayerts and Carlier, were the first civilized men to live in this very spot!" (p. 21)

The lofty dreams of Kayerts and Carlier anticipate the noble goals that Kurtz will carry with him when he first journeys into the Congo and the heroic ambitions that Jim will take to Patusan. In each case the isolated individuals believe that they will be able to spread progress by imposing the conventions of their own culture upon the natives of the primitive regions, but the fates which befall Kayerts and Carlier signal the beginning of Conrad's recurrent theme of exposing the failure of this dream.

When Kayerts and Carlier learn of slave-trading in the vicinity of their outpost, they proclaim their dismay, but the prospect of deriving personal profit from the exchanges leads them to agree to suppress the knowledge of the illegal activity in their report to the Managing Director of the Great Civilizing Company. Thus the willingness to reap the benefits of slavery supplants the idealism of spreading the virtues of civilization. Instead of "humanizing" the natives, Kayerts and Carlier begin to exploit them and even to speak of destroying them: after Carlier shoots a hippopotamus in the river he is unable to secure it and it winds up in the hands of the natives,
whereupon "Carlier had a fit of rage over it and talked about the necessity of exterminating all the niggers before the country could be made habitable" (p. 30).

Carlier's advocacy of "extermination" is a remarkably explicit anticipation of Kurtz's scrawled addendum to his report to the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs: "Exterminate all the brutes!" are Kurtz's last words of advice about the best policy to pursue in the Congo. The tendency to revert to brutal instincts exhibited by Kurtz is explained by Conrad at some length in his analysis of Kayerts and Carlier:

Few men realize that their lives, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion. But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of being alone of one's kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one's thoughts, of one's sensations—-to the negation
of the habitual, which is safe, there is added the affirmation of the unusual, which is dangerous; a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilized nerves of the foolish and the wise alike (p. 17).

The "civilized nerves" of the foolish Kayerts and Carlier are tried to such an extent that they are reduced to bitter bickering over trivialities; eventually the paranoid Kayerts murders his co-pioneer and then commits suicide to avoid facing condemnation from his society in the person of the Managing Director who, after a prolonged absence of many months, happens to arrive at the outpost just after the moment of crisis between its two occupants—it is one of the incredibly absurd coincidences with which Conrad dramatizes the chaos and insanity of life in this world.

The inglorious ends of the pair manning the outpost of progress are another anticipation of Kurtz's decline; unlike Kayerts and Carlier, however, Kurtz is not shown to have been a fool and a failure in his pre-pioneering existence but is instead one of the "wise" men who also fall prey to the evils of isolation in a primitive society. An artist, a humanist, and a would-be reformer of the exploitative
procedures in the African ivory trade, Kurtz represents the best that the Western world and its civilization have to offer. Lacking the fortune to merit the hand of his fiancée (the Intended), Kurtz goes to Africa with a dream of achieving personal greatness through public service and ends by becoming the most nefarious ivory-grubber of them all, displaying the heads of those who have opposed him on the posts of his encampment in the Congo. It is this decline of the man of high aspirations and abilities into an obsessive figure who shuts himself off from human contact that is the essential pattern of tragedy in Conrad's greatest novels, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo*.5

The more ambiguous role of Marlow is set alongside the clearly tragic fates of Kurtz and Jim in the first two of these three novels. Early critics of *Heart of Darkness* tended to see Kurtz and the brutality he epitomizes as the center of the novel: Edward Garnett, for example, speaks of "the central figure, the sadistic Kurtz" and of "the ironic exposure of the white man's civilized inhumanity."6 More recent critics, however, including Zabel, Hewitt, and Guerard, have insisted "that the story is not primarily about Kurtz or about the brutality of Belgian officials but about Marlow as narrator."7
The importance attached to Marlow's role by these critics naturally magnifies the importance of his action at the end of the novel when he confronts the Intended after Kurtz's death. Having been sent into the Congo to rescue Kurtz, Marlow had arrived to find him on the verge of death and had witnessed his last words, "The horror! The horror!" (the significance of which will be examined in more detail below). When he encounters the Intended, however, Marlow tells her that the dying man's last words were her name. This charitable lie is the center of a considerable amount of critical controversy addressed to the issue of determining how far, if at all, Marlow's benevolently intended act of deception offsets the brutality of Kurtz.

The arguments offered by Thomas Moser and Lillian Feder can serve to illustrate one side in the controversy: citing Marlow's observation early in the novel that he detests lies for their "flavor of mortality," these critics contend that the falsehood which Marlow tells the Intended at the end of the novel represents "a kind of spiritual death" for him. This interpretation clashes sharply with the view held by many critics that the lie at the end is a transcendent act by means of which Marlow reaffirms his humanity, threatened previously by
his contact with the Congo and Kurtz.

Ted E. Boyle argues that Feder and other critics make the novel seem more pessimistic than it really is when they interpret the lie as a degrading act. Contending that Marlow's action is morally correct when he elects to preserve the Intended's "saving illusion" by telling her the lie, Boyle groundlessly laments that among the novel's critics only Walter Wright has recognized this allegedly redemptive aspect of Marlow's behavior. Here Boyle obviously overlooks a number of similar interpretations, including the one offered by the estimable Jocelyn Baines, who asserts in his critical biography that Marlow's lie brings out the radical difference in the effect that the wilderness has on Kurtz and on Marlow. Kurtz succumbs totally to the power of the wilderness and only emerges momentarily at the end to full awareness of his experience, whereas Marlow is forced to make a limited concession to the wilderness but preserves his moral being because he is not "hollow at the core." The irony that it is morally right for Marlow to make this concession is an essential ingredient of Conrad's view of life. In a corrupt world one is bound to commit a corrupt act. Tragedy would have been the result of telling the truth; the "salvation of another soul" was at stake. Marlow was in a situation for which he was not to blame, but was compelled to violate one of his most strongly held principles and to acknow-
ledge mortality in order to preserve the "saving illusion" of another. . . . 10

It is ironic, in the face of all this controversy, to note David Daiches' assertion that within the world of the novel with regard to the lie "the question of the morality of Marlow's conduct does not arise." 11 Certainly the question does arise for numerous critics, but their manifest failure to agree on the answer to that question is evidence of the ambiguity of Marlow's lie. And this final ambiguity is hardly an anomaly in the novel: throughout Marlow's narrative we are reminded that things are "not very clear" to him. Indeed, at the outset of Marlow's tale the frame narrator recognizes immediately that the listeners aboard the Nellie are "fated to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences," 12 and this inconclusiveness is very much in evidence when Marlow begins to recount his visit to the Intended:

I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went (p. 119).

"I don't know" is a very frequent refrain with Marlow. Even at the end of the novel, Daiches argues, "Marlow is shown as himself not fully understanding
the meaning of his experience."\textsuperscript{13} His failure to understand the meaning of his experience of course complicates our effort to understand it, for he suggests no clear-cut grounds for judging the morality of his action. Yet, without imposing our own criteria and making a moral judgment of that action, I think that we can still say something fairly definitive about the significance of the lie within the world of the novel with respect especially to Kurtz's recognition of the horror and Marlow's reaction to that recognition.

The relative importance of Kurtz's cry and Marlow's lie has been examined by Leonard F. Dean.\textsuperscript{14} In his account of critical efforts to place \textit{Heart of Darkness} in the pattern of traditionally tragic literature with its ultimately uplifting effect, Dean (who obviously read a different set of essays from those read by Boyle) notes the general tendency among critics to assume that the novel "achieves an effect which is profoundly affirmative rather than despairing and that Conrad therefore belongs at his best in the great tragic tradition."\textsuperscript{15} Dean's reaction to this tendency is to say that Conrad does indeed try to make a place for himself in the tragic tradition, but that in \textit{Heart of Darkness} he is only partially successful in doing so. Dean uses King
Lear as the archetypal tragedy and argues by analogy with it to show where Conrad's novel diverges from the traditional tragic pattern. Starting with a standard Aristotelian reading of the play, which argues essentially that "when Lear awakens near the end of the play, he is shown to be purged of his initial arrogance"\(^\text{16}\) and that therefore the play is finally affirmative of harmony in the world to which man willingly submits, Dean then goes on to contend that the purgation in *Heart of Darkness* is less meaningful because it is vicarious: it comes, he says, through the observer (Marlow) in his relations with the Intended rather than through the tragic hero, Kurtz, who does not end by affirming the moral order of the universe.

Dean is right about Kurtz and right about the vicariousness of any purgation Marlow may achieve, but the analogy with *King Lear* seems to me fundamentally wrong-headed. Shakespeare, who knew "little Latin and less Greek" according to Jonson, did not write his plays in accordance with Aristotle's dictates, and *Lear* seems to me finally a very different thing from the celebration of order that the Aristotelian critique would make of it. The moment of purgation in *Lear* occurs not at the end of the play but in Act IV, when the once-proud old king
learns to pity the "poor naked wretches" who people his land; having shown this moment of illumination, however, as Herbert Weisinger points out, Shakespeare adds an eventfully tragic final act, "completely cancelling the calming and cleansing effect of the tragic vision already attained with Lear's self-awareness." The most poignant event of Act V is the senseless death of the innocent Cordelia, who is hanged because the order sent to stop her execution arrives moments too late. The defeat in combat and death-bed repentance of the overreaching Edmund amount to little more than plot contrivances; his characterization, so forceful and fascinating at the beginning of the play, is sadly neglected at the end, with the result that his transformation is totally unconvincing and the effect of his purgation virtually nil. As for Lear, he ends not with a humble reconciliation to the order of the universe but with a bitter exclamation against the insanity of a world which has deprived him of his daughter and with a welcome for the death which at last releases him from the rack of that tough world.

What this reading of Lear suggests is that the real vision projected by the play is very close to that which Krieger identifies as the modern tragic vision; instead of the "calming and cleansing effect"
of traditional tragedy, we are left with a sense of life's futility. From this futilitarianism Weisinger concludes that "Shakespeare paid for the cost of the tragic vision by its loss. He looked long and directly into the face of evil; in the end he shut his eyes," having "lost his confidence in the harmony of creation." Given this critical bias, it is understandable why Weisinger berates Macbeth, concluding that "tragedy may be much more and much different from what I have been suggesting here, but one thing it cannot be and that is a tale signifying nothing." If, however, we do not insist that tragic works must affirm "the harmony of the universe," then we are apt to say that Shakespeare had his eyes as wide open as ever when he wrote the last act of Lear and the nihilistic "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech in Macbeth. Indeed, we are apt then to say quite the opposite of what Weisinger says; we are apt to say that Shakespeare's tragedies are most powerful and convincing when they assert the dis-harmony of the universe. And the same possibility presents itself in our consideration of Heart of Darkness: we are apt to see Kurtz's vision of the horror as more striking and significant than the saving illusion at the end of the novel.

When Krieger identifies Heart of Darkness as
"an ideal archetype of the literature of the tragic vision," and identifies Kurtz as the archetypal tragic visionary, he suggests that Kurtz's recognition of the horror occupies in the novel a position of importance comparable to the "tomorrow" speech in Macbeth; when we recall that Krieger believes the modern tragic vision to be based on a realization of the complete futility of human existence, we see that he would make the two speeches essentially equivalent. Macbeth's elaboration of the nihilistic creed is of course much more definitive than what we may read into Kurtz's cry; no less estimable a critic than Lionel Trilling has attested to the difficulty of saying precisely what Kurtz's cry signifies. Yet if we examine the context of Kurtz's last words I think we can see that they are not meant as a repentance for his reversion to brutality or as an affirmation of the moral order of the world, but rather as a despairing summing-up of the human condition at large. Marlow's account, at least, suggests that there has been little purgation of the demonic strain which has led Kurtz into his abysmal state. Observing that the expression on Kurtz's face at the moment of his pronouncement was not one of contrition but of "somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair" (p. 114),
Marlow then goes on to tell us what he thinks "the horror" means:

Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up—he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth. . . . It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! (pp. 115-116)

Kurtz's "affirmation" clearly is not of the existing moral order, if Marlow can be trusted (and we are given very little reason at this point to distrust him), for it is spoken "with a vibrating note of revolt." His "moral victory" consists not in having seen the horror in his own failure to fulfill social norms but rather in affirming the void, in seeing and expressing the horror of "the whole universe, . . . all the hearts that beat in the darkness."

There is much evidence to suggest that Kurtz's success in recognizing the horror of human existence
is the only kind of victory that can be won within the world of the novel; other apparent victories are merely illusory and ultimately meaningless. Marlow, for example, speaks at the outset of his tale of "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves" (pp. 31-32). Marlow says that colonization is "not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (p. 32), but then adds ambiguously that "what redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . ." This kind of redemption, however, does not seem to be borne out at all in the novel, since what Marlow encounters in his trip into the Congo after Kurtz is simply one example of exploitation after another, culminating in the confrontation with Kurtz himself, whose life is the greatest example of the abandonment of the hallowed "idea." The "unselfish belief" in that idea is never dramatized; instead Marlow tells of atrocities and of absurdly wasteful expenditures of energy: the French gunboat shelling the coast where there are no signs of life (p. 41), the "objectless blasting" of a
cliff that was "not in the way or anything" (p. 43), the excavation of a "vast artificial hole" the purpose of which is "impossible to divine" (p. 44), and the ludicrous misadventures of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, whose mission is directed not at spreading progress and light to the dark places of the earth but simply at wresting the wealth of Africa away from its native inhabitants. The outcome of the expedition's foray into the wilderness is left somewhat unclear; Marlow reports that "long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead," but, he adds, he knows "nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals" (p. 66).

Marlow's marvelously sardonic estimate of human worth here is quite typical of his attitude throughout the novel. On the other hand, it may appear that he is able to save himself from worthlessness by the efficient execution of his own duties: he himself says at one point that "what saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency" (p. 31). Yet the clearest example of devotion to efficiency depicted by Marlow is the chief accountant of the shipping company's station in the Congo, who preserves an impeccable appearance and keeps his books in "apple-pie" order while ignoring completely the abundant distress around him. Hearing the cries of a native in his
death throes, the chief accountant complains, "the groans of this sick person . . . distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate" (p. 47). The salvific value of "efficiency" is certainly called into question by this caricature, and we are forced to ask how meaningful Marlow's own achievement is when he "rivets" himself to his own work.

Marlow himself undercuts the importance of any such achievement when he sums up his reaction to the atrocities and the absurdities and the confrontation with Kurtz in a remarkably pessimistic generalization about life:

Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets (p. 115).

This passage, which prefaces Marlow's explication of Kurtz's cry, is utterly crucial because it shows that the tragic vision is not merely Kurtz's but is Marlow's as well. Life is futile, he says; even knowledge comes too late to do us any good. Whereas Heyst ends Victory with the admonition that we must learn to put our trust in life and in love while we are young, Marlow indicates that whatever we learn
is ultimately useless to us. Kurtz puts his trust in a life of action and adventure and turns into a despicable animal; his Intended puts her faith in love and ends in isolation cherishing a groundless illusion of fidelity.

When Marlow elects to preserve that illusion with his lie, he salvages his "humanity" in a way that Kurtz does not; I question, however, how meaningful that salvation is within the world of the novel. We must recall that Marlow is recounting his entire narrative, dealing with a series of actions completed in the past, so that he offers his bleak definition of life after he has told the lie—the telling of it has not transformed the futile purpose of life into something meaningful. Furthermore, the blatant symbolism of the novel's final paragraph seems clearly to reinforce this impression of final futility: just as Marlow finishes saying that it would have been "too dark—too dark altogether" (p. 124) to have told the truth to the Intended, the frame narrator closes the novel by observing the "black bank of clouds" and the waterway "under the overcast sky," apparently leading to "the heart of an immense darkness" (p. 125). The implication seems to be that Marlow's attempt to avoid the darkness, or any attempt of that sort, is foredoomed to failure since darkness
inevitably envelops us. It is possible for the critic to impose from outside the novel a moral judgment which says that Marlow's lie sheds light on our need to reaffirm the values of civilization repudiated by Kurtz; within the novel itself, however, as within Macbeth, no final restoration of tranquility can impose itself as forcibly as the foregoing expressions of nihilism. Once Macbeth has told us in his unforgettable way that life signifies nothing, once Kurtz has seen the horror of the whole universe, and once Marlow has told us that life is a "mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose," any ending affirmation is hopelessly undercut.

It is not surprising that the pessimistic vision of Heart of Darkness should spill over into Lord Jim, for Conrad wrote the shorter novel while working on the longer one. The use of Marlow again as a narrator adds to this bleakness; his view of life's futility is essentially repeated in Lord Jim, as I shall show. Marlow stands in relation to Jim much as he stood in relation to Kurtz: Jim, like Kurtz, is a romantic engaged in a quest for personal glory, and, as with Kurtz, we learn relatively little about his personal reflections; it is Marlow who provides most of the probing analysis of character. As in Heart of Darkness, Marlow emphasizes his own inability
to see things clearly: he speaks of Jim as "the heart of a vast enigma" (p. 204), and asserts that "it is impossible to see him clearly" (p. 206). "I affirm nothing" (p. 206) is the stance that Marlow assumes at the outset of the letter to his friend telling the details of Jim's demise; yet although we, too, cannot hope to see Jim with perfect clarity, I think that we must conclude from the account of his life and death that what the novel affirms is the void of human existence.

In his famous essay, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors," Ian Watt points out that by describing Jim in the first sentence of the novel as "an inch, perhaps two, under six feet"—six feet being a traditional hallmark of heroic stature—Conrad suggests immediately that Jim will fall just a bit short of heroism. 24 A more blatant suggestion of the same idea is conveyed by the title's ironic coupling of the aristocratic and the diminutive. Both the frame narrator and Marlow follow up this suggestion early in the novel by their highly ironic accounts of the disparity between Jim's dreams of glory and his actual comportment in times of crisis. The frame narrator lays bare the vivid fantasies which Jim, training for a career at sea, indulged in:

He saw himself saving people from sinking ships,
cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half-naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shell-fish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men--always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book (p. 5).

Unfortunately, these grand illusions are unjustified. The paragon fails to seize the chance for displaying his "unflinching" heroism: a mercy mission is engendered by the collision of a coaster and a schooner, but when hands are called for to man the rescue boat, Jim undergoes a sort of paralysis and fails to participate in the mission. The narrator's juxtaposition of Jim's vision of himself "saving people from sinking ships" with his failure to act thus creates an ironic index of Jim's character and foreshadows his subsequent desertion of the Patna.

Like the frame narrator, Marlow sets off with his own irony the spuriousness of Jim's self-image. Though he is drawn to admire Jim for stubbornly facing the Court of Inquiry after deserting the Patna, Marlow is at the same time perfectly aware of the cowardice of Jim's act. Lamenting his own desertion and another missed opportunity for glory, Jim rather
enviously refers to the Patna's third engineer, who stayed aboard because he died there, apparently when his "weak heart" gave out. "Weak heart! ... I sometimes wish mine had been," says Jim, and Marlow's reaction is a telling one: "Do you?" I exclaimed with deep-rooted irony" (p. 66). Jim misses the irony, but the obvious implication is that Jim does have a weak heart. Accordingly, Marlow is frequently sarcastic when Jim attempts to mitigate the shame of his act. "There was not the thickness of a sheet of paper between the right and wrong of this affair," claims Jim, but Marlow by way of response unsympathetically inquires, "how much more did you want?" (p. 79)

Despite all of this ironic undercutting of Jim's stature, however, Marlow takes the young man's problems very seriously, and when he shares them with his old friend, the entomologist Stein, we are made to see the tragic dimensions of Jim's ordeal. When Marlow goes to see Stein to ask his advice about how to help Jim, the German is examining a butterfly; he calls it "the masterpiece of Nature," and Marlow invites an explanation by exclaiming, "Masterpiece! And what of man?"

"Man is amazing, but he is not a masterpiece," he said, keeping his eyes fixed on the
glass case. "Perhaps the artist was a little mad. Eh? What do you think? Sometimes it seems to me that man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him; for if not, why should he want all the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass?" (p. 126)

Stein's account of man is perhaps intended to recall Hamlet's cynical speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern beginning, "what a piece of work is man!" and climaxed by, "man delights not me" (II.iii.315-320). It is not clear that Conrad intends for us to make this connection, but Stein himself specifically makes another connection with Hamlet when he learns from Marlow about Jim. Recognizing at once from Marlow's description that Jim's problem is that "he is romantic," Stein is then asked by Marlow, "what's good for it?"

He lifted up a long forefinger. "There is only one remedy! One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure!" The finger came down on the desk with a smart rap. The case which he had made to look so simple before became if possible still simpler—and altogether hopeless. There was a pause. "Yes," said I, "strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured, but how to live."

He approved with his head, a little sadly as it seemed. "Ja! Ja! In general, adapting the
words of your great poet: That is the question.

"How to be! Ach! How to be" (p. 129).

With this variation on the theme of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, Conrad (through Stein) puts his finger on the crux of what has come to be called the existential dilemma. How are you to live in a world in which you "find you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough are, or not clever enough?" (p. 130) Stein's solution is his famous pronouncement that we must "in the destructive element immerse" and "follow the dream . . .--ewig--usque ad finem" (p. 131), a dictate which has been pointed out by virtually every critic of the novel. Yet often overlooked is Marlow's reaction to this notion of following one's dream:

The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn—or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide; but it was a charming and deceptive light, throwing the impalpable poesy of its dimness over pitfalls—over graves. His life had begun in sacrifice, in enthusiasm for generous ideas; he had traveled very far, on various ways, on strange paths, and whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. In so far he was right.
That was the way, no doubt. Yet for all that, the great plain on which men wander amongst graves and pitfalls remained very desolate under the impalpable poesy of its crepuscular light, overshadowed in the center, circled with a bright edge as if surrounded by an abyss full of flames (p. 131).

Marlow's vision of the world as a desolate plain surrounded by an abyss full of flames seems very close to his vision of the futility of life in *Heart of Darkness*. The "charming and deceptive" light is the illusion of victory created by "the dream"; beneath it is the harsh reality that denies the possibility of a real victory. What Marlow undercut is the very idea that following one's dream is a meaningful thing to do. It is "right"; it is "the way"—but what good does it do? Earlier in their conversation Stein had recalled a day when he had "nothing to desire":

"... I was young, strong; I had friendship; I had the love ... of woman, a child I had, to make my heart very full--... ."

He struck a match, which flared violently. His thoughtful, placid face twitched once.

"Friend, wife, child," he said slowly, gazing at the small flame—"phoo!" The match was blown out (p. 128).

The image of the extinction of life's flame, reminis-
cent of Macbeth's "out, out, brief candle!" in the "tomorrow" speech, and carrying with it the extinction of love and friendship, is a reminder of the tragic evanescence of human happiness. As Marlow concludes from the example of Stein's life, even self-sacrifice and enthusiasm for generous ideas do not transform the earth; it is still a desolate plain marked by pitfalls and graves.

Marlow's view of Stein's life prefigures the view of Jim which he takes later when he visits Patusan, the uncivilized island where the young romantic has taken refuge in the effort to redeem himself after the Patna fiasco. Unlike Kayerts and Carlier, Jim shows that he is capable of a high degree of public achievement and personal happiness in his remote outpost, by bringing peace and order to the troubled primitive society and by falling in love with a beautiful half-caste, Jewel; Marlow, however, even in visiting Jim in his time of triumph, looks out over the landscape of Patusan in the darkness and cynically ponders the troubles that Jim will face there as elsewhere:

It was a great peace, as if the earth had been one grave, and for a time I stood there thinking of the living who, buried in remote places out of the knowledge of mankind, still are fated to share in its tragic or grotesque
miseries. In its noble struggles, too—who knows? The human heart is vast enough to contain all the world. It is valiant enough to bear the burden, but where is the courage that would cast it off? (p. 196)

While he admires Jim's energy, his enterprise, and his shrewdness and acknowledges that "nothing on earth seemed less real now than his plans, his energy, and his enthusiasm" (p. 195), Marlow nevertheless foresees the "tragic and grotesque miseries" that will befall Jim in the end and expose the illusoriness of his grand projects. Marlow acknowledges, too, that the human heart can struggle nobly, as indeed Jim's does, but his emphasis clearly is not on an affirmation of that struggle—it is mentioned as an afterthought and then quickly supplanted by a melancholy expression of the difficulty of casting off the burden of existence.

This difficulty, the expression of which is another echo of Hamlet's soliloquy, is finally surmounted by Jim at the end of the novel when he casts off the burden of life and embraces death as his punishment for unwittingly betraying the natives of Patusan. When Gentleman Brown and his deadly band of brigands arrive at the island, Jim orders that they be allowed to depart with their lives; "men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others"
(p. 240), Jim tells Jewel after his unsettling conversation with Brown has reminded him of his own failures in the past. Grateful for the chance to start over which he has apparently had in Patusan, Jim in a sense extends the same opportunity to Brown and his crew, but with disastrous results; putting his trust in human fellowship at the wrong time leaves Jim in part responsible when the cutthroats ambush and kill his best friend, Dain Waris, son of the native chief, Doramin. Despite the efforts of his servant and of Jewel to stop him, Jim promptly presents himself before the bereaved chief and accepts the immediate execution of his death sentence "with a proud and unflinching glance" (p. 253).

Jim shows plenty of courage in casting off the burden of his life, but we are more likely to deplore the futility of his final gesture than to applaud the courage behind it. What Fiedler says of Hamlet's end is true as well of Jim's: "the denouement he does not achieve, but suffers; and he dies . . . not really convincing us that he must."25 To be sure, Jim has, as Stein insists, been true to his difficult dream; he has followed it to its bitter end, and in meeting death with his "unflinching" glance he at last fulfills the boyhood ideal of being "as unflinching as a hero in a book." Jewel, however,
bitterly accuses her erstwhile lover of betraying her in choosing death, and Marlow echoes this reproach by declaring that Jim has left her behind in order to satisfy his own "exalted egoism" (p. 253). The emphasis on Jim's pride at the end of his life reflects his divergence from the purged state of the traditional tragic hero. When Jim "goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (p. 253), his submission is not to the harmony of the universe but to a vague abstraction which Conrad, or at least Marlow, does not seem at all anxious to affirm. Indeed, Jim's final action reaffirms Marlow's view of the world's desolation. Unlike Kurtz, Jim does not come to possess this vision himself, but his fate, viewed objectively (as Marlow strives to view it), can lead but to this grim conclusion. Jim's abandonment of Jewel recalls Kurtz's abortive relationship with the Intended. Both men, in the grip of their respective obsessions, fail to bring to full fruition the love held out to them. Kurtz cries out his recognition of the horror and shortly thereafter dies, leaving the sepulchral Intended dependent upon Marlow's fabrications to fuel her fragile spirit; Jim elects death, leaving an embittered Jewel to the ineffectual consolation of Stein. In choosing death Jim terminates the new
society he had begun to build with Jewel; his ob-
se ssive concern for "a shadowy ideal of conduct"
aborts any potentially comic resolution of his life-
story, and isolation, the hallmark of tragedy, is
the dominant motif at the end of the novel.

The tragic tone concluding Heart of Darkness
and Lord Jim may seem to be offset by a third early
work involving Marlow, "Youth." The exhilarating
aspects of this story, however, are severely quali-
fied by Marlow's irony, so that in judging the final
tone of the story we face a problem similar to the
one presented by Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. Both
works deal with the survival by various parties of
almost incredible successions of catastrophes, yet
both works also clearly question the meaningfulness
of the depicted surviv als.

"I took this family and subjected them to the
two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer--
flood and fire,"26 said Faulkner of the Bundrens,
and the Judea is beset by similarly disastrous cir-
cumstances in Conrad's story. "A man is born to
trouble, to leaking ships, and to ships that burn,"27
observes Marlow, and he more than adequately illus-
trates his point in recounting the story of his
remarkable first voyage to the East. A hint of
impending troubles appears when Marlow, who has just
come from a "crack Australian clipper," first describes the Judea, which has been in drydocks for more than twenty years: "She was all rust, dust, grime—soot aloft, dirt on deck. To me it was like coming out of a palace into a ruined cottage" (p. 180). Under the leadership of a sixty-year-old captain enjoying his first command at that belated stage of his career ("you'll admit it was time," Marlow wryly observes), the Judea encounters a gale immediately upon leaving London and must be escorted by a tugboat to the Tyne, where it remains in a pier for a month. When the ship is once more prepared to depart for Bangkok, a steamer crashes into it and Marlow's maiden voyage is delayed again. When the trip to the East finally begins, Marlow recalls, "we had already been three months out of London. We had expected to be a fortnight or so—at the outside" (p. 184).

Once underway, the Judea shortly proves to be less than seaworthy, as Marlow indicates in his ironic account of the crew's struggle to survive when another gale strikes:

We pumped all the four hours. We pumped all night, all day, all the week—watch and watch. She was working herself loose, and leaked badly—not enough to drown us at once, but enough to kill us with work at the pumps (pp. 184–185).
The trials to which the seamen are subjected result in the madness of one steward and the refusal of duty by the rest of the crew when the ship staggers into Falmouth. At this point in the voyage, Marlow recounts, the chief mate "said it was a foolish business, and would end badly" (p. 187), and another boatman says to Marlow of his ship, "she will never get to Bangkok" (p. 188), yet the Judea eventually carries on, after another lengthy delay, with a new crew. Now, however, another catastrophe occurs: the cargo catches fire. Rejecting the saner alternative of aborting the voyage and heading for a nearer shore, the captain declares, "we will just keep her head for Bangkok, and fight the fire. No more putting back anywhere, if we all get roasted" (p. 190). The captain's determination avails little: the seamen are not "roasted" but the ship is, and it finally sinks along with its charred cargo off the coast of Java.

The odyssey of the Judea, clearly enough, would have been better left unattempted; once attempted, it should have been promptly abandoned. It is true that Marlow derives a sense of accomplishment from reaching the East in his longboat, and that he emerges from his trials with new confidence in himself: "I did not know how good a man I was till then" (p. 202), he declares, and obviously in looking back on his
youth he has a nostalgic remembrance of the courage and vigor which enabled him to endure his debacle and which left him with "the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men" (p. 202). However, Marlow also recognizes that this youthful optimism is not borne out in later life: he calls it

the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain efforts—to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires—and expires, too soon, too soon—before life itself (pp. 202-203).

Marlow's use of the image of the "handful of dust" is an interesting anticipation of "The Burial of the Dead" in Eliot's Waste Land, and indeed Marlow's first speech (undercutting subsequent exuberance) indicates that he attributes to the Judea's voyage the same symbolic import that readers have attributed to Eliot's poem:

You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something—and you can't. Not from any fault
of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little—not a thing in the world—not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination (p. 179).

Marlow's bleak vision in seizing upon the Judea's fruitless voyage as "a symbol of existence" seems to be confirmed, too, by the frame narrator when he speaks at the end of the story, after the conclusion of Marlow's tale, of

our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions (p. 207).

"Looking anxiously for something out of life" which we cannot hope to have is a typical Conradian dilemma, and it is no accident that "Youth" ends with its emphasis on lost "illusions" rather than on attainments.

During the Judea's unscheduled stay in Falmouth the ship under repair is deserted by the rats which had remained aboard through the ship's previous troubles, causing Marlow and the first mate to agree "that the wisdom of rats had been grossly overrated, being in fact no greater than that of men" (p. 189);
this ironic estimate of human intellect is only slightly less flattering than the one offered by veterinarian Billy Varner, explaining his qualifications for setting human limbs, in *As I Lay Dying*: "a man ain't so different from a horse or a mule, come long come short, except a mule or a horse has got a little more sense." The occasion for Varner's services, the refractured leg of Cash Bundren, symbolizes the cost of the Bundrens' journey through flood and fire to bury Addie in her family's plot in Jefferson. The funeral trip, like the voyage of the Judea, is undertaken despite many warnings of the hazards it will involve, and Cash's injury is the most flagrant example of the accuracy of those warnings.

Unlike the Judea, Addie's coffin eventually arrives at its destination, and the Bundrens' success in fulfilling Anse's promise to bury Addie with her family has occasionally been regarded as a triumphant affirmation of human capacities for transcending adversity. Cleanth Brooks, for example, makes a hero of Jewel, the man-of-action who rescues Addie's corpse from the flooded river and from the barn which his brother Darl has set aflame. "Heroism is heroism even though it sometimes appears to be merely the hither side of folly," says Brooks, but it seems
to me that the critic here subordinates what Faulkner in fact emphasizes: the hither side of folly rather than heroism is what the novel most clearly dramatizes.

Jewel is not the pure hero that Brooks would make him—he covertly feeds his horse with his father's grain (p. 13) while protesting never to allow it a single mouthful from this source (p. 129), and later he turns viciously on Darl and expedites his delivery to the insane asylum in Jackson, even after Darl has just intervened to prevent Jewel from becoming involved in a fight with a knife-bearing stranger. Jewel does act heroically in rescuing Addie's corpse and later in surrendering his cherished horse in payment for a new team of mules with which to continue the journey after the original team has been lost in the flood; as in "Youth," however, we are made to see that the heroism is of no use, for the fulfillment of a promise to the dead at the expense of bodily harm to the living is shown to be absurd. Faulkner, asked at Virginia if Anse is "the villain in the story," gave this illuminating reply:

If there is a villain in that story it's the convention in which people have to live, in which in that case insisted that because this woman had said, I want to be buried twenty miles away, the people would go to any trouble and
anguish to get her there. The simplest thing would have been to bury her where she was in any pleasant place. . . . Or if they wanted to be practical they could have taken her out to the back yard and buried her. So if there was a villain it was the convention which gave them no out except to carry her through fire and flood twenty miles in order to follow the dying wish, which by that time to her meant nothing.  

Anse, of course, is concerned about getting to town not merely so he can fulfill his promise to Addie but also so he can "get them teeth" he has been wanting for fifteen years. Anse is successful in his dual quest, but the affirmation is not of the exalted qualities of compassion and sacrifice, for Anse has not shown these qualities at all. Instead of taking Cash to a doctor to have his leg properly set, Anse countenances the terrible and grotesque scene wherein Darl pours cement over the wounded limb. Anse, too, is so unsympathetic to his pregnant unmarried daughter, Dewey Dell, that she cannot turn to him for help; indeed, he ruthlessly takes the money which she had intended to use for an abortion and with it apparently pays for his new teeth. Anse also gets a new wife while he is in Jefferson, fulfilling Kate's prediction that "he'll get another one before cotton picking" (p. 32), and thus he moves
the end of the novel toward the traditional climax of comedy. The comic conventions, however, are highly displaced, for Anse is hardly a typical comic protagonist. Instead of putting his trust in love he puts his trust in getting them teeth, and his victory is as troublesome as the victory of Arabella at the end of *Jude the Obscure* when she goes out to hunt for a new husband while Jude is dying. While such victories may ensure the endurance of the human race, they offer little evidence that the race is worth preserving. As Slatoff observes, in view of Anse's success "we must feel simultaneously that Faulkner is making a kind of comic affirmation and that he is saying that life is so meaningless and even vicious that any kind of affirmation is a mockery."32

Reacting to an assertion that his characters "carry a sense of submission to their fate," Faulkner spoke in a *Paris Review* interview of *As I Lay Dying* as an example of a family that coped "pretty well" with fate:

> The Father having lost his wife would naturally need another one, so he got one. At one blow he not only replaced the family cook, he acquired a gramophone to give them all pleasure while they were resting. The pregnant daughter failed this time to undo her condition, but she was not discouraged. She intended to try again and even if
they all failed right up to the last, it wasn't anything but just another baby.\textsuperscript{33}

Here Faulkner significantly overlooks the damage done to Cash's leg, and, more significantly, the madness of Darl and the lack of sympathy for him displayed by all of the members of the family except Cash and the uncompressed child, Vardaman. Faulkner also grossly distorts the feeling that the novel evokes on behalf of Dewey Dell; the sympathy that we are made to feel for her surely does not allow us to dismiss her problem on the grounds that it will be "just another baby." It would hardly be just another baby to Dewey Dell. Faulkner so effectively exposes the callousness of the two pharmacists whom she consults, and of Darl and Anse, that we pity her profoundly, and we are certainly more disturbed at the end of the novel by her failure to resolve her problem than encouraged by the feeling that she will go on trying.

Faulkner's distortions in speaking of \textit{As I Lay Dying} raise problems similar to those created by his comments on \textit{The Sound and the Fury}. The Virginian interviewer's concern over the apparent disparity between the themes of \textit{The Sound and the Fury} and the Nobel Prize speech\textsuperscript{34} were anticipated in a 1952 interview with Frenchman Loic Bouvard, then a graduate student at Princeton, who after meeting with Faulkner
observed that "my reading of The Sound and the Fury had deceived me regarding the personality of its author. I would never have guessed . . . that he would prove to be something of a moralist."\textsuperscript{35} Faulkner's "moralism" emerges in his response to Bouvard's explanation that young people in France, influenced by Sartre and Camus, were "supplanting a faith in God with a faith in Man":

"Probably you are wrong in doing away with God in that fashion. God is. It is He who created man. If you don't reckon with God, you won't wind up anywhere. You question God, and then you begin to ask "Why? Why? Why?" and God fades away by the very act of your doubting him."\textsuperscript{36}

Here Faulkner's espousal of conventional religious values is very far removed from the philosophical stances of some of his most cerebral characters. Darl Bundren moves from a contemplation of the problem of his brother's wounded leg to this remarkably sweeping nihilistic statement:

"How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls. Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out (pp. 196-197)."
The same images are used in The Sound and the Fury in the section narrated by Quentin Compson when he speaks of his father teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not (p. 218).

This denial of Christ's redemption of mankind is particularly arresting when juxtaposed against Faulkner's embracing of "God" in the Bouvard interview and his reworking of the Christ story in A Fable. It is true, of course, that at the time of these pronouncements Darl is on the brink of being sent to the asylum in Jackson and Quentin is on the brink of suicide, but we must keep in mind that in Faulkner's fictional world we cannot always easily distinguish the sane from the insane. We are often left in the difficult position verbalized by Cash in what is perhaps the most crucial passage of As I Lay Dying: "I ain't so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what ain't" (p. 228), he says, as he contemplates Darl's fate. Of Darl particularly we are often inclined to say what is once said of Yossarian's unique role in the insane world of CATCH-22: "That crazy bastard may be the
only sane one left." Even when he has been sent to Jackson and the style of his narrative suggests his madness, Darl's vision imposes itself upon us forcibly. His last words in the novel, "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes" (p. 244), very likely an ironical echo of Molly's string of "yesses" ending Ulysses, are coupled with his hysterical laughter over a picture, "in a little spy-glass he got in France at the war," of "a woman and a pig with two backs and no face"; a similar coupling is made by Quentin, who borrows a phrase from Iago to describe his sister and her lovers making "the beast with two backs" (p. 184) and then refers to their "wild breath the yes Yes Yes yes" (p. 185). This reduction of human sexuality to the bestial level, a major theme in Faulkner's early fiction, stands in stark contrast to Ike McCaslin's assertion in "Delta Autumn" that the copulation of human lovers manifests the presence of God. If Ike seems to be a spokesman for the author, we still cannot ignore the importance of the very different attitudes presented in Darl and Quentin at an earlier stage in Faulkner's career.

Quentin's decision to commit suicide, though primarily motivated by his incestuously-bred despair over Caddy's promiscuity and by his jealousy of her marriage, is reinforced by his father's fatalistic
outlook. "My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead" (p. 167), says Addie Bundren, and Mr. Compson imparts to his son a similarly bleak philosophy. The image of men as dolls stuffed with sawdust is but one of many nihilistic pronouncements which Quentin quotes or paraphrases and appears to embrace. "Man," according to Mr. Compson, "is the sum of his misfortunes" (p. 129), "a problem in impure properties carried tediously to an unvarying nil: stalemate of dust and desire" (p. 193), and "any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man" (p. 125). This estimate of mankind, which also strikingly resembles the one imparted to Heyst by his philosopher-father in Victory ("man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not bear close investigation"),\textsuperscript{37} does nothing to deter Quentin from his suicidal course and is essentially reproduced in the passages near the end of Quentin's section as he approaches his death:

I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of grey halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should
have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who (p. 211).

the strange thing is that man who is conceived by accident and whose every breath is a fresh cast with dice already loaded against him will not face that final main which he knows beforehand he has assuredly to face without essaying expedients ranging all the way from violence to petty chicanery that would not deceive a child until someday in very disgust he risks everything on a single blind turn of a card no man ever does that under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realised that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman and temporary and he it is hard believing to think that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which matures willingly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps... (pp. 220-221)

Quentin's reference to the "denial of significance they should have affirmed" possibly is influenced by the passage in the "Ithaca" section of Ulysses wherein Joyce states that Stephen, communing with Bloom,

affirmed his significance as a conscious rational
animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro- and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void. 38

Whereas Bloom and Stephen form a mutually supportive relationship, becoming at least briefly surrogate father and son for one another, Quentin is left by his father's fatalism to face unsupported the same "incertitude of the void." The references to the "dark diceman" and the "Gods" run counter to the notion of a benevolent single God suggested by Faulkner in the Bouvard interview, and they create a problem similar to the one that arises in Lord Jim when Marlow, reacting to Jim's desire to have a "clean slate," says, "as if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock!" (p. 113) It is difficult to tell from its context whether this categorical generalization represents Conrad's views on fate and free will or merely Marlow's, and it is equally difficult to separate Faulkner's views from Quentin's. Sartre seems to equate Faulkner's vision with Quentin's: praising The Sound and the Fury for its style but criticizing its author for allegedly rendering Quentin's suicide with excessive pessimism by neglecting to show him debating not to do it,
Sartre, arch-enemy of quiescence, concludes of Faulkner, "I like his art, but I do not believe in his metaphysics." 39

A more prevalent interpretation of The Sound and the Fury, however, has made Dilsey rather than Quentin the metaphysical center of the novel. Sartre's argument that the depiction of Quentin's suicide represents too pessimistically human surrender to and acceptance of death and defeat has been countered by Faulkner and by many of his critics with the assertion that Dilsey's "triumph" offsets Quentin's defeatism, and Jason's destructive greed as well, and gives us the assurance that man will endure and prevail. For Cynthia Grenier, Faulkner himself listed Dilsey along with Ratliff as his favorite characters in his own work; 40 at Virginia he cited Dilsey's counterbalancing role in responding to the comment that Quentin "seemed to have the cards stacked against him":

True, and his mother wasn't much good and he had an idiot brother, and yet in that whole family there was Dilsey that held the whole thing together and would continue to hold the whole thing together for no reward, that the will of man to prevail will even take the nether channel of the black man, the black race, before it will relinquish, succumb, be defeated. 41

Warren and Vickery are among the major critics whose
comments on *The Sound and the Fury* echo the author's. Both of these critics emphasize the fourth and final section of the novel—narrated in the omniscient third person after the first person narratives of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason—in which, they say, Dilsey's faith and courage and endurance come to the fore. Warren concludes his remarks on *The Sound and the Fury* in "William Faulkner: The South, the Negro, and Time" by unskeptically reading the Nobel Prize speech back into the novel; he rebuts Sartre's interpretation by stressing the redemptiveness of Dilsey's role and by pointing out that "Faulkner's effort ends in Easter." Vickery offers a similar commentary:

Out of Dilsey's actions and her participation in the Easter service arise once more the simple verities of human life, which Faulkner's Stockholm address describes as "the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." It is these truths which throw the final illumination not only on Caddy and the whole sequence of events that started with her affair but also on what each of the Compsons believed her to be. The splinters of truth presented in the first three sections reverberate with the sound and the fury signifying nothing. But out of those same events, the same disorder and confusion, come Dilsey's triumph and
her peace, lending significance not only to her own life but to the book as a whole.\textsuperscript{43}

I think that this position taken by Faulkner and supported by Warren and Vickery is extremely misleading, for a number of reasons. First I think we must question the significance of the Easter service in the book as a whole. It is, of course, quite common among whites to see some sort of salvation for humanity in the faith of the downtrodden black, who are often credited with exceptional capacities for emotional or spiritual response: Archie Rice, the decadent anti-hero of \textit{The Entertainer}, recalling a memorable moment in his spiritually bankrupt existence when he had heard a Negro hymn, says, "if ever I saw any hope or strength in the human race, it was in the face of that fat old Negress getting up to sing about Jesus or something like that."\textsuperscript{44} Eliot's \textit{The Hollow Men} suggests the sterility of the white church service in the twentieth century with its "dried voices . . . quiet and meaningless"; in Reverend Shegog's ceremony the audience is at first disappointed because his voice is a "cold inflectionless wire" like a white man's, but when he adopts a black dialect Faulkner shows the audience immediately responding with enthusiasm. An almost embarrassingly explicit duplication of this scene
occurs at the end of Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*, wherein the faithful family servant, Ella, is a double for Dilsey, and the preacher, Daddy Faith, closely resembles Shegog.

The stereotypical representation of the black "mammy" which the interchangeable characterizations of Dilsey and Ella suggest has been called by James Baldwin a comforting image of black forgiveness which whites must cling to. It is instructive to compare this image, essentially duplicated by Faulkner in the portrait of Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun*, with its handling by black playwright Lorraine Hansberry. In *A Raisin in the Sun* she depicts a "Mama" (Lena Younger) who is devoutly and conventionally religious, but Hansberry sets in opposition to this pacifying figure her discontented daughter (Beneatha) who believes that "there simply is no blasted God--there is only man and it is he who makes miracles." This rejection of the comforts of theology by the young black echoes Bigger Thomas' reason for spurning the church in *Native Son*: "I wanted to be happy," he says, "in this world, not out of it."

In *The Sound and the Fury* as well it is important to see that despite Dilsey's wholehearted participation in the Easter service, Faulkner suggests the
possibility of a less enthralled reaction among the younger blacks: as Millgate points out, "Luster in particular had been less impressed by the service than by the performance on the musical saw he had witnessed the night before." Vickery's assertion that during the service "each member of the congregation . . . loses his identity but finds his humanity and the knowledge that all men are equal and brothers in their sufferings" reveals some wishful thinking on the critic's part, for Luster's participation in the service in no apparent way alters the "streak of mischievous cruelty" which he displays in his treatment of the idiot, Benjy. Brooks gives perhaps the fairest assessment of the meaning of the Easter service:

For Dilsey life does have meaning, though many of her betters would dismiss what she takes to be its meaning as illusion, the opium dispensed to a poor and illiterate people. Faulkner makes no claim for Dilsey's version of Christianity one way or the other. His presentation of it is moving and credible, but moving and credible as an aspect of Dilsey's own mental and emotional life.

In his comments on the novel, of course, Faulkner does make some claims for Dilsey. The last words of the appendix which Faulkner added to the novel in
1945 follow Dilsey's name and say, "they endured," but in the Stockholm speech and in talking about The Sound and the Fury in interviews Faulkner says that man not only endures but will prevail. It seems to me that Minter's observation of Lena Grove that she endures but does not prevail is still more clearly true of Dilsey. Faulkner says of the Compson family that Dilsey "held the whole thing together," but in fact what the novel demonstrates is the family's falling apart: Caddy disgraces herself, her brother Quentin suicides, and her daughter Quentin runs off at the end of the novel. Jason has had Benjy castrated and is merely waiting for their mother to die so that he can have the idiot committed to the asylum in Jackson; years later, in filling out the Snopes trilogy, Faulkner reveals that after the death of Mrs. Compson Jason did indeed have Benjy committed, but that Benjy returned to the family home and accidentally burned it down, completing the fall of the house of Compson.

We do not need these additional details, however, to see that Dilsey is powerless to prevent the ruin of the family. The clearest example of her failure to impose her will successfully is in the case of Caddy's daughter. Millgate argues that the girl "struggles in the last section to maintain at least
some semblance of family harmony and order" and that this is "perhaps to be taken as a sign of hope," but it seems to me that this argument radically distorts the impact of Quentin's characterization. Although she is the victim of Jason's heartless persecution, she herself is evoked very unsympathetically. She protests against Benjy's being fed in her presence—"It's like eating with a pig" (p. 86), she says—and unlike her mother (with whom Millgate would have us compare her) she exhibits no signs of compassion for the idiot. She also bickers with her weak grandmother as well as with Jason, forcing Dilsey to intervene; in return for Dilsey's solicitude Quentin is twice shown pushing the servant's comforting hand away, once adding to the gesture the words, "you damn old nigger" (p. 230). Millgate admires her for giving a quarter to Luster so that he can see the minstrel show, but Luster's account of his reception of the coin is coupled with his awareness of Quentin's plan to sneak off in the night (pp. 89-90) in such a way as to suggest that her contribution to his entertainment fund is probably a bribe of some sort (i.e., for silence) rather than an altruistic donation. Instead of the figure of hope that Millgate would make her out to be, she is in truth a figure of despair: "I don't see why I
was born" (pp. 233-234) she says, and later she adds, "I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead" (p. 324)--like Hardy's young Jude she represents not regeneration but the coming of "the universal wish not to live."

It is true, as Millgate points out, that "unlike her mother, she leaves no hostage behind," but the account of her appearance and comportment, even though we receive much of it through Jason's biased view, leaves little doubt that she will soon enough find herself in the same predicaments suffered by her mother.

Warren's statement that "Faulkner's effort ends with Easter" is misleading, too, because although The Sound and the Fury does close on Easter Sunday, the novel (unlike Lie Down in Darkness) finally focuses on images which are far removed from those of the religious service or of any celebration of resurrection. Vickery says that the motifs of the sound and the fury prevail in the first three sections and then are supplanted in the fourth by Dilsey's triumph and peace, but in fact the fourth section and the novel come to rest upon a quintessential recapitulation of the images of sound and fury. As Benjy rides to town in the family carriage with Luster, the mischievous servant whips the mare and drives around the courthouse square to the left of the town monument (of a Confederate soldier, a very important closing
symbol of defeat and devotion to a fruitless cause) instead of to the right as Benjy is accustomed to being taken. The idiot breaks into a bellow of "horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound" (p. 400). Benjy's sound is quickly complemented by the fury of Jason, who races to halt the carriage, slashes the mare, and then strikes Luster over the head with his fist and threatens to kill him if he ever brings Benjy into town again. Benjy's roar ceases as the carriage begins to move in the customary direction, and in the last sentence of the novel Faulkner describes the idiot's eyes,

empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place (p. 401).

The restoration of order at the end of the novel is clearly of the most superficial kind; indeed, it seems likely that Faulkner deliberately uses the word "ordered" to call attention to his ironic displacement of the traditional restoration of peace and tranquility at the end of tragedy.

The significance of this ending is that with it Faulkner takes a step beyond Macbeth, in the direction indicated by Krieger when he says that
modern tragic literature rejects the ultimate soothing power provided by the aesthetic form of traditional tragedy. As Slatoff says of Faulkner's final section of *The Sound and the Fury*, "the general tenor of this episode is in accord with Mr. Compson's pessimism rather than Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech"; it is almost as though Faulkner has rewritten *Macbeth* with the "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech at the very end of the play in place of Malcolm's ascent. Faulkner, of course, knew the speech well—he identified it as the source of his title and recited it with only trivial errors during an interview in Japan— and he alluded to it in his fiction continually throughout his career. The phrase "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" seems particularly to have haunted him: the phrase or a form of it appears twice in *Pylon*, in *Wild Palms*, in *Knight's Gambit* (once in a story called "Tomorrow" and again in the title story), and three times in *Requiem for a Nun*.

What Shakespeare's phrase in its context suggests is that life tomorrow will be the same (i.e., just as meaningless and futile) as it is today and as it was yesterday; this idea is the antithesis of Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech and of his comments on *The Sound and the Fury*. Having insisted in the novel itself on a vision of the world rooted in the
awareness of life as a succession of meaningless tomorrows, Faulkner later somehow exchanged that bleak vision for the facile optimism of "tomorrow is another day." The end-line of *Gone with the Wind*, with its promise of sweeping changes to come, epitomizes the popular novel's commitment to affirming man's ability to transform the world in the direction of his dreams; conversely in the best of Faulkner's fiction, as in the best of Conrad's, the illuscriness of that ability is affirmed. Victory is illusory even when dreams are grandest and men most magnificent, as I shall show in my discussion of *Nostromo* and *Absalom, Absalom!* in the final chapter.
IV

THE FIXED IDEA AND THE DESIGN

A man in the grip of a fixed idea is insane.

---Nostromo

I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside.

---Absalom, Absalom!

One could find substantial support in the canons of Conrad and Faulkner for Northrop Frye's generalization that the modern literary epoch is fundamentally ironic; using the method set forth in The Anatomy of Criticism for determining the mode of a literary work in accordance with the stature of it protagonist in the eyes of his society and of the reader, it might be argued that Conrad and Faulkner characteristically depict protagonists upon whom the fictional society and the reader look down. Recalling the undercutting announcement of Kurtz's death, the opening sentence describing Jim, and the pervasive ridicule of the Bundrens and Jason Compson, it could perhaps be contended that under Frye's categories Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, As I Lay Dying, and The
Sound and the Fury are more clearly ironic that tragic novels. Nostrono and Absalom, Absalom!, however, present protagonists who clearly meet the standard of heroic stature that Frye's scheme calls for in the tragic mode, and any modernist's attempt to deal with the tragic must, I think, take these two remarkable novels into account. As my own account of them will show, both of these novels participate fully in the futilitarian vision which I have identified as the central philosophical theme uniting the major fiction of Conrad and Faulkner.

At Virginia, in answering the question of how we are to acquire the "right view" of Thomas Sutpen, the multiply-viewed central protagonist of Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner replied that there is no single right view, for "the old man was himself a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see all at once." Sutpen is a larger-than-life figure to the narrators in the novel: listening in the opening pages of the novel to Miss Rosa's account of Sutpen's creation of his plantation with the labor of his wild slaves, Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens vio-
lently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light (pp. 8-9).

Nostromo's chief protagonists, Fidanza--who is called Nostromo (our man)--and Charles Gould, do not quite equal this god-like stature, but the Italian is continually described by the coupling of such superlatives as "magnificent" or "a fellow in a thousand" with his sonorific title, "capataz de cargadores"; the Englishman is known as the "King of Sulaco" and is compared with Charles IV ("Charles the Fair"). Nostromo, of course, is also billed by his friends as "the incorruptible" while one of the main points made by Conrad is that the capataz is indeed corruptible, so there is obviously a great deal of irony operative in the novel. Similarly critical moral judgments are made of Gould and Sutpen, but we will miss the tragic impact of these judgments if we fail first to acknowledge the genuinely heroic stature of the characters upon whom they are made.

Quintessential man-of-action, Nostromo demonstrates often his extraordinary courage and his capacity to act effectively when others cannot. During the course of the revolution in Costaguana which is the central event of the novel, Nostromo
reaches the height of his heroism when he rides on horseback four hundred miles in six days, passing through enemy lines at the end of his journey, to summon General Barrics back to Sulaco to defend the city from the encroaching Monterist insurrectionaries. "He carried all our lives in his pocket" (p. 384), says Captain Mitchell, speaking for the citizens of Sulaco, and despite Mitchell's obtuseness elsewhere we see that this estimate of Nostromo's accomplishment is correct.5

Gould's role is not quite so clear: the Englishman who returns from Europe to develop his family's inoperative silver mine in Costaguana achieves his goal of making the mine a paying enterprise where all others had failed before him, but his accomplishment is so thoroughly debunked in the course of the novel that he appears to some readers to be more of a villain than a hero. The central critical dispute about Nostromo is between Warren, who sees Gould's goals and accomplishments as bettering the world of the novel, and Guerard, who argues that Warren distorts the tone of the novel with his interpretation and that the real purpose of the novel is to expose the inadequacy of Gould's achievements.

Fleischman, in summarizing the dispute between Warren and Guerard, observes that
it is one of the minor ironies of literary history that Warren, like other New Critics, has been critical of the values of modern industrial society, yet when a judgment of society is to be made he bases it on typically capitalist norms: political stability, the security of life and property, expanding production and trade.7

What Fleishman is suggesting, obviously, is that Conrad adopts different norms for judging society; we must see, however, that these allegedly "capitalist" norms are indeed an important part of the novel's criteria for judging Gould's achievement. In devaluing this achievement Fleishman cites the "generally neglected" passage wherein an emissary of the Robin Hood-like bandit, Hernandez, a key representative of "the people," asks for Gould's support of popular efforts to oppose the insurrection. Gould, as Fleishman shows, responds without enthusiasm: he agrees to support Hernandez, but his "moral imagination is outraged by an alliance with what he considers another of the anarchic and criminal forces in the country," while "it is clear that Conrad does not depict the peasant band in the same light."8 This assessment of Gould's situation is clear enough, but Fleischman neglects to give due weight to the attitude of Hernandez's emissary toward Gould. "You are a just man," the bandit tells Gould
in the passage which Fleischman quotes, "it is believed that your soul is so just that a prayer from you would cure the sickness of every beast, like the orison of the upright judge." Earlier in his appeal the bandit has explained in more detail why Gould is looked upon so highly by "the people":

"You have proved yourself a just man. There had been no wrong done to anyone since you called upon the people to work in the mountains. My brother says that no official of the government, no oppressor of the campo, had been seen on your side of the stream. Your own officials do not oppress the people in the gorge. Doubtless they are afraid of your severity. You are a just man and a powerful one" (p. 288).

The gratitude expressed by Hernandez's emissary proves that the appreciation of Gould's achievement does not come merely from a capitalist consciousness. We must remember that Gould does not "oppress the people" (and, indeed, has helped to end the oppression of many of them) when we consider Fleischman's argument that Conrad is supporting "the people" in opposition to Gould in the novel. Fleischman points out passages in which "a certain warmth toward the rising populace" on the part of the author can be discerned, and the account of Hernandez and his band is certainly charged with this sympathetic tone, but in
general I think we grossly misread the novel if we conclude that Conrad puts any very great faith in the integrity of the populace or in its ability to improve upon the accomplishments of Gould. Set against the virtuous Hernandez are the despicable Montero brothers and the ludicrously inept Sotillo, "leaders" whom the "rising populace" is unfortunately all too willing to accept. It seems to me that Conrad in truth places no more faith in the discretion of the mob than Shakespeare does; consider, for example, Conrad's satirical rendering of this mob scene:

Senor Gamacho's oration, delectable to popular ears, went on in the heat and glare of the plaza like the uncouth howlings of an inferior sort of devil cast into a white-hot furnace. Every moment he had to wipe his steaming face with his bare forearm; he had flung off his coat, and had turned up the sleeves of his shirt high above the elbows; but he kept on his head the large cocked hat with white plumes. His ingenuousness cherished this sign of his rank as comandante of the national guards. Approving and grave murmurs greeted his periods. His opinion was that war should be declared at once against France, England, Germany, and the United States, who, by introducing railways, mining enterprises, colonization, and under other shallow pretenses, aimed at robbing poor people of their lands, and with the help
of these Goths and paralytics, the aristocrats would convert them into toiling and miserable slaves. And the leperos, flinging about the corners of their dirty white mantas, yelled their approbation. General Montero, Gamacho howled with conviction, was the only man equal to the patriotic task. They assented to that, too (p. 315).¹¹

It is only Nostromo's heroic ride and the solidarity of Gould's miners that prevent the Monterists from gaining control of Sulaco.

In judging Conrad's attitude toward revolution we must also keep in mind that he introduces very early in the novel the pathetic figure of Giorgio Viola, former compatriot of Garibaldi. Committed to liberty and republicanism, Giorgio has "an austere contempt for all personal advantage" (p. 40), an attitude antithetical to the capitalist creed, but "this stern devotion to a cause had cast a gloom upon Giorgio's old age. It cast a gloom because the cause seemed lost" (p. 40). The gloom of this failed revolutionary hangs over the whole novel and foreshadows the futility of future revolutions.

In emphasizing the inadequacies of the alternatives to Gould's faith in material interests I am not attempting to whitewash the Englishman but rather to call attention to the tragedy of his personal
failure and to the thoroughness of the novel's pessimism. Fleischman's reading of the novel as an affirmation of the rise of the oppressed classes, and Dorothy Van Ghent's pronouncement that the novel is "comedy,"\(^12\) strike me as drastic distortions of the novel's impact. Only if we see that Gould begins with the admirable ambitions, "springing from instinctive uprightness" (p. 123), of using the wealth of the mine "as a means, not as an end" (p. 73) to establish "law, good faith, order, security" (p. 80)--goals which the peasants as well as the capitalists approve--will we fully appreciate his tragedy.

Gould's career in Sulaco is aptly called a "fairy tale" (p. 178): it begins in the purest romance tradition, with the handsome young prince carrying his enraptured bride out of the old world and into the new, leaving her in his splendid mansion, "like a lady in a medieval castle" (p. 68), while he, like the archetypal questing knight, sets out to restore peace and prosperity to the troubled society around him.\(^13\) Gould's most direct motivation for making a success of the mine which he has inherited is his father's failure to develop it and his premature death as a result of harassment by a succession of Costaguana governments which demanded that he pay royalties from the inoperative mine. This compulsion
to atone for his father's weakness (the same as the motive for the heroic exploits of Hemingway's Robert Jordan) is similar to Sutpen's obsessive quest to obliterate his sense of rejection and shame at having been turned away in his youth by a Negro servant from the front door of a plantation-owner's mansion. Just as Gould strives to erase the painful memory of his father's failure and persecution by turning the mine into the center of Sulaco's economy, so Sutpen strives to supply a happy ending to his own "fairy tale" by transcending the humiliating recollection of his impoverished childhood--his father, "snoring with alcohol" (p. 224), was also ineffectual--through the construction of an estate which will dwarf even the magnificent one at which he was sent to the back door.

Sutpen's intense reaction to this rejection also reveals a sense of class conflict which resembles Nostromo's continually reiterated resentment of being the tool of the wealthy. Sutpen's father, we learn, had participated along with other poor whites in beating Negro slaves not from a direct hatred of the black race but rather from a desire to take revenge upon the rich plantation owners who exploited the whites as well as the blacks; similarly, Sutpen as a child regarding the mansion reflects bitterly that
"the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them" (p. 235). Nostromo has comparable thoughts in the midst of his efforts to save Gould's silver from the Monterists:
"What he had heard Giorgio Viola say once was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service" (p. 332). 15

The turning point in Nostromo's fate occurs after the lighter bearing him and Decoud and the silver which they are trying to keep out of the hands of the Monterists is apparently sunk; once Decoud commits suicide, Nostromo alone knows that the silver is not lost, and he therefore decides to "grow rich very slowly" (p. 400). This decision is prefigured by Nostromo's account of the effect of treasure upon human intelligence:

"There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man's mind. He will pray and blaspheme and still persevere, and will curse the day he ever heard of it, and will let his last hour come upon him unawares, still believing that he has missed it only by a foot. He will see it every time he closes his eyes. He will never forget it till he is dead—and even then. . . .
There is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind" (p. 367).

Once the treasure fastens upon Nostromo's mind, it causes him to adopt the furtive course of action which costs him his self-esteem and ultimately his life; Gould and Sutpen pay similarly high prices for their obsessions. Gould's fairy tale goes awry because he devotes himself to the development of the mine so exhaustively that he in effect excludes his wife from his life. Conrad offers an explicit judgment of this obsessive behavior:

Mrs. Gould watched his abstraction with dread. It was a domestic and frightful phenomenon that darkened and chilled the house for her like a thunder cloud passing over the sun. Charles Gould's fits of abstraction depicted the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea. A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head? The eyes of Mrs. Gould, watching her husband's profile, filled with tears again (p. 305).

The barrenness of his marriage is the ultimate result of Gould's "insane" fixation: the fruitful union characteristic of the comic mode does not take place, and Conrad suggests that Gould's obsession costs him his children. Returning with her husband
to their mansion after an extended business trip abroad, Mrs. Gould observes that "it would be good to have him to myself for one evening on our return to this house I love" (p. 403), but then she learns from a servant that "the master returns to sleep at the mountain tonight" (p. 413). Having in the meantime listened to Dr. Monygham's cynical pronouncement (cited by Guerard and others as the most crucial theme of the novel) that "there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests" (p. 406), Mrs. Gould now reflects with equally profound pessimism on the life that she and her husband have shared:

She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy—more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst government, ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. . . . but she saw clearly the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps. . . . But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. With a prophetic
vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work—all alone in the "treasure house of the world." The profound, blind suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words—

"Material interest" (pp. 414-415).

The fruitless marriage of the first lady of Sulaco leaves her at the end of the novel "as solitary as any human being had ever been, perhaps, on this earth" (p. 440), and her isolation is perhaps the clearest example in Conrad's fiction to show that "the young ideal of life, of love, of work" does not transform life into something meaningful. The ultimate expression of her emptiness comes when she "comforts" Giselle Viola, Nostromo's would-be lover, after her father has mistakenly killed the capataz. "Console yourself, child," Mrs. Gould tells the young girl. "Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure" (p. 445).

Mrs. Gould's disillusioned comment ties together the fates of Gould and Nostromo, both of which resemble the outcome of Sutpen's story. Sutpen's "design"—also called his "fixed goal" (p. 53)—is comparable in its control over his behavior to Gould's "fixed
idea" and the idea of the treasure which fastens on Nostromo's mind. Like Gould, Sutpen "could not see" the flaws in his plan: "only let the material interests once get a firm footing," says Gould, "and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist" (p. 80); Sutpen shows a similarly mechanical view of human events in his belief that "the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out" (p. 263). The "innocence" underly ing this belief, and underlying Sutpen's whole commitment to his design, allows him, as Brooks and Hinter have shown, unwittingly to give grave affronts successively to Eulalia Bon, his first wife and mother of his first child, when he discovers that she has Negro blood; to Miss Rosa, to whom he suggests that they should copulate and then marry if she gave birth to a male child; and finally to Wash Jones, whose granddaughter he is prepared to discard after begetting upon her an unwanted daughter. The repercussion of the first affront is that Charles Bon, Sutpen's son by Eulalia, revenges himself upon his unacknowledged father by forcing the son (Henry)
of Sutpen's second marriage to kill him (Bon) in order to prevent him from marrying Judith, Henry's sister and Bon's half-sister. In killing his half-brother Henry of course becomes an outlaw, and thus Sutpen is in effect deprived of both of his sons.

"To me he is to be pitied," said Faulkner of Sutpen,
as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, of the human family, is to be pitied. Sutpen didn't believe that. He was Sutpen. He was going to take what he wanted because he was big enough and strong enough, and I think that people like that are destroyed sooner or later, because one has got to belong to the human family, and to take a responsible part in the human family. . . .

Sutpen's conception of himself as an "untouchable," beyond the pale of common mortals, is crystallized in the scene of his slaying when he tells Wash, "Don't you touch me" (p. 185); Wash responds, "I'm going to tech you, Kernel," and proceeds to kill him with a scythe. The emphasis in this exchange on "touching" echoes the earlier crucial scene wherein Miss Rosa, summoned to the Sutpen estate by Wash after Henry kills Bon, is prevented from rushing to comfort Judith by the restraining hand of Clytie, the Negro half-sister of Judith and Henry. Recalling
the moment of this touching of black and white, Miss Rosa voices a conclusion which illumines the entire novel: "let flesh touch with flesh and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too" (p. 139). Subsequent echoes of this passage increase its impact: as Quentin and his Harvard roommate, Shreve, reconstruct the circumstances of Sutpen's decline and fall, they attribute the South's failure in the Civil War (which is the macrocosmic equivalent of Sutpen's private failure) in part to the conferring of authority within the army "by an absolute caste system" (p. 345, emphasis mine), producing incompetent generals; and Bon (in the reconstruction by Quentin and Shreve), envisioning a confrontation with Sutpen which will force the father to acknowledge the son, thinks "I will just touch flesh with him" (p. 348, emphasis mine). It is Sutpen's refusal to touch flesh with Bon, to acknowledge their kinship, that sets in motion the tragic chain of events culminating in the fatal "tech" by Wash Jones.

While Faulkner seems to say that the caste system embraced by the South is responsible for Sutpen's tragedy, he also shows an important example of a character who does not submit to this system in his portrait of Judith; her story is, as Brooks contends,
"one of the most moving that Faulkner has ever written." Breaking through the caste system with her solicitude for Bon's octoroon wife and his son by her, Judith does, as Brooks emphasizes, exhibit the qualities of love and compassion which Sutpen sacrificed to his design, yet it is important to see also that despite her beneficent actions Judith is characterized by despair as profound as Mrs. Gould's. Brooks, it seems to me, unfairly subordinates the "mere" Stoicism revealed in the remarkable speech which Judith makes when she brings Bon's letter to Quentin's grandmother:

"... you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided
there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter" (p. 127).

This speech, similar in style and spirit to the nihilistic thought-streams near the end of Quentin's section of The Sound and the Fury, seems to me the most compelling passage in all of Faulkner's fiction, comparable in impact and importance to the "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech in Macbeth. Judith, it is true, goes on in her speech to suggest that by bringing the letter to Quentin's grandmother either to save or to destroy she is affirming the fact of her existence, but this affirmation is clearly a feeble one, and the words which Judith causes to be scratched on her own block of stone point again to her sense of the absence of meaning in life:

Judith Coldfield Sutpen. Daughter of Ellen Coldfield. Born October 3, 1841. Suffered the Indignities and Travails of this World for 42 Years, 4 Months, 9 Days, and went to Rest at Last February 12, 1884. Pause, Mortal; Remember Vanity and Folly and Beware (p. 211).

The meaningfulness of Judith's tombstone itself, of course, is undercut by her own speech and also by
Mr. Compson's description of graves as "little puny affirmations of spurious immortality" (p. 192); the spuriousness of immortality is suggested again later when Mr. Compson, describing Miss Rosa's funeral in his letter to Quentin, mentions the presence of a worm in her grave—almost inevitably Hamlet, the gravedigger, and the base uses to which we may return are called to mind.

The aura of Macbeth in Judith's vision of life's futility is essentially duplicated in Gould's view of the world, even though he does not recognize the specific flaw of his commitment to material interests. Walter F. Wright makes this connection indirectly when he observes that "Gould does not, like Macbeth, call life an idiot's tale, but he finds it, nevertheless, cheap and depressing." In the midst of the Monterist revolution, as he surveys the wounded citizens in the streets of Sulaco, Gould is oppressed by a vision of "the cruel futility of things . . . unveiled in the levity and sufferings of that incorrigible people; the cruel futility of lives and of deaths thrown away in the vain endeavor to attain an enduring solution of the problem" (p. 293). Gould's feeling of futility, echoed in his wife's "withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labors" (p. 413), overtake the eagerness of youthful commitment that
had inspired the young couple to launch their great adventure. "Action is consolatory," says Conrad in describing that youthful zest in Gould; "it is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions" (p. 66). Gould does not relinquish his fixed idea, but in the course of the novel we see clearly that his flattering illusions are dispelled and that action for him loses even its meager capacity to console.

If action is the enemy of thought and the friend of illusion, it might be inferred that, in the novel's view, thought is the enemy of illusion and is there-fore to be cultivated. In his portrait of Decoud, however, Conrad clearly sets forth the inadequacies of the intellectual life. In explaining Decoud's suicide Conrad calls the skeptical young Costaguanero "a victim of the disillusioned weariness meted out to intellectual audacity" (p. 399); on the same page the author refers to Nostromo, now at the brink of his corruption, as "the victim of the disenchanted vanity which is the reward of audacious action."

With the blatant parallel structure of the two assessments Conrad equally debunks both sides of the thought-action duality: neither action nor cerebration, he suggests, will lead us out of disillusionment and disenchantment.

While Nostromo's decline, representing the vanity
of action, closely resembles Sutpen's, the suicide of Decoud reminds us of the similar fate of the comparably cerebral Quentin. It might be argued that we should ignore our knowledge of Quentin's fate (in *The Sound and the Fury*) in reading *Absalom, Absalom!* since each of the two novels can be viewed as a self-contained unit; on the other hand, Faulkner could have told Sutpen's story through other narrators, and in choosing Quentin as one of his tellers the author seems deliberately to invite us to read *Absalom, Absalom!* in the light of the earlier novel.  

Our knowledge of Quentin's suicide, coupled with Mintz's observation that Quentin and the other interpreters of Sutpen's story "bring order rather to man's apprehension and measure of his life than to his life itself,"\(^{23}\) suggests the possibility that the measure of man's life which Quentin derives from the story contributes to his decision to end his own life.

Even if we leave Quentin trying not to hate the South instead of committing suicide, we see that the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* is as bleak as the end of *The Sound and the Fury*. Miss Rosa's attempt to carry off Henry Sutpen culminates in her death and in Clytie's burning of the old ruined Sutpen mansion, completing the destruction of Sutpen's design as
Benjy destroys the last vestiges of the Compson's erstwhile grandeur. Images of sound and fury are again brought together in a position of climactic importance: the "silent and bitter fury" of Miss Rosa's effort to reach Henry in the burning mansion is complemented by the mad howling of Jim Bond, the last of the Sutpens, whose mindless lamentation is, like Benjy's, "the grave hopeless sound of all misery under the sun."²⁴

Shreve's prediction on the last page of Absalom, Absalom! that "the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere" in "a few thousand years" when their skin has bleached out is the only kind of affirmation the novel offers; the "eggshell shibboleth of caste and color" will be conquered not by the exalted qualities of courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice but simply by biological mutation. It is not clear whether Shreve speaks for Faulkner or simply for himself when he makes this prediction, but it is clear enough, I think, within the scope of the novel itself, that man does not prevail. Faulkner shows us the wrongs of the world without showing man in the process of eradicating those wrongs, as Conrad shows us the inadequacies of material interests without showing man meaningfully pursuing non-material
interests. The last paragraph of *Nostromo* is dominated by the image of "a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver," an image as bleak in the context of this novel as the ending image of a "black bank of clouds" is in the context of *Heart of Darkness*. We conclude once more with a vision of despair.

When he elaborated at various times on the idea that man will prevail, Faulkner tended to leave his fiction far behind and to indulge in far-flung predictions for which little evidence could be amassed: for example, in one interview in Japan he moved from the indisputable observation that "there are evils of yesterday that don't exist any more" to the oracular pronouncement that

there will be a time when the older people that get the world into wars won't be able to get the world into wars any more for the young people to get killed in. That will come, it will take time, it will take patience, and it will take a capacity of people to believe that man's condition can be improved, not as a gift to him, but by his own efforts. That he can do it. 25

In reading Faulkner's prediction I am reminded of a speech by Vershinin near the end of *Three Sisters*:

... you must admit that it *life* is gradually getting easier and brighter, and it's clear
that the time isn't far off when the light will spread everywhere. . . . In the old days the human race was always making war, its entire existence was taken up with campaigns, advances, retreats, victories. . . . But now all that's out of date, and in its place there's a huge vacuum, clamouring to be filled. Humanity is passionately seeking something to fill it with and, of course, it will find something one day. 26

In a letter to a friend Chekhov once said of his purpose in writing for the theater, "all I wanted to do was to say to people, 'Have a look at yourselves and see how bad and dreary your lives are!' The important thing is that people should realize that, for when they do, they will certainly create a better life for themselves." 27 It is one thing to say that we ought to create a better life for ourselves, and quite another to say that we will be able to do it. If most of us would like to believe that Faulkner is right when he says that there will come a time when there are no more wars, yet few of us would agree with Vershinin's declaration (circa 1901) that wars belong to "the old days"; unfortunately, it seems that the same sort of wishful, uncritical intelligence produces the two statements.

Certainly the world which Faulkner shows us in Absalom, Absalom! and in the rest of his great novels
offers little support for his optimistic prognosis of man's fate. The philosophy emanating from that fictional world is perhaps best exemplified by the definition of life which Faulkner includes in discussing his work early in his correspondence with Malcolm Cowley: "life is a phenomenon but not a novelty, the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere and man stinks the same stink nonetheless where in time." For Faulkner's definition of life we could easily substitute Marlow's ("that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose"), and the profound pessimism which pervades Nostromo as well as the rest of Conrad's finest fiction suggests that not merely Marlow but the author himself stands behind that bleak worldview. The two interchangeable futilitarian credos illumine the striking similarity of vision which links the major work of the two novelists.
NOTES

Chapter I

1 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959), pp. 4-5.

2 Cf. the Nobel Prize address:

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his 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 which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man; it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.


3 When Faulkner speaks of writers "failing" we must remember that he rated himself and his contemporaries "not by our accomplishments but by the splendor of the failure":

... the work that I have done was never as good as I wanted it to be, hoped it would be, which is the reason the writer writes another one. If he wrote one book and that was all he had hoped of it, he would probably quit. But it's not, so he tries again and so he begins to think of his own work as a long series of failures, that is it was the best he could do, but none of it is perfection, which is what he wants, and anything less than perfection is failure.


Ibid.


Critical controversy over the final philosophical tones of Light in August and The Sound and the Fury is discussed in my second and third chapters.

A full discussion of the critical controversy over Heart of Darkness appears in my third chapter.


Ibid., p. 6.

Ibid., p. 18.


Fiedler, op. cit., p. 18.

Ibid.


Ibid., pp. 18-19.


23 Krieger, *op. cit.*, p. 3.


30 Laurence Michel's *The Thing Contained: Theory of the Tragic* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), discusses tragedy in Conrad and Faulkner as well as Shakespeare, but neglects as Krieger does to deal with Nostromo, *The Sound and the Fury*, or Absalom, Absalom!.


33 Émile Zola, *Germinal*, translated by L. W.
Tancock (Baltimore: Penguin Classic paperback, 1954), p. 498. All citations refer to this edition and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.

34 Cf. Hillis Miller: "... the death of god is the starting point for many twentieth-century writers." Poets of Reality, p. 2.


38 Ellis, op. cit., p. 153.


40 Grant, op. cit., p. 130.


42 Turnell, op. cit., p. 173.

43 Grant, op. cit., p. 130.


46 Ibid., pp. 333-334.

47 Ransom's lament that Faulkner "has not had the advantage of the learning of his literary peers"
("William Faulkner: An Impression," excerpted in Warren, ed., op. cit., p. 294), suggesting a desire on the critic's part to place Faulkner in the toast and tea world of a James, or around a seminar table in New Haven with Warren and friends, obviously would meet with little sympathy from Faulkner, who had a notorious disregard for critics and criticism.

48 Maxwell Geismar complained of Faulkner's "pervasive and pathological" subjects, and Camille J. McDole characterized the author as "a salesman of vice": an illuminating summary of early Faulkner criticism appears in the introduction by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery to their edition of William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960). Perhaps the most spectacular evidence of the failure of American critics to appreciate Faulkner while he was at his peak is the fact that in Edmund Wilson's The Shores of Light, a massive literary chronicle of the twenties and thirties by the critic commonly judged America's foremost man of letters in the twentieth century, Faulkner's name is mentioned only once and then unfavorably.

49 Lion in the Garden, p. 106.


53 Faulkner in the University, p. 16. In this matter, as in many others, Faulkner was not entirely consistent, and he on several other occasions mentioned James among the masters of the craft of fiction.

54 Conrad's "Henry James: An Appreciation" (1905) is reprinted in Walter F. Wright, ed., Joseph
Conrad on Fiction (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 82-88.

55 Slatoff's comment is quoted by Alan Friedman in The Turn of the Novel (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 184. Friedman defends Faulkner and argues that Slatoff's irritation comes from "a critical sense of the 'real world' which has another strong literary basis in another tradition."

56 Lion in the Garden, p. 107.


58 The apparent discrepancy in the stories told by Faulkner and his wife regarding Ulysses comes up in several of the interviews (including one with Mrs. Faulkner) reprinted in Lion in the Garden. In his 1955 interview with Cynthia Grenier, Faulkner said, "I read Ulysses in the middle twenties"; in 1952 the author had told Henry Nash Smith, "I have never read Ulysses."

59 Guerard, op. cit., p. xiv. On another occasion Faulkner stated at Virginia, "I got quite a lot from Conrad"; in a subsequent interview session Faulkner was pressed to develop the comparison of his own style with Conrad's, but his response was essentially again a disclaimer of the importance of style. In yet other sessions at Virginia Faulkner mentions The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Heart of Darkness among his favorite books. Seventeen years earlier, in his 1940 interview with Dan Brennan, Faulkner listed "Conrad's Lord Jim and Kostromka" along with "Shakespeare's sonnets and Henry the Fifth" and "some Dickens" as works a young writer might read with profit. In a pair of still earlier interviews he is quoted as listing The Nigger as one of his two favorite books, the other being Roby Dick. See Lion in the Garden and Faulkner in the University.

60 Knight's Gambit (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 244. The allusion, obviously, is to the description of Kurtz's Intended in Heart of Darkness.
Faulkner's most famous allusion, of course, is in the discussion between Ike McCaslin and his cousin, Cass, of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in Go Down, Moses.

Guerard, op. cit., p. 302.

The speaker is Joy (alias Hulga) in O'Connor's "Good Country People."

Chapter II


Eula perhaps commits suicide to prevent Flem from telling her daughter Linda that he is not her father; it is also conjectured, however, that Eula is simply "bored" with living.


6 See note 55, chapter I.

7 Joe Christmas, of course, is not necessarily Negro; see below, pp. 61-62.

8 Wiley, op. cit., p. 44.

9 Guerard discusses some of the various critical views of narrative problems in Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 105-108. Those who think highly of the novel tend to excuse or even to justify the inconsistencies in point of view; my own opinion is that the novel is very much overrated and that the narrative incongruities lead to an unintended confusion in philosophical tone.


12 The view of Wait as a satanic figure persists among the crew throughout the novel and is intensified at the moment of Wait's burial at sea. Singleton's prediction that the ship would not reach home until Wait had died and been cast out is validated by the rising of the wind, changing the conditions so that the Narcissus' imperiled voyage can be continued, just when Wait's body has been cast into the sea. Conrad's narrative structure does not appear in any way intentionally to undercut this unsophisticated anthropomorphization of the elements; as Avron Fleischman observes, "the implication is that the crew is right in its superstitious belief that the weather is preternaturally linked with the dying man's presence on the ship." Conrad's Politics (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1967), p. 130.

13 "Suddenly the nigger's eyes rolled wildly, became all whites. He put his hand to his side and coughed twice, a cough metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud; it resounded like two explosions in a vault; the dome of the sky rang to it, and the iron plates of the ship's bulwarks seemed to vibrate in unison" (pp. 71-72).

14 I say "apparent" malingering here, where some critics (including Guérard) make no qualification; it is not quite justifiable to dismiss Wait as "lazy" in the way that Guérard does. Such a dismissal implies that Wait is not really ill; actually Wait removes any doubt about the reality of his illness when he, in Fleischman's words, "exonerates himself by the simple expedient of dying." Op. cit., p. 130.

15 See below, p. 50, for more commentary on the behavior of the crew during the storm. While acknowledging the genuine heroism of the crew in
saving Wait, one must take into account the fact that Wait never recovers from his illness and that he eventually dies aboard ship before the voyage is completed; the rescue, therefore, is in a way similar to the heroic expenditures of effort in ultimately futile causes which form the basis for my comparison of "Youth" and *As I Lay Dying* in chapter III.

16 When Allistoun confronts Wait before the men he tells him, "you have been shamming sick. ... Why, anybody can see that. There's nothing the matter with you, but you lie-up to please yourself—and now you shall lie-up to please me" (p. 140). Later, however, he says to Baker,

"When I saw him standing there, three parts dead and so scared—black amongst that gaping lot—no grit to face what's coming to us all—the notion came to me all at once, before I could think. Sorry for him—like you would be for a sick brute. If ever creature was in a mortal funk to die! ... I thought I would let him go out in his own way. Kind of impulse. It never came into my head, those fools. ... H'm! Stand to it now—of course" (pp. 144-145).

Presumably Allistoun is giving a faithful account in the latter speech.

17 Allistoun's speech is a precise fulfillment of his promise to his officers to address the crew "like a Dutch uncle"; viewing his seamen as "a crazy crowd of tinkers," he tells the mate, "I could count the real sailors amongst them on the fingers of one hand" (p. 144). A severe problem in narrative structure, of course, is that for the seaman-narrator to record this speech without comment, even though he is a member of the maligned crew, is virtually unthinkable.

18 *Palmer, op. cit.*, p. 69.

19 *Fleischman, op. cit.*, p. 131.

20 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959), pp. 73-74.
21 Ibid., pp. 96-97.

22 Brooks, op. cit., p. 71.


25 Faulkner in the University, p. 72. Emphasis mine.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Kazin, op. cit., p. 151.

29 Brooks, op. cit., p. 49.

30 All citations from the novel refer to the 1968 Random House Modern Library paperback edition and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.

31 Faulkner in the University, p. 41.

32 "They are alike in being heroes who are distinctly modern and who must make their way in a cosmos that is violent, chaotic, and absurd. Stephen's plight is only slightly less desperate than Christmas', and Stephen's motto non serviam is very close to Christmas' rigid determination not to submit to those forces that compulsively attempt to shape him to their will." John W. Longley, Jr., The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 108.

33 Later it becomes clear that Byron works over-
time not for the extra money but to keep himself out of the path of temptation: "I thought that if there ever was a place where a man would be where the chance to do harm could not have found him, it would have been out there at the mill on a Saturday evening" (p. 74), Byron tells Hightower.

34 "The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August," in The Merrill Studies in 'Light in August', N. Thomas Inge, ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1971), pp. 51-74. This citation, p. 70.

35 Longley, op. cit., p. 108.

36 Hinter, op. cit., p. 13.

37 Kazin, op. cit., p. 156.

38 In "Charles Dickens" George Orwell asserts, "the truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. Hence the utter lack of constructive suggestion anywhere in his work." A Collection of Essays (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 52. Cf Bleak House Ann Y. Wilkinson writes, "there seems to be a consoling optimism about the future and support for the idea of an eventual moral and spiritual regeneration which will save the world. But though Dickens may have consciously assented to these hopeful propositions, in the universe of the novel they are shown to be ultimately irrelevant." "Bleak House: From Faraday to Judgment Day," in English Literary History, Vol. 34, No. 2 (June 1967), pp. 245-246.


41 "The Bear," in Go Down, Moses, p. 294.

42 Lion in the Garden, p. 225. Cf. similar comments made by Faulkner in a session at Virginia:

... there are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with their prob-
lems. There seem to be three stages: The first says, This is rotten, I'll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I'm going to do something about it. McCaslin is the second. He says, This is bad, and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to do something about it, I'm going to change it.

_Faulkner in the University_, pp. 245-246.

43 Guerard, _op. cit._, p. 56.


45 It is not possible to deal in full detail with all of Conrad's works which could be called failed attempts at affirmation; I have tried to get at this problem by dealing in some depth with the most important novel of this kind, _The Nigger of the Narcissus._ The theory of Conrad's "achievement and decline," similar in many respects to Fiedler's view of Faulkner's career, has been propounded by several critics, most notably Guerard and Thomas Moser; their arguments and some of the rebuttals are summarized in the appendix to Palmer's _Joseph Conrad's Fiction_. I think that both Guerard and Moser overstate the case against Conrad's later fiction (a flagrant example is Guerard's dictum that the time has come to remove _Victory_ from Conrad's canon), but I agree with Guerard that "the best work of Conrad is the work of a tragic pessimist, . . . and that his turn to 'normality' was stultifying. Conrad's example exists as a glaring warning to the novelist who, today or in any age, tries to make himself into an 'affirmative' writer." _Conrad the Novelist_, p. 55.

A late novel like _The Rover_ has much in common with _The Reivers_; each is a competently narrated tale of action, heroic in the former and mock-heroic in the latter, but each lacks the penetrating psychological analysis of character and the relentless confrontation with darkness which lend tragic intensity to the great earlier works.

46 _Victory_ (Garden City, New York: Doubleday,
Chapter III

1 The Sound and the Fury, p. 93. All citations from the novel refer to the 1956 Random House Modern Library paperback edition and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.


3 Perhaps the best example of this tendency toward perverse titles is Conrad's "The Return": Alvan Hervey's wife returns to him after planning to run away with another man; her explanation of her dissatisfaction with their marriage causes Hervey to leave her, and the last sentence of the story is, "He never returned."


5 My discussion of Nostromo appears in the following chapter.


7 The citation is from Guerard's Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p. 37. Summaries of Heart of Darkness criticism generally hail Guerard's argument as the first to promulgate this view of Marlow's importance: Stanton Hoffman's summary, in Comedy and Form in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1969), is typical. Actually Guerard was not the first to reach this conclusion in print. He says almost nothing about Heart of Darkness in his 1947 publication, Joseph Conrad, and even before that work appeared,
Morton D. Zabel, in "Joseph Conrad: Chance and Recognition" (Sewanee Review, LIII, No. 1, Winter 1945) had placed Heart of Darkness in the pattern of Conrad's novels which "repeatedly emphasize" the "crisis of moral isolation and responsibility in which the individual meets his first full test of character," and had classified Marlow as one of the typical Conradian characters "caught in the grip of circumstances that enforce self-discovery and its cognate, the discovery of reality or truth." And in Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952) Douglas Hewitt had spoken out against the general assumption that Marlow is "merely the more or less transparent medium through which we study the exploitation of the Congo natives and the degradation of Mr. Kurtz, the 'hollow man.' In fact, the story is primarily concerned with the effect of the country and of Kurtz on Marlow" (p. 18).

8 The citation is from Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 9, March 1955. Moser, in Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), states flatly that "Marlow's lie certainly weakens the scene; he has made truth seem too important throughout the novel to persuade the reader now to accept the falsehood as salvation" (p. 79). Moser apparently overlooks the significance of the action which prefigures Marlow's lie to the Intended: when Marlow submits Kurtz's highly idealistic report on the Suppression of Savage Customs, he turns it in "with the postscriptum torn off." By eliminating the revealing addendum, "Exterminate all the Brutes!" Marlow in a sense falsifies Kurtz's document; when he hides Kurtz's final pronouncement in his report to the Intended, he is in a sense just tearing off the postscriptum again.


12 Heart of Darkness, p. 114. All citations
from the novel refer to The Laurel Conrad (New York: Dell, 1960, 1970) paperback edition and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.

13 Daiches, op. cit., p. 40.


15 Ibid., p. 100.

16 Ibid., p. 103.


18 Ibid., p. 336.

19 Ibid., p. 333.

20 An extreme application of this view can be detected in Tony Richardson's film of Hamlet, which eliminates the restoration of order established by the entry of Fortinbras. Richardson ends the film with a close-up of the dead Hamlet, mourned by Horatio. Admittedly this is a highly controversial rendering of Shakespeare's play, but I point it out because it highlights the modern sensibility that the restoration of order at the end is a formal execration which does not conform to the essential spirit of the play.


23 Editor's Note on the Composition of Lord Jim, p. 275 in Thomas Moser, ed., Norton Critical


27 "Youth," in *Great Short Works of Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 199. All citations refer to this edition and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.


30 Ibid., p. 165.

31 *Faulkner in the University*, p. 112.


34 See my first chapter, p. 1.

35 *Lion in the Garden*, pp. 69-70.

36 Ibid., p. 70.


40 Lion in the Garden, p. 225.

41 Faulkner in the University, p. 45.


49 Vickery, op. cit., p. 49.

50 Millgate, op. cit., p. 103.

51 Brooks, op. cit., p. 348.

52 Millgate, op. cit., p. 103. As Millgate concedes, Faulkner talks about Quentin very pessi-
mistically in the Appendix.


54 Lion in the Garden, pp. 169-170.

55 This list does not purport to be exhaustive. Faulkner alludes prominently to the speech in Go Down, Moses ("out of all that empty sound and bottomless fury," p. 284 in Random House 1955 edition) and The Big Woods ("strutted his roaring eueptic hour and then was no more," p. 3 in Random House 1955 edition).

Chapter IV

1 Nostromo, p. 305. All citations refer to the Signet Classic paperback (New York: New American Library, 1960, 1964) and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.

2 Absalom, Absalom!, p. 240. All citations refer to the Modern Library paperback (New York: Random House, 1964) and will hereafter be documented parenthetically in the text.

3 My own view, as I have indicated in previous chapters, is that these novels participate in the "tragic vision" that Krieger defines.

4 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959), pp. 275-274.

5 Problems of narrative consistency arise in this novel as elsewhere in Conrad's fiction: on p. 88 Conrad uses the first person for the narrative voice, but in general the narrative method resembles the third-person omniscient style (the only style, for example, which permits the description of Decoud's suicide in isolation) except when Mitchell is telling the story. I shall refer to the main narrative voice simply as "Conrad."


8 Ibid., p. 167.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 166.

11 This satiric portrait is paralleled by Conrad's ridicule of Fuentes, Ganacho's cohort in rabble rousing.

12 Van Ghent's remarks appear in her introduction to the Rhinehart edition of the novel (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1961). Her essay is made all the more incomprehensible by the fact that she purports to be basing her approach on The Anatomy of Criticism; Nostromo is dominated by a mood of final isolation, which Frye sees as the clearest hallmark of the tragic mode.

13 Van Ghent aptly points out the parallel between Gould's quest and the quest of the Fisher King in the Waste Land.

14 The phrase occurs repeatedly in Faulkner's novel.

15 I have never seen it pointed out, but Nostromo's lamentations that he is never properly rewarded are quite groundless; Gould gives him a ship in recompense for his efforts to save the silver, even though the Englishman thinks that the silver has been lost. Nostromo voluntarily pays back the price of the ship (with wherewithal derived from the missing treasure), but Gould's generosity should be kept in mind especially in view of the passages which denigrate his character.
16 Guerard's discussion of this passage appears on p. 197 of *Conrad the Novelist*.


18 Faulkner in the University, pp. 80-81.


20 Ibid.


22 "It is conceivable that in placing at this point *i.e.*, at the end of Absalom, Absalom! the conclusion of Mr. Compson's letter, the first part of which appears just over 200 pages earlier (pp. 173-174), Faulkner intended to point towards the moment six months later when Quentin committed the suicide of which we have already learned from *The Sound and the Fury*." Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 324.


25 *Faulkner in the University*, p. 178.


27 Ibid., p. 426.

28 Quoted in Millgate, *op. cit.* p. 286.
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