THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY OF THE SOUTH IN THE
WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY OF THE SOUTH IN THE
WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Moonlight and Magnolias

Although the twentieth century, particularly the time since World War II, has greatly reduced sectional boundaries in the United States, it is still easy to divide it into geopolitical, cultural, and economic areas more or less distinct from each other.

Perhaps the greatest stronghold of sectionalism in the United States today, just as it has been in the past, is in that area known as the Deep South, which includes the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, and portions of bordering states, such as East Texas, North Florida, and South Kentucky. This area possesses a cohesive tradition, a state of mind one might say, which results from a cohesive past and a cohesive economy. The history of the Deep South is one conducive to the establishment of deep-rooted customs, to strong emotional attachment to family, ancestors, land, and region. On the framework of the violent, spectacular, often sordid, often admirable history of the South has gradually evolved a myth, a sectional religion, which may be called the Myth of the Old South. The all-important seed and root of the Myth is the Civil War, still
referred to in the South as "The War." The Myth has been summarized by Irving Howe:

The homeland . . . had proudly insisted that it alone should determine its destiny; provoked into a war impossible to win, it had nevertheless fought to its last strength; and it had fought this war with a reckless gallantry and superb heroism that, as Faulkner might say, made of its defeat not a shame but almost a vindication. But the homeland fell, and from this fall came misery and squalor: the ravaging by the conquerors, the loss of faith among the descendants of the defeated, and the rise of a new breed of faceless men who would batten on their neighbors' humiliation. From these stories there follows that pride in ancestral glory and that mourning over the decline of the homeland which comprise the psychology of the "lost cause."

For many years the Myth was accepted in toto by the writers of the South. William Faulkner's great-grandfather, Colonel William Falkner, accepted it and used it when he wrote his very popular novel of the latter part of the nineteenth century, The White Rose of Memphis. The moonlight-and magnolias school of literature continued well into the twentieth century until a short time after World War I when the new cynical, pessimistic, lost-generation school of writers forsook all myths. In the period from the end of the Civil War to 1920 such moonlight-and magnolia works as The White Rose of Memphis, Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus, G. W. Cable's The Grandissimes, Thomas Nelson Page's Red Rock

and *In Ole Virginia*, and Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*, represent the Myth.

After 1920 the Myth was either ignored or attacked by most Southern writers until Faulkner began using it effectively as a point of departure. In 1936 Margaret Mitchell revived the Myth, full blown and on a grand scale, in her extremely popular novel, *Gone With the Wind*. Although none have been as spectacularly successful as *Gone With the Wind*, several popular novels of the old school, such as Ben Ames Williams's *The Unconquered*, have been published in the last several years. The moonlight-and-magnolias theme is still significant in American literature.

**Sensationalism and Degeneracy**

Since the latter 1920's there has developed a school of writing concerning the South which is almost completely associated with one writer, Erskine Caldwell. This school is marked by the use of sensationalism in depicting the degeneracy of the lowest class of whites in the eroded backwoods sections of the Deep South. Just as it concerns itself with only one narrow segment of society in the South, this school covers only a limited time, the depression years of the 1930's.

Most of the works of this group have little literary merit, though a great popular appeal because of the emphasis placed upon violence, depravity, and sex. If there is any purpose to be found in these works, it is to show to what
depths a people can descend when it loses its traditions and sense of integrity. Unsympathetic critics have suggested that the prime purpose of this school is to picture people as shocking and depraved as possible in order to create a large popular, and therefore financially rewarding, following.

Such works as Tobacco Road and God's Little Acre have brought forth great cries of anguish and indignation from the South, accusing the author of being a traitor to his group. But just as a Southern writer has done the most to malign the South in the eyes of the world, other Southern writers have pictured the South in a compassionate and philosophical manner. Without hiding what is shameful, Ellen Glasgow, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter, and William Faulkner have shown that humanity, courage, dignity, and honor can be found in the South.

It now seems evident that the sensational and degenerate view of the South is a fading aspect of American literature. It is the type of writing which cloys quickly and so loses its popular appeal with the public. I think that, in the final analysis, it will prove to be of as little importance in the writing of the South as the earlier school of moonlight-and-magnolias.

Faulkner and the Myth

It would be inconceivable that a boy growing up in Mississippi at the turn of the century would be ignorant of the
Myth of the South. There would have been fathers and grandfathers who had fought in "The War" and who would doubtless have spent many evenings telling the children about their experiences and about the glory of Jackson and Lee. He would not have learned the Myth as he learned European History, in school through study, but rather through everyday association with the mementos of the Myth, through listening to the garrulous loafers on the town square, through hearing his relatives and friends speaking about the "glory," "honor," and "moral right" of the "Lost Cause." The Myth would eventually become a part of his concept of the South, of the United States, and of the world. As Faulkner tells us in *Intruder in the Dust*:

> For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance.2

It is obvious that Faulkner absorbed the Myth and that he used it, but it is not true that he has used it as did Colonel Falkner or Thomas Nelson Page or Margaret Mitchell. Faulkner uses the Myth in much the same way that many writers have used the Old Testament, not as an actuality but as a

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symbolistic device upon which to construct their work. He
certainly does not give complete allegiance to it, for he
makes the aristocrats, the Sartorises, for instance, much
too quixotic and ineffectual to conform to the Myth.

Occasionally Faulkner permits his heritage to take con-
trol, and his writing approaches close to the Myth, especially
in some of his earlier work. This is to be expected in a
writer who so obviously projects his moods into his writing.
However, when Faulkner is writing with a conscious organiza-
tion and outlook, his writing returns to a more balanced use
of the Myth, as is true in the greater part of his work. Of
course, the Myth can be reconstructed in its entirety from
the works of Faulkner, but the construction comes from the
words and actions of Faulkner's characters, not from Faulkner.
It is also from the words and actions of the characters that
Faulkner punctures the Myth, for even when a Sartor's is be-
ing the bravest, his search for death reveals that the Myth
has a great lack which causes a monumental frustration. The
one incident in Sartoris wherein Bayard Sartoris dashes
through the entire Union lines in an attempt to capture a
supply of anchovies, his favorite food, and is killed in the
attempt is a vivid indictment of a system that bred men to be
brave and gallant without giving them anything of any value
to be brave and gallant for.

Except for the few lapses mentioned heretofore, Faulkner
has not actually used the Myth as such, but he has gone beyond
the Myth and used the events and states of mind from which the Myth grew. Often the events and the Myth coincide, for it is historical fact that there were men of the South who fought bravely and sometimes unbelievably effectively, there were plantations where slave and master lived harmoniously, there were unjustified depredations done by the Union forces and carpetbaggers after the war, there were able men of the South who worked patiently to restore harmony and stability; but wherein the Myth errs is that it assumes these things to be all of the South. It hides the shameful, vulgar, mean aspects that were and are in the South, and it is in this respect that Faulkner goes beyond the Myth; he not only pictures what is true in the Myth, but he also pictures what is true outside the Myth. In short, he makes an honest, and often effective, attempt to conform to actuality, and if not to actuality, to reality, while, of course, coloring each with his own outlook and interpretation.

Faulkner and Actuality

In the great majority of Faulkner's works through his last novel, Requiem for a Nun, published in 1951, the setting is in a fictional part of Mississippi which Faulkner has designated as Yoknapatawpha County. The picture of Yoknapatawpha County has gradually evolved to the point that it can be described in as great detail as any actual county in Mississippi. Faulkner has even been so kind as to draw a map
of the county which he placed at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* published first in 1936. This map Faulkner labeled:

JEFFERSON, Yoknapatawpha co., Mississippi
Area, 2400 Square Miles - Population, Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313

William Faulkner, Sole Owner & Proprietor

Place and land assume a great importance to Faulkner; so it is necessary to go into more detail about Yoknapatawpha County.

The county is situated in the northwest part of Mississippi. The county seat is Jefferson, which is approximately seventy-five miles south of Memphis and forty miles from Oxford, where the state university is located. The Tallahatchie River runs through the northern part of the county, and the Yoknapatawpha River through the southern part. It is interesting to note that the word Yoknapatawpha comes from two Chichasaw words, *Yocona* and *petopha*, meaning "split land."^4

Although Faulkner does not give it chronologically in his works, it is possible, by rearranging them, to reconstruct the history of Yoknapatawpha County from 1800 to the present. Faulkner calls his tales concerning the early Indians "The Wilderness" and it is as a wilderness that we first find the

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county in 1800, when the Indians are just beginning to be contaminated by the white men. The Indians consider the land to be bountiful, the gift of a beneficent deity. After the coming of the white man, however, the Indians assume his concepts of property and justice and are destroyed as a strong people. The whites trick them and trade them out of their best lands. These men are the Compsons, the Sartorises, the McCaslins, the Sutpens. After them come "people named Gowrie and McCallum and Fraser and Ingrum that used to be Ingraham and Workitt that used to be Urquhart only the one that brought it to America and then Mississippi couldn't spell it either, who love brawling and fear God and believe in Hell."5 With these people came slavery.

The name Jefferson for the county seat dates from 1833. The courthouse is completed in 1839, and the town begins to prosper. It prospers from 1840 to 1860, when the Civil War comes to end forever the dreams of the Compsons, the Sartorises, and the Sutpens. Jefferson is burned by Union troops in 1864.6

After the war the plantation owners return and try to build a new society upon the ruins, but, with the exception of Colonel Sartoris, they meet with nothing but failure. Reconstruction takes its toll. From this time to 1900 the men

5Ibid., p. 74.

6Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, pp. 3-48 (These pages give a complete account of the founding and growth of Jefferson).
who were the leaders before and during the Civil War die out or lose their influence. The time since 1900 has been marked by the dissolution of the great clans of the previous century. The descendants of the Compsons and the Sartorises either die or degenerate into weak or ineffectual people. In this decadence Faulkner has found his favorite and strongest subjects.

Through all of this the Negroes have been persecuted and pampered. They seem to sit outside the world of the whites and to watch its decay impassively. They maintain their roots and sense of family much more effectively than do the whites. As Faulkner says of them in *The Sound and the Fury*, "They endured."  

When one looks for the parallels between Yoknapatawpha County and Lafayette County, of which Oxford is the county seat and which is also Faulkner's home and county, that is, between Legend and Actuality, he will be gratified to find that there are many. The history and geography of both coincide in their major aspects. In fact, each of the clans in the works of Faulkner has its counterpart in the clans that have existed in Lafayette County, and nearly all the incidents in Faulkner have their parallel in actuality. For instance, the career of Thomas Sutpen is a near duplicate of Alexander H. Pegues, the first owner of Ammadelle, an ante-bellum

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7Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, p. 22.
house in Oxford.\(^8\) The Sartorises are easily recognized as the fictional counterpart of Faulkner's own family.

In spite of the many similarities, Yoknapatawpha is not Lafayette County, for just as there are many aspects of the two which coincide, there are some that do not. Faulkner has taken his own county and fashioned it into another county which more nearly lends itself to a literary interpretation. The legendary town of Jefferson is actually a more desirable literary device than is Oxford, for Jefferson is more representative of the small town in Mississippi than is Oxford. Oxford is the site of the state university, which gives it a certain amount of sophistication and sets it off from the other towns of its size in Mississippi. Oxford is real; Jefferson is realistic. By making Yoknapatawpha larger than life size (Lafayette County contains only 679 square miles while Yoknapatawpha County contains 2400 square miles)\(^9\) Faulkner is able to give his saga a broader scope and is able to isolate his characters when he needs to.

In the final analysis, Yoknapatawpha County is real in the Platonic sense. It is the Idea which Faulkner has distilled from reality.

\(^8\)Miner, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 86.
CHAPTER II

ARISTOCRATS

In all societies of the civilized world it is possible to delineate a class structure wherein different people inhabit separate planes of privilege and responsibility. In some societies this delineation is much more marked than in others. The structure of the society of the feudal system of fourteenth century Europe was an extremely stable and remorseless system compared to the social structure of the United States of today, but a society without lines of demarcation of some sort has never existed, and probably never will. No society ever remains indefinitely stable; it changes in form and nature, and classes disappear or are displaced by other groups.

In his Yoknapatawpha Saga William Faulkner has given us, not only a picture of individual members of the society of the South, but also, through them, a picture of the social hierarchy in his part of the South from 1800 to the present. During this time classes have come into existence, and others have destroyed them. Control of society has shifted. Faulkner's South is always in a state of flux.

One class in Faulkner's myth comes into being, flourishes, and is destroyed, but not replaced. The conditions that permit
this class to exist are themselves destroyed; so this class disappears without leaving a vacuum. It is the birth, life, and death of this group that Faulkner has written about most. These are the men who believe in the God-given rightness of their position, in the Code of Honor, who are extremely brave and foolhardy without having anything tangible to be brave and foolhardy about, and so invent abstractions to furnish justification, who achieve everything in the grand manner except their dissolution. These are the aristocrats, Sartoris and Compson.

As Irving Howe has said, "Clan rather than class forms the basic social unit in Faulkner's world." However, this does not mean, as Howe argues, that Faulkner does not concern himself with class; it only means that in the limited framework of Yoknapatawpha County it is necessary to use clans, or families, to represent class, for in an enclosed social system such as Faulkner's only one or two families can represent each delicate social gradation. And at the peak of Faulkner's world we find two clans, the Sartorises and the Compsons.

The Compsons were the first to make an appearance in Yoknapatawpha County. The first Compson in Yoknapatawpha County was Jason Lycurgus Compson, the son of Charles Stuart Compson and the grandson of Quentin Maclachan Compson, both of whom had a propensity for gambling and allying themselves

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1 Irving Howe, William Faulkner; A Critical Study, p. 7.
with hopeless ventures. Jason Lycurgus Compson, with the help of a horse which was extraordinarily fast for two furlongs, became half owner and then full owner of an Indian trading post and was finally able to trade the horse to Ik-kemotubbe, the chief of the Chickasaws, for a square mile of land which would eventually be near the heart of Jefferson and on which within twenty years he had established a plantation with "its slave-quarters and stables and kitchengardens and the formal laws and promenades and pavilions laid out by the same architect who built the columned porticoed house."^2

From this time until the Civil War the Compsons prospered, became powerful and produced a governor, Quentin Maclachan Compson, and a general, Jason Lycurgus Compson II, who proved inept in war, even more inept in finance, and who began the decline of the Compson clan, finally dying in a hunting and fishing camp in 1900.

It is about the son of Jason Lycurgus II, Jason Lycurgus III, and his children that the Compson novel, The Sound and the Fury, tells. Jason Lycurgus III was trained to be a lawyer, but he spent his days in his office above the square reading Horace and Livy and Catullus while the hopelessly mortgaged Compson land relentlessly slipped from his grasp.

^2Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, p. 6. Faulkner has given a detailed genealogy of the Compsons in the appendix of the 1946 publication of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.
The Sound and the Fury is an account of the anguished dissolution of the Compson clan. Written in a difficult combination of stream-of-consciousness and narration, it pictures the frustration, purposelessness, weak will, decadence of the last of a once powerful and proud family.

There is Quentin Compson III, whose perverted sense of family honor creates an unnatural but inactive love in him for his amoral sister Candace. Jason III, his father, has sold part of the remaining Compson land so that Quentin can go to Harvard for one year, and thus become a gentleman, and he is enough of a gentleman to wait until the year is completed before he drowns himself in the Charles River in June, 1910.

There is Candace, called Caddy, who is guided by a sense of doom from one affair to another, from one marriage to another, until she is last heard of as the mistress of a Nazi general in 1945, and who "doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything anymore worth being saved."  

There is Jason Compson IV, who is "the first sane Compson since before Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence the last."  

Being "sane," he is different from the other Compsons. He does not retreat from the plague-like Snopeses who are gaining control of Jefferson, but he fights them on their own terms and beats them. He learns to be a cotton grader, bides

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3Ibid., p. 16.  4Ibid.
his time until his mother's death, when he is able to put his idiot brother in an institution, take unto himself a mistress, and spend the rest of his days in contentment.

There is Benjy who is named Maury until his idiocy becomes apparent. Benjy loves three things: the pasture which has been sold to send Quentin III to Harvard, his sister Candace, and firelight. He is emasculated in 1913 and, in 1933, is committed to the state Asylum, where he still loves the same three things.

There is Quentin, the daughter of Candace and the last Compson. Quentin is "nameless at birth and already doomed to be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined her sex." She steals the money which her Uncle Jason has been saving during miserable years of self-denial and disappears with a carnival pitchman, never to be seen again.

So ends the saga of the Compsons in weakness, perversion, promiscuity, frustration, and self-indulgence. Herein lies Faulkner's favorite theme, loss of strength, decay and death of once-great families.

The other aristocratic clan in Yoknapatawpha County is the Sartoris family, which Faulkner writes about in The Unvanquished and Sartoris. In many ways the Sartoris family corresponds to Faulkner's own family. Colonel John Sartoris is the fictional counterpart of Colonel William Falkner,

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5Ibid., p. 19.
Faulkner's great-grandfather. Except for changes in dates their lives are almost identical. The young Bayard Sartoris in *Sartoris* has his model in Dean Faulkner, Faulkner's brother killed in an air crash. And there are other, not so obvious, parallels.

Of all of Faulkner's major clans the Sartorises are probably the most ill defined. *Sartoris*, which tells of the twentieth century Sartorises, precedes *The Unvanquished*, which hazily pictures the Civil War and Reconstruction ancestors. It is probable that Faulkner introduced the Sartoris group in *Sartoris* before he had formulated the complete concept of the Yoknapatawpha Saga. *The Unvanquished* would then have been added in order to complete the story of the Sartorises. Also, Faulkner seems to have difficulty in his interpretations of the Sartoris protagonists. His ambiguous approach to the Sartoris family may stem from the fact that they are, after all, Faulkners (Falkners), about whom Faulkner has probably had several changes of opinion.

The first Sartoris in the Yoknapatawpha Saga is John Sartoris, who comes to the county about 1837. He already has money and slaves and steps immediately into a position of prominence in Jefferson. The Sartoris plantation is built four miles north of Jefferson, and John Sartoris shares social leadership only with the Compsons, who live in Jefferson itself.

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6Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, p. 44.
John Sartoris, besides being rich, is obviously a man of learning and culture. In his library are found copies of "Coke upon Littleton, a Josephus, a Koran, a volume of Mississippi Reports dated 1848, a Jeremy Taylor, a Napoleon's Maxims, a thousand and ninety-eight page treatise on astrology, a History of Werewolf Men in England, Ireland and Scotland and Including Wales by the Reverend Ptolemy Thorndyke, M. A. (Edinburgh), F. R. S. S., a complete Walter Scott, a complete Fenimore Cooper, a paper-bound Dumas complete."^7

The two decades of prosperity and stability which Jefferson enjoys from 1840 to 1860 are ended by the Civil War. John Sartoris immediately, without any concept of the forces behind the war, raises a regiment of cavalry at his own expense and is elected colonel. However, he is defeated for re-election the next year and comes back to Jefferson to organize an irregular cavalry unit. From that time until the end of the war, he spends part of the time fighting and part of the time at home trying to raise crops. Obviously he does not distinguish himself in war, for little is written about his part in it.

After the war, Colonel Sartoris becomes the leader in the successful attempt of the people of Yoknapatawpha County to destroy the Reconstruction politicians, Grandfather and Grandson Burden, fanatical reformers from New England. Colonel Sartoris insures the political success of himself and his

^7Faulkner, The Unvanquished, p. 18.
cohorts by killing the Burdens (they drew first) and intimidating the Negro voters.

Colonel Sartoris is also a leader in the financial field. In partnership with General Compson and Ben J. Redmond, he builds a railroad through Jefferson to Memphis. He continues to prosper and runs for the state legislature in 1874, defeating his former partner, Redmond, who thereupon kills Sartoris, who is unarmed at the time.  

After the death of Colonel Sartoris, there are no more Sartorises who have the ability to persevere as had the colonel. He is the only Sartoris who is ever successful at anything except suicide, just as Jason Lycurgus is the only Compson who leaves the Compson clan stronger than he finds it.

Another Sartoris, the other Bayard, is killed in a moment of reckless bravado during the Civil War. His place in the clan is never clearly defined although he is probably John's brother. Another Bayard, the son of John Sartoris, is first found as the adolescent narrator in The Unvanquished and then again as Old Bayard in Sartoris. He is the only Sartoris to live past sixty. Born too late for one war and too early for all succeeding wars, he must search for death in some other manner, and he finally dies of a heart attack in the careening car of his grandson, also named Bayard, in 1919.

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8These dates coincide with those in The Unvanquished. According to Requiem for a Nun, the railroad is finished in 1876, and Colonel Sartoris is killed in 1888.
Old Bayard's son John, mentioned only a few times in Faulkner's works, dies of yellow fever and an old Spanish bullet wound in 1901, according to an entry in Old Bayard's Bible.9

John has twin sons, John and Bayard, both of whom die in the air but in different ways. John is shot down by German planes in 1918 after he flies into German territory alone in an obsolete plane. Bayard witnesses his death, and the memory forces him to search for death, too. Sartoris, although it concerns many others, is chiefly the story of Young Bayard's search for meaning in life coupled with his search for death. He finally finds death when he takes up an airplane which he knows is defective, leaving an infant son named Benbow Sartoris. So, unlike the Compsons, the Sartorises have not completely disappeared, but as yet Faulkner has given no indication of a plan to resurrect the Sartoris Saga in the person of Benbow. In Sartoris the following dialogue is found concerning the Civil War:

"Will," he said, "what the devil were you folks fighting about, anyhow?"
"Bayard," old man Falls answered, "be damned ef I ever did know."10

This dialogue contains the central and revealing characterization of the Sartoris men. They never did know what they were fighting about, and although they fought bravely and

9Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 90. 10Ibid., p. 227.
magnificently, they were never satisfied, never knowing what they were fighting about. They sought and found justification only in death.

The glamour, the chivalry, the tragedy of the Sartorises is shown in the thoughts of Aunt Jenny after the death of Young Bayard:

The music went on in the dusk softly; the dusk was peopled with ghosts of glamorous and old disastrous things. And if they were just glamorous enough, there was sure to be a Sartoris in them, and then they were sure to be disastrous. Pawns, But the Player, and the game He plays. . . He must have a name for His pawns, though. But perhaps Sartoris is the game itself - a game outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late and to an old dead pattern, and of which the Player Himself is a little wearied. For there is death in the sound of it, and a glamorous fatality, like silver pennons downrushing at sunset, or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux.11

11Ibid., p. 380.
CHAPTER III

PRETENDERS

At first glance, it would appear that another family, the Sutpens, should have been included in the chapter on the aristocrats, but a closer examination will show that Thomas Sutpen is a pretender to aristocracy who tries to force himself into that class by acquiring money, property, and a wife of high birth. Sutpen never succeeds in this attempt because he lacks some essential qualifications of a true aristocrat. He lacks compassion, an important trait in all of Faulkner's aristocrats, and he lacks a belief in the code of the class to which he aspires. He wants to be a member of the class because he wants to be on top, but he has no convictions about the rightness or the responsibility of the gentleman; so he fails to act his part convincingly, and his failure to fulfill the obligations of the class that he presumes himself to be a member of is the cause of his death.

In Absalom; Absalom! Faulkner tells the story of the Sutpens in an indirect manner, using a conversation between Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson and between Quentin and his Harvard roommate to unfold the story.

Thomas Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson in 1837 creates a lasting impression upon everyone who sees it or hears about it.
And it is in this way that he affects everyone during his life. Seventy-two years after his arrival in Jefferson Rosa Coldfield describes him thus:

A man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that French architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by negroes - a man who fled here and hid, concealed himself behind respectability, behind that hundred miles of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant Indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather...

In the next paragraph Rosa gives her irrevocable judgment of Sutpen's social position:

No; not even a gentleman. Marrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made him one.2

From the time of his arrival in Yoknapatawpha County Sutpen works himself and his Negroes to the limit of their endurance, tearing a plantation from the heavily wooded northwest corner of the county and building the largest house in the area. In 1834 he has a daughter, Clytemnestra, by one of his slave women, but this fact does not prevent his marrying Ellen Coldfield, the daughter of Goodhue Coldfield, the symbol of the respectability that Sutpen demands. The next

1Faulkner, Absalom; Absalom! p. 16.  
2Ibid.
year a son, Henry Sutpen, is born, bringing the number of Sutpen's sons to two (he has had a son, Charles Bon, by his first wife, Eulalia, whom he renounced after he found that she had some Negro blood). In 1841 a daughter, Judith, is born.

From this time until 1859, Thomas Sutpen's affairs go well. In 1859, however, Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon meet at the University of Mississippi, and Charles meets Judith at Christmas of the same year. Thomas Sutpen refuses to give any sign that he recognizes Charles Bon as his son, and Charles refuses to reveal it himself. When Charles and Judith become engaged, Sutpen forbids the marriage, giving no reason for his action. Henry repudiates his birthright and departs with Charles.

At the beginning of the war in 1861, Sutpen, Henry, and Charles enter the Confederate forces. Sutpen is elected major in the unit of which John Sartoris is chosen colonel. The following year Sutpen is elected the colonel of the regiment, replacing Colonel Sartoris.

After the war Henry learns that Charles Bon is his half brother and kills him at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred, not because he fears incest but because he abhors the possibility of miscegenation.

After the war Sutpen is quickly destroyed. He loses all but a small portion of his land and finally becomes a clerk in a country store, selling candy and flour to Negroes and
poor whites and drinking whiskey with Wash Jones, one of his former plantation hangers-on. He takes up with Milly, Wash's granddaughter, in hopes of continuing his line, but when a daughter is born in 1869, he is so disappointed that he abuses Milly; and Wash, rising to the stature of a man for once in his life, kills him.

Judith dies of smallpox in 1884, and Charles dies when the old plantation house is burned in 1910, ending the Sutpen line.

The Sutpens are among the strongest of Faulkner's characters. They possess strength, perseverance, and will. Thomas Sutpen begins with nothing and builds the largest plantation in Yoknapatawpha County; yet he is destroyed completely while the Sartorises and the Compsons are still powers in the county.

Faulkner has used the Sutpens as the symbol of that class that he thinks really did the most to destroy the South. Sutpen is in many ways an apotheosis of the Southern planter. He has a prototype plantation house, a hundred square miles of fertile land, one hundred fifty slaves, and he has great influence in the area. But he lacks those personal qualities which a class that has all those things must have if the society is to survive. He lacks compassion, ethics, a sense of honor, and most of all, he lacks self-understanding; neither he nor his sons ever understand themselves. Their actions are compulsive, and they never understand their compulsions;
they merely follow them to their doom. It was the compulsive, unthinking men of power in the South who made the war inevitable. With the war, destruction was certain.

In Absalom; Absalom! Quentin Compson brings forth this idea symbolically when he divines Rosa Coldfield’s motive in telling him the story of the Sutpens:

It's because she wants it told... so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War; that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could he stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth.3

3Ibid., p. 11.
CHAPTER IV

PLEBEIANS

After his grandfather, Old Bayard, dies of a heart attack in his car, Young Bayard, in Sartoris, seeks out his old friends in the hill country of Yoknapatawpha County, the McCallums, for a temporary retreat from life and his tortured mind. In the company of the MacCallums, proud, self-sufficient, unpretentious, Bayard finds rest for a short time before he goes back to his world of torment to search for death.

Although Faulkner devotes very little space in his work to the MacCallums and their kind, they constitute another plane in the hierarchy of Yoknapatawpha County. The MacCallums are the land-owning, tolerant, moral, stable whites who form part of the strength of the South. They have no pretensions of aristocracy, no desire for political control. They have an intuitive loyalty to their region and country, and a strong, affectionate loyalty to each other. Like the Negroes, the MacCallums seem to stay on the sidelines in Yoknapatawpha County, observing rather than participating, and also, like the Negroes, they endure.

The following brief description of Virginius MacCallum, the head of the MacCallum family, shows Faulkner's admiration for this kind of man:
In 1861 he was sixteen and he had walked to Lexington, Virginia, and enlisted, served four years in the Stonewall brigade and walked back to Mississippi and built himself a house and got married. His wife's dot was a clock and a dressed hog; his own father gave him a mule. His wife was dead these many years, and her successor was dead, but he sat now before the fireplace at which that hog had been cooked, beneath the roof he had built in '66, and on the mantel above him the clock sat, deriding that time whose servant it once had been.

The MacCallums are kind to their Negroes (they have a Negro family to cook, farm, and train their hunting dogs). The Negroes and the MacCallums have an unexpressed affection for each other, both content with their position in life.

Like all of Faulkner's self-sufficient characters the MacCallums are close to nature. They are responsive to changes in the weather, to the changes in season, and to the land itself. When Young Bayard ventures the guess that snow is imminent, making for good hunting weather, one of the MacCallum boys answers:

"Might be. What's it goin' to do tonight, Pappy?"
"Rain," the old man answered. "Tomorrow, too. Scent won't lay good till We'n'sday."

Later Dick, the Negro in charge of the dogs, supports the old man's prediction:

"Ground's about hard already," Bayard remarked.
"'Twon't freeze tonight," Buddy answered. "Will it Dick?"
"Naw, suh. Gwine rain."
"Go on," Bayard said. "I don't believe it."

1Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 310. 2Ibid., p. 313.
"Pappy said so," Buddy replied. "Warmer'n 'twas at sundown."
"Don't feel like it, to me." Bayard insisted. Of course, it did not freeze, and it did rain for the next two days.

Besides Virginius MacCallum there are his sons. There is Jackson, "the eldest, a man of fifty-two, with a broad high forehead and thick brows and an expression at once dreamy and intense - a sort of shy and impractical Cincinnatus." There is Henry, fifty, who takes the place of the housekeeper in the womanless MacCallum family (Mandy, the Negro cook, is supervised by Henry). He is an excellent cook and distiller. With the help of a Negro, Henry makes an exceptional Scotch-like whiskey from a secret recipe meant for family consumption only. Henry, taciturn like his father, goes into Jefferson only when it is necessary.

There are the twins Rafe and Stuart, forty-four, who bear no greater resemblance than do any of the other brothers. Rafe has an easy manner and is the most talkative of the MacCallum boys. Stuart is quiet and even-tempered. He has an instinctive trading ability and has a respectable bank account in Jefferson.

There are the youngest sons, Buddy, twenty, who is the quietest of all the boys and who spends the greater part of his time hunting, regardless of the state of the weather, and Lee, who is eighteen.

3Ibid., p. 316. 4Ibid., p. 315.
The MacCallums show some signs of decadence, however. The fact that all the boys are bachelors points to the fact that the strength of the family lies to a certain extent in the will of the ageing Virginius. The boys, particularly Buddy, show an envy of the aristocratic Bayard with his city-bred manners and freedom.

As long as the MacCallums stay close to the soil and do not aspire to raise themselves in the social system, they remain stable and strong. Decadence begins only when the Sartorises contaminate the MacCallums and cause them to have envy. Faulkner does not continue the story of the MacCallums until he writes about them again after the beginning of World War II, when he finds the MacCallums to be still the same sturdy, independent hill farmers that they are in Sartoris; so we must assume that the incipient decadence which is seen in the MacCallums in Sartoris is overcome, possibly because of the fact that, after the death of Bayard, the MacCallums have no more contact with the aristocrats.

There is another family in Faulkner's works which almost assumes the same position as that of the MacCallums, but it is prevented from doing so because of the curse which Carothers McCaslin, the founder of the clan, brings upon his descendants when he seduces his daughter born to him by a Negro slave. This is, in fact, a double curse, a combination of miscegenation and incest.
Go Down, Moses is a book of seven stories, six of which deal with the McCaslin clan from the Civil War to the social decay of 1940. Four of the stories concern the ancestry, upbringing, and moral formation of Isaac McCaslin, the last of the clan.

The first of the McCaslins in Yoknapatawpha County is Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, who is born in the Carolinas in 1772 and dies in Yoknapatawpha County in 1837. He has twin sons Amodeus (Buck) McCaslin and Theophilus (Buddy) McCaslin, born in the Carolinas in 1800. Carothers McCaslin founds the clan and fashions the instrument of its destruction by his relations with his Negro mistress. The McCaslins acquire land and slaves, but they never move in the top social and political circles of Yoknapatawpha County, nor do they pretend to.

The last McCaslin on the male side is Isaac McCaslin, the central figure in Go Down, Moses. The latest, though not the last, descendant on the female (Negro) side to be considered in Faulkner's works is Lucas Beauchamp, the central figure of Intruder in the Dust. He will be considered in Chapter VI.

Isaac McCaslin, the grandson of Carothers McCaslin, burdened by the curse of incest and miscegenation put on the family by his grandfather, repudiates his inheritance and undertakes to do justice to the Negro descendants of the family by dividing the inheritance among them. The central
theme of *Go Down, Moses* is love and justice, a social conscience that seems to be as much a part of Faulkner as of Isaac. Through his boyhood relationship with Sam Fathers, half Indian and half Negro, and his close kinship with nature through this relationship, Isaac has returned to nature, to the primitive sense of pride and justice which the early Indians possessed, to the idea of nature as a bountiful supplier not to be abused and as belonging to all men equally. Through his renunciation of his inheritance, Isaac becomes a self-sufficient symbol of enduring strength.

The Plebeians maintain their strength because they draw upon the values of the Primitives while successfully resisting the temptations of the civilization of Jefferson.
CHAPTER V

POOR WHITES

Except the Negroes, the poor whites comprise the most numerous clan in Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner has recognized the importance of this group in the large portion of his work that is devoted to it. He pictures poor whites in all of his works; and several of his novels, such as The Hamlet, As I Lay Dying, and Light in August, are concerned primarily with them.

This class has in itself two major divisions. One group is composed of those poor whites who scrabble their living from the soil from one year to the next, always on the edge of poverty and having neither the ability nor inclination to better their position. The second group is composed of those who, through trickery and unemotional, remorseless cruelty, prey on the other poor whites to acquire money and power. The first group is best exemplified by the Bundrens, the central figures of As I Lay Dying. The second group is exemplified by the Snopeses, the clan that, in The Hamlet, descends upon Yoknapatawpha County like a plague of locusts.

In both The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, Faulkner tells the story by giving the thoughts of the participants of the story. The thoughts of the Bundrens are given in short,
choppy snatches as they take the putrescent corpse of Addie Bundren, the mother of the family, to Jefferson to be buried. By the time Addie Bundren is buried, a complete picture of the strength and weakness, virtues and vices, of the Bundren family has been presented.

Before her death, Addie Bundren remembers her father saying to her "that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time."

Because she wants to stay dead for a long time in the right way, she makes Anse Bundren, her husband, promise to take her to Jefferson when she dies and bury her with her ancestors. Anse, to whom honesty and selflessness are ordinarily foreign, considers this promise to be binding. He and his family are forced literally to go through fire and flood to bring the body to Jefferson, but the stinking corpse is finally put into the Jefferson cemetery after nine days of the perverted Odyssey.

Of all the Bundrens, Addie is the strongest, even in death. She is the only member of the family who has any roots in the past. Her father, who, it would appear, was a morbid sayer of proverbs concerning death, induced her to get enough education to be a school teacher. While she is teaching at a rural school in Yoknapatawpha County, Anse Bundren comes calling on her and asks her to marry him on his first visit. In order to escape from teaching, which she abhors, she

\[1\] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, p. 461.
accepts Anse and, with him, a life of even greater misery. When Addie becomes pregnant for the first time, she feels that she has been betrayed:

And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not.2

After the second son is born, Addie considers her husband to be dead. She refuses him any more children while she withdraws into herself with thoughts of death, sins, words, and action.

Addie is stirred from her lethargy by the Preacher Whitfield, with whom she has an affair. She considers the sin of her relations with Preacher Whitfield to be erased because of the fact that the instrument of it is a man of God, just as an electric needle closes the same wound that it makes. She has a son by Preacher Whitfield, and to make up to Anse for it, she gives him two more children:

I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die.3

Addie has expiated her sin against Anse by action instead of words, unlike her neighbor, Cora Tull:

2Ibid., p. 463. 3Ibid., p. 467.
One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray, too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words, too.4

The titular head of the Bundren family is Anse Bundren, whose ancestry is explained away by his terse "I ain't got no people."5 Anse exhibits all the damning characteristics of his class with none, or almost none, of the redeeming ones. He is selfish, callous, bone lazy, deceitful, unambitious, parasitic. He swindles his sons and neighbors into doing all of his work for him, claiming that, as the result of a childhood sickness, if he ever sweats, he will die. Though no one believes this but Anse, all are tricked into doing his work for him. Even though Anse has spent his life existing on the sweat of others, he has a monumental pity for himself:

It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain't the hard-working man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they can't take their motors and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord.6

Much of the above lament is true, but not about Anse Bundren.

4Ibid., p. 468.
5Ibid., p. 463.
6Ibid., p. 414.
Only once does Anse evince any compassion or affection for his dead wife, when he speaks to his children about her just before she is buried:

You all don't know . . . The somebody you was young with and you growed old in her and she growed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it don't matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and alla man's grief and trials. You all don't know.7

The fact that his selflessness is only a thing of the moment is shown the day after Addie is buried, when Anse brings back "a kind of duck-shaped woman all dressed up, with them kind of hard-looking pop eyes like she was daring ere a man to say nothing,"8 and introduces her to his children as Mrs. Bundren.

Besides Anse and Addie, there are the children, Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. Cash, the first born, is, in many ways, the strongest of the children. He is quiet, efficient, patient, introverted, self-sufficient, compassionate. Cash possesses the virtues of his class that his father lacks. He is a skillful carpenter, taking great pride in the construction of his mother's coffin. When his leg is broken and Anse, in his cruel selfishness, sets it by pouring concrete over it, Cash utters not one complaint over the miles of torture into Jefferson. Cash is almost Christ-like in his patience, compassion, and suffering.

7Ibid., p. 511. 8Ibid., p. 532.
The second son is Darl, the only member of the family to divine his mother's affair with Whitfield and Dewey Dell's pregnancy. Addie and Dewey Dell are aware of Darl's knowledge about them, although he never speaks to them of it. Darl's brooding upon the knowledge that he has drives him to insanity and the asylum in Jackson, with no one but Cash to mourn his going.

The third son is Jewel, the issue of Addie and Preacher Whitfield. The affection between Jewel and Addie is a vicious fury which everyone else sees as hatred. Addie says of him: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me." And it is Jewel who saves Addie's corpse from the flooded river and from the burning barn after Darl has set it afire to burn her body. Jewel has a fierce desire to protect his mother from the rest of the family:

It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill, faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet. . .

He sacrifices his most valued possession, a spotted horse, in order to get her body to Jefferson as she wanted. There is some indication that, with his mother gone, he will leave the family and disappear.

9Ibid., p. 460.  
10Ibid., pp. 347-8.
After Jewel come Dewey Dell and Vardaman, vegetable and idiot. Dewey Dell is pathetic in her amorality and her search for a means of ridding herself of the growth in her womb. Dewey Dell is incapable of any emotion except fear. She engineers Darl's commitment to the asylum with perfect equanimity, only for the reason that she knows that Darl knows of her pregnancy, which everyone else will soon know about anyway.

Vardaman, the last son, is an idiot who is unable to distinguish between his mother and the fish that he catches on the same day that she dies. All that he knows is that Jewel's mother is a horse and that his mother cannot be in the coffin that his brothers are so laboriously carrying to Jefferson, for "my mother is a fish."11

These are the Bundrens, but there are other people of the same class shown in As I Lay Dying. There are the Tulls and the Armstids, families in the same economic position as the Bundrens, having the same religion, superstitions, and habits, all of them resigned to their life of poverty and sweat which will be rewarded only after death.

Besides the poor whites as symbolized by the Bundrens, there is the group which is often referred to in the South as white trash. This group is found in the works of Faulkner in the shape of Flem Snopes and his swindling, stealing, lying, deceiving, snatching, disgusting clan.

11Ibid., p. 398.
The Hamlet is the chronicle of the Snopeses, although Faulkner gives further information about them in other works such as Sartoris, The Unvanquished, and The Sound and the Fury. In the Yoknapatawpha Saga the Snopeses descend upon the county and the city like a plague of locusts that no one is able to cope with. They are parasites that consume and kill those upon whom they feed. Through trickery and deceit they swindle their neighbors out of their money and property and move into Jefferson and spread like a cancer until they assume political control and one of them becomes president of the Sartoris bank. One by one, they take over control of the businesses in Jefferson until they control the economy of the whole county.

Faulkner's thesis is that the Snopeses would never have gained control had it not been for the abdication of responsibility by the one group that could have stopped them, the aristocrats. Colonel Sartoris or General Compson would have answered the Snopes invasion by shooting one (more, if necessary) of them dead on the streets of Jefferson as an example to the rest. But by the time the Snopes's threat becomes apparent, Colonel Sartoris and General Compson are dead, and their descendants, Old Bayard Sartoris and Jason Compson, are too weak to fight. The Snopeses contaminate the community because there is no force left in the community to stop them. In Faulkner it is the aristocrats and the Snopeses that destroy the old way of life, the first, passively; the second, actively.
The first of the Snopeses is Ab Snopes, a bushwhacking horse thief during the Civil War, who helps Rosa Millard steal Yankee horses and has her killed when she is no longer any help to him. From 1875 to 1900 Ab and his relatives breed children prolifically while moving from one flea-bitten farm to another, leaving each one even more worthless than they find it, burning the buildings on the farms if they think the landlord has been unfair to them.

The Snopeses are uncommunicative and withdrawn. Those who deal with them for the first time recoil with unexplainable fear. The Snopeses have no social contacts with their neighbors, mingling only with those of their own clan. When they deal with people outside their clan, it is only to swindle them with unfeeling viciousness.

The real leader of the Snopes clan is Flem Snopes, the eldest son of Ab. The Hamlet concerns the demoralization and spiritual destruction of the people of Frenchman's Bend, a rural community in Yoknapatawpha County.

Flem Snopes is the real beginning of the evil in the Snopeses. Ab Snopes, Flem's father, is not mean, just soured, as Ratliff, the sewing machine agent in The Hamlet, explains:

"Why, just soured," Ratliff said pleasantly, easily, readily. "There was that business during the War. When he wasn't bothering nobody, not

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The name Flem Snopes is itself onomatopoetically designed for revolting implications. Flem is suggestive of phlegm. The word Snopes is suggestive of snot, snake, snob, sneer, snarl, snot, snide, snare, sneak, snivel, snoop, and snuffle.
harming or helping either side, just tending to his own business, which was profit and horses — things which never even heard of such a thing as a political conviction — when here comes somebody that never even owned the horses even and shot him in the heel. And that soured him. And then that business of Colonel Sartoris's main-law, Miss Rosa Millard, that Ab had done went and formed a horse-and mule-partnership with in good faith and honor, not aiming to harm nobody blue or gray but just keeping his mind fixed on profit and horses, until Miz Millard had to go and get herself shot by that fellow that called his self Major Gruroby, and then Colonel's boy Bayard and Uncle Buck McCaslin and a nigger caught Ab in the woods and something else happened, tied up to a tree or something and maybe even a doubled bridle rein or maybe even a heated ramrod in it too though that's just hearsay. Anyhow, Ab had to withdraw his allegiance to the Sartorises, and I hear tell he skulked for a considerable back in the hills until Colonel Sartoris got busy enough building his railroad for it to be safe to come out. And that soured him some more but at least he still had horse trading left to fall back on. Then he run into Pat Stamper. And Pat eliminated him from horse-trading. And so he just went plumb curdled.13

Flem, however, is born, not only soured, but evil. He is mechanical in his callous disregard for anything resembling honesty or compassion.

Because he fears Flem, Will Varner hires him as clerk in his store in Frenchman's Bend, even letting him stay in one of the rooms in his house. In a short time, Flem begins to assume the same proprietary air concerning anything that belongs to Will Varner that Varner has himself. The people of Frenchman's Bend learn to fear Flem Snopes.

When Varner's daughter Eula becomes pregnant by an unknown suitor, Varner buys Flem as her husband, giving him a sizeable amount of money as well as a large tract of land. With this start, Flem replaces Varner as the leading power in the community. He deceives, bullies, and swindles his neighbors with impunity. At one time he sells his neighbors a number of wild spotted horses which are untamable; at another time he manages to sell worthless land for a good price by "salting" the land with gold. This swindle drives one of the purchasers mad.

When Flem has accumulated enough money, he buys half interest in a restaurant in Jefferson, where he moves himself and many of his relatives to prey on the unsuspecting town. When Flem becomes president of the Sartoris bank, his triumph is complete; and the South of Colonel Sartoris, General Compson, and Colonel Sutpen is dead.

Besides Ab and Flem, there are a multitude of other Snopeses. The kinship of one Snopes to another is often so confused that even their neighbors are not quite aware of it. There is Eck Snopes, whose horse breaks Armstid's leg. There is Mink Snopes, the murderer. There is Isaac Snopes, the idiot who loves a cow with Homeric passion and whose father makes an exhibition of his bestial relations with the cow. There is Byron Snopes, who is the bookkeeper in the Sartoris bank until he robs it and leaves in the night. Behind these
there are the nameless Snopeses who follow Flem, denuding 
Yoknapatawpha County as the locusts plagued the land of 
Egypt.

Indeed, it is a judgment that the Snopeses descend upon 
Yoknapatawpha County. The people of the county have deserted 
the primitive principles of compassion and justice and respons-
sibility, and the Snopeses are their punishment, their plague 
of locusts.

Faulkner sums up the character of the Snopeses when Flem 
Snopes, who has just swindled Mrs. Armstid out of her last 
five dollars, gives her five cents worth of candy and says 
with equanimity, "A little sweetening for the chaps."\footnote{Ibid., p. 362.}
CHAPTER VI

NEGROES

The picture that Faulkner has given us of the Negroes in Yoknapatawpha County has been a constantly changing one. In his first works, Faulkner uses a stereotyped concept of the Negro, but as he progresses in his work, his Negroes assume more complex characteristics and greater importance. In Faulkner's last novels, *Intruder in the Dust* and *Requiem for a Nun*, Negroes become protagonists.

Although the picture of the Negro in Yoknapatawpha County changes constantly, the position that he holds in the social structure of the county does not change. Any white man in Yoknapatawpha County has more privileges and immunities than does any Negro, and, unlike the Snopeses, for instance, the Negro has no hope of being able to raise himself in the social scale except by leaving the county and going to some Northern city, where he finds that the change is not enough to merit the move.

In the Appendix of *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner says of the Negroes that "they endure."\(^1\) Those two words give the keynote to the salient characteristic of the Negroes in

\(^1\)Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, p. 22.
Yoknapatawpha County. Despite misfortune, poverty, and persecution, the Negroes survive. Either from good sense or fear, the Negroes accept, though not necessarily approve, their unhappy position in the society of Yoknapatawpha County. Though the Negroes have no ancestor fixation, as have the Sartorises, they have a strong sense of family and are even more firmly rooted in the county than those who have done the most to fashion it.

As Faulkner has been more aware of the importance of the Negro problem in the South, his admiration for the Negro has increased. In 1927, Faulkner, talking of Negroes, says:

> After all, only a few chosen can accept service with dignity: it is man's impulse to do for himself. It rests with the servant to lend dignity to an unnatural proceeding.  

In 1929, Faulkner has Quentin Compson, in *The Sound and the Fury*, think about the Negro:

> The train swung around the curve, the engine puffing with short, heavy blasts, and they (a Negro and his mule) passed smoothly from sight that way, with that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity: that blending of childlike and ready incompetence and paradoxical reliability that tends and protects them it loves out of all reason and robs them steadily and evades responsibility and obligations by means too barefaced to be called subterfuge even and is taken in theft or evasion with only that frank and spontaneous admiration for the victor which a gentleman feels for anyone who beats him in a fair contest, and withal a fond and unflagging tolerance for white-folks' vagaries like that of

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a grandparent for unpredictable and troublesome children, which I had forgotten.  

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936, Faulkner even suggests that the Negro race is superior to the white race when he has Miss Rosa Coldfield say of the half-breed Clytie: "A brooding awareness and acceptance of the inexplicable unseen, inherited from an older and purer race than mine." In 1942 Ike McCaslin, one of Faulkner's strongest whites, says of the Negro:

They are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion -- not laziness: evasion: of what white men had set them to, not for their aggrandisement or even comfort but his own -- . . . . And their virtues -- . . . . Endurance -- . . . and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children -- . . . whether their own or not or black or not. 

In the same work Faulkner completely dams the white man's pride over the Negro when he says:

Then one day the old curse of his (Carothers Edmonds') father, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him. 

The old adage that a man, having done another an injustice, will never forgive him for it seems to apply to the white man and the Negro. The white man in the South, having done the Negroes a monumental injustice, finds himself compelled to

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6Ibid., p. 111.
justify himself by continued injustices. Only a few, such as Isaac McCaslin and Gavin Stevens, have the insight to recognize the injustice and the courage to attempt to right it.

The Negroes in Yoknapatawpha County who do not have the patience and endurance found in the other Negroes are those that have been "corrupted" by white blood. Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, torn between his white and Negro blood, fights his society and is destroyed. Charles Bon and Charles St. Velery Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!* unable to receive the recognition that they desire, are destroyed because of their ambiguous racial status. (Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*, even though he does have endurance, is isolated from society because he refuses to accept either his white or black heritage.)

Except for those that rebel against them, the whites do not look upon the Negroes as individuals but as a group. They tend to think of them as Negro instead of as a Negro. Faulkner is often himself guilty of this generalization. There is no work of Faulkner's which deals with a Negro family or clan in a way comparable to his treatment of white families in *Sartoris, The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying*, and *The Hamlet*. The relationship of Negroes with each other is little discussed, also. In Yoknapatawpha County, the whites show little interest in the life of the Negroes except as it relates to them. And it is this aspect of the Negro that Faulkner concerns himself with. He always
pictures the Negroes in their relationship with the whites, and in this aspect the Negroes are very important. For the whites, the Negroes often assume the function of savior and conscience. It is the Negro mammy Dilsey who holds the Compson family together until its death in *The Sound and the Fury*. Dilsey is the only person who is capable of restraining Jason IV from doing those things which would destroy the family completely.

In Yoknapatawpha County, there is a difference between the Negro as a child and the Negro as an adult. White and Negro children play together with easy familiarity until adolescence, when this interracial friendship is no longer permitted. Old Bayard nostalgically recalls his boyhood friendship with Ringo, his Negro playmate. (In *The Sound and the Fury*, the only pleasant memories that the whites have are those of the times when the white and Negro children play together.) In *Go Down, Moses*, Miss Worsham explains her wish to help an old Negro woman by recalling their childhood friendship. Also in *Go Down, Moses*, Roth Edmonds says that Mollie Beauchamp is the only mother he ever knew and that as a child he considered the Beauchamp home and his own to be interchangeable. This feeling continues until Roth assumes the white man's pride and deliberately and shamefully asserts his dominance over Henry Beauchamp. In their thoughts, the adult whites in Yoknapatawpha County often show a longing to live with the Negroes with the same childhood familiarity.
When a Negro becomes an adult, however, he immediately assumes another role in Yoknapatawpha County. He then becomes a person to be watched, suspected, controlled. He becomes a potential threat to all the white womanhood of the county, and he has to be watched to see that he not only does not entertain any lascivious notions toward the white women but also that he does not become "uppity" in general.

The first Negro who assumes the role of the conscience and moral guide of the whites is Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury. In the whole Compson household, Dilsey is the most patient and the strongest. She alone forces Jason to take care of Benjy and his deluded mother until Caroline Compson dies and there is nothing left to hold together. "I've seed de first an de last," Dilsey says after she witnesses the end of the Compson dynasty. Besides Dilsey, there is her son Luster: "A man, aged 14. Who was not only capable of the complete care and security of an idiot twice his age and three times his size, but could keep him entertained." 8

In Faulkner's latest works, the Negroes assume new characteristics. They are still those who endure; they are still the conscience of the white society, but now Faulkner (and with him, the people of Yoknapatawpha County) begins to realize that no group of people can be subjected to injustice.

7 Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, p. 22.
8 Ibid., p. 313.
and abuse for generations without evolving a great resentment about it. Dilsey feels that she belongs in the South and that her place in it is the proper one. Lucas Beauchamp in Intruder in the Dust and Nancy, the prostitute and dope-addict in Requiem for a Nun, however, refuse to accept the traditional status of the Southern Negro.

Lucas appears in Intruder in the Dust entirely on his own. He is powerful and complete, outside society, yet exerting a great influence on society. He becomes the conscience of every white man in Yoknapatawpha County. He is too proud either to fight or resist the whites who are trying to destroy him, some by lynching, some by law. He is so convinced that the whites will not find the truth, would not recognize it if they did, that he will not try to tell them. He waits, quiet and proud, while an old woman and a young boy save him from death. Then he stubbornly asserts his claim to equality by forcing his white lawyer to take his fee.

In Requiem for a Nun, Nancy, the prostitute and dope-addict, is pictured as the conscience, scourge, and savior of the white family for whom she works. When its mother threatens to take it into a life of shame and misery, Nancy kills the baby which is in her care to save it from the world, and by so doing, saves the mother from herself. Nancy dies, of course, but her influence upon the whites remains.

In Yoknapatawpha County the Negro is the white man's guilt and shame. Because the white man lacks more strength
CHAPTER VII

PRIMITIVES

In Yoknapataw County there is a group which does not belong to any of the social categories delineated in the previous chapters. These people exist outside the social system of the county, for they are primitives who do not take a graduated social structure as their guide. These people follow the precepts of nature and, by so doing, have the strength and justice to survive. Among them, color is of no consequence; the group contains whites, Negroes, and Indians. Their primitive stoicism is the obverse of the American society which Gavin Stevens decries in Intruder in the Dust:

the cheap shoddy dishonest music, the cheap flash baseless overvalued money, the glittering edifice of publicity foundationed on nothing . . . all the spurious uproar produced by men deliberately fostering and then getting rich on our national passion for the mediocre: who will even accept the best provided it is debased and befouled before being fed to us: who are the only people on earth who brag publicly of being second rate.1

Primitive stoicism is exemplified in the Negro who has not been degraded by his contact with the whites:

because he loved the old few simple things which no one wanted to take from him: not an automobile nor flashy clothes nor his picture in the paper but a little of music (his own), a hearth, not his

1Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 155.
child but any child, a God a heaven which a man may avail himself of a little at a time without having to wait to die, a little earth for his own sweat to fall on among his own green shoots and plants.2

The first primitives in Yoknapatawpha County are the Chickasaw Indians before they are corrupted by the white man's sense of property and justice. Before the coming of the white man, the Indians live in the wilderness where there is a plenitude of everything they need, game, woods, water, and space. They look upon nature as a gift from beneficent gods, meant to be shared by all men equally. Their system of justice is simple and effective, lacking the loopholes to be found in the white man's complicated laws.

The Indians have only one weakness, their innocence. When the whites come with their slaves, money, and sense of private property, the Indians are unable to resist the new ways because their innocence prevents them from seeing the danger of the new system that they adopt. Their loss of innocence is accompanied by their destruction as a strong people; they are uprooted from their land and sent to Oklahoma.

The second group of primitives in Yoknapatawpha County are the Negro slaves who keep for themselves and transmit to their descendants their fear and love of mysterious nature and their endurance and great capacity for affection. The prototype for one of these, Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury, is probably seen in the dedication of Go Down, Moses:

2Ibid., p. 156.
To Mammy

CAROLINE BARR

Mississippi

(1840-1940)

Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love. 3

The Negroes that keep their awareness of nature retain their strength and self-sufficiency. Those that permit themselves to ape the people that Gavin Stevens derides are destroyed. Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, in Go Down, Moses, deserts his life close to nature to become a Chicago numbers racketeer and is executed for murder.

It is the primitives in Yoknapatawpha County who resist the encroaching forces of civilization and who emerge, if not completely victorious, at least undefeated and enduring. These are in contrast to the failures of the civilized world, Bayard Sartoris of Sartoris, the Compsons of The Sound and the Fury, Popeye, Benbow, and Temple Drake of Sanctuary, all the characters of Pylon and of Absalom, Absalom! The stolid and stoic figure of Lucas Beauchamp, who endures the danger of lynching in Intruder in the Dust and emerges unyielding, free, and recalcitrant to the last, is the obverse of the products of the corrosion of modern civilization.

3Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, flyleaf.
The two principal primitives in Yoknapatawpha County are presented in "The Bear" from Go Down, Moses. These are Sam Fathers, the half Negro, half Indian hunting guide, and Isaac McCaslin, whom Sam Fathers initiates into the world of nature. In Sam Fathers are united the stolid endurance of the Negro and the awareness of nature of the Indian. Isaac McCaslin is the young neophyte who has come to the high priest, Sam Fathers, for moral guidance:

They (Ike and Sam Fathers) were the white boy, marked forever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody hands had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man's tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands, the touch, the first worthy blood . . . joining him and the man forever . . . .4

In an allegorical manner, Sam Fathers, Isaac McCaslin, and Old Ben, the bear, act out the ritual of the nature myth. For six years the annual hunt for Old Ben continues, until the bear is brought to bay and killed with the help of Lion, a wild hunting dog, who is also killed in the struggle. Sam Fathers, who feels that his life is united inexplicably with the life of Old Ben, dies a few days later, and the old world of primitive freedom ends, with only Ike McCaslin left as a reminder of it. Ike has been able to see the end of the wilderness coming when he sees Lion, who he knows will be the one to finally track down Old Ben:

4Tbid., p. 165.
So he (Ike) should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn't know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a stage. It was the beginning and end of something, he didn't know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too.5

Before Sam dies, he has made a true primitive of Ike. Ike adopts primitive values, courage, humility, stoicism, perseverance, and unostentatious pride. Because he has accepted the old Indian belief that all things are meant to be shared by all men equally, therefore abnegating the concept of private property, Ike McCaslin refuses to accept the ownership of his patrimony, the McCaslin plantation. He voices the concept of primitivism when he explains to his cousin:

I cant repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation. Because it was never Ikkemotubbe's fathers' fathers' to bequeath Ikkemotubbe to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing. . . .

Because He told in the Book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his  

5Ibid., p. 226.
descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee he asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread.  

With the destruction of the wilderness, Ike McCaslin is forced to live with the civilization that he dislikes, but he manages to retain his primitive values. If not understood, he is loved and respected by those people of Yoknapatawpha County whom he has helped while following the dictates of his primitive values.

In 1940, when Ike is seventy-three years old, he mourns the passing of the wilderness and the primitive individualism which it represented:

This Delta. This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares. . . . No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! . . . The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.  

There are those in Yoknapatawpha County who possess some of the primitive characteristics but not all. The MacCallums

6Ibid., pp. 256-7.  
7Ibid., p. 364.
are almost primitives, and as a family they endure. The closer the people of the county are to primitives, the stronger and more admirable they are. The farther they are from primitives, the weaker, the more degraded, the more decadent they become. As Ike prophesies, those who have destroyed the wilderness will accomplish its revenge for they -- the Sartorises, the Compsons, the Sutpens, the Drakes, and Benbows -- destroy themselves.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Myth of the Old South, like all myths, contains some elements of truth, but like all myths, it contains some things that are not true. Faulkner has used those parts of the Myth that are true, but he has repudiated and in many cases destroyed those parts of the Myth which he has found to be the product of imagination rather than history.

That Faulkner knows the South, particularly the part of the South about which he writes, is beyond dispute. He spent the first part of his life absorbing in detail every facet of his society. From that time until the present, he has written about the South with an acute perception, insight, and understanding, which stands as evidence of his extensive and profound knowledge of his country.

Unlike other writers who have repudiated the Myth of the Old South, Faulkner does not revile the South. He writes about his country with compassion and justice which permit him to show that which is admirable in the South without hiding that which is shameful. The fact that Faulkner is able to castigate the faults of the South as well as praise its virtues is proof of the genuine nature of the love that he expresses for his country in the great body of his work.
In his picture of Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner has evolved a set of values which are evinced by his treatment of the groups or classes of people in the society. These groups have been given in this paper in the following order: the Aristocrats, the Pretenders, the Plebeians, the Poor Whites, the White Trash, the Negroes, and the Primitives. However, if these groups are arranged as Faulkner represents them in respect to their merits, they should be arranged in the following order: the Primitives, the Negroes, the Plebeians, the Aristocrats, the Poor Whites, the Pretenders, and the White Trash. Thus, the social scale is nearly, but not quite, reversed.

The Primitives are first because they possess virtues that a society must have if it is to survive in honor. These men have compassion, endurance, humility, stoicism, and a justifiable pride. Of these, the most important is compassion, a feeling of brotherhood which respects life and its processes and which permits man to live without prejudice, meanness, or greed. It is in these men, in the proud individualism of Lucas Beauchamp and Sam Fathers and Ike McCaslin, that the true value and the hope of the South lie.

The Negroes are strong because they have stayed close to the Primitives, not as individuals but as a people. Their forced contact with the decadent whites has instilled some of the whites' vices into them, but they have retained the primitive virtue of endurance. It is the ability to endure that
we find in the Dilseys and Lusters who outlive the decadence of their white wards. It is the ability to endure that has enabled the Negro to undergo some of the harshest and most unjust treatment ever inflicted upon a people and not only survive but often prevail.

Approximately halfway between good and evil, between Primitives and White Trash, are found the Plebeians. The Plebeians have some of the virtues of the Primitives and some of the vices of the White Trash. These people, exemplified by the MacCallums in Yoknapatawpha County, possess the love of nature, the stoicism, and the endurance of Ike McCaslin, but they also possess a few of the vices of Flem Snopes. Some of the McCallums are beginning to long for the luxuries of Jefferson and the social position of the Sartorises. The McCallums are fortunate, however, in that their virtues are stronger than their vices, and they are able to survive and maintain their strength.

In the Aristocrats we find those people who have moved too far away from the Primitive values. The Sartorises and the Compsons possess courage and honor, but they have lost the Primitive values that would give these qualities substance. These are the people who "mean right" but who look in the wrong places to justify their actions and so die of their own frustrations.

The Poor Whites, although they spend their lives close to nature, fail to acquire from it those qualities which they
need. They do not have pride, strength, or endurance. Although they do have moments of compassion, these are often explosively replaced by violent intolerance and cruelty. Their wilful ignorance often leads them to do those things which injure not only themselves but their society.

The Pretenders, unlike the Poor Whites, who merely fail to follow the Primitive values, actively oppose them. The sin of the Sutpens is that they take unto themselves the bounty of nature and destroy it. The Sutpens are incapable of compassion, of respect for life. They are capable only of a greed for those false values of civilization, money, property, and position, which prove to be empty symbols.

The lowest, the most immoral, the most degraded form of life in Yoknapatawpha County is the Snopes Clan, the White Trash. The Snopeses represent the obverse of the Primitive, who is a moral man. The Snopeses are swindlers, blackmailers, thieves, murderers, and sadists. The only people who try to stop them are the Primitives, but there are not enough. The only people who could stop the Snopeses are the Aristocrats, but they have abdicated the responsibility which accrues to their class. The Sartorises and the Compsons dissipate their strength in the conflicts of their own natures instead of using it to destroy the Snopeses, as is their duty. Thus, the Aristocrats are destroyed and the Snopeses take control of Yoknapatawpha County.
The assumption of control of the South by the Snopeses does not mean that Faulkner despairs for the future of his country. His later novels, *Intruder in the Dust* and *Requiem for a Nun*, show that Faulkner considers the ascendancy of the Snopes to represent the nadir of the South, that from that point there is no way to go but up. And it will be the men who believe in the Primitive values, the Lucas Beauchamps and the Ike McCaslins, who will lead the way. It will be men who have stoicism, endurance, patience, compassion, pride, love, and the capability of sacrifice who assure the triumph of man.

When he accepted the Nobel Prize, Faulkner summarized, not only the sickness of our time, but also his belief in man's ultimate triumph:

> Our tragedy today is a general and a universal fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: when will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweet.

> He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old varieties and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed -- love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice ....

> I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last
worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice still talking. I refuse to accept this. 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 . . . .

APPENDIX A

A MALE GENEALOGY OF THE SARTORIS CLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Birth-Year - Death-Year (Possible Additional Years)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(?) Sartoris</td>
<td>(17??-????)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Bayard Sartoris</td>
<td>(18??-1863)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Sartoris</td>
<td>(18??-1874 (1888))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Bayard Sartoris</td>
<td>(1839-1919)</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Sartoris II</td>
<td>(18??-1901)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Bayard Sartoris</td>
<td>(1893-1920)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benbow Sartoris</td>
<td>(1920- )</td>
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APPENDIX B

AN ABBREVIATED GENEALOGY OF THE COMPSON CLAN

Quentin Maclachan Compson (17??-17??)

Charles Stuart Compson (17??-17??)

Jason Lycurgus Compson (17??-18??)

Quentin Maclachan Compson II Compson II (18??-18??) (18??-1900)

Jason Lycurgus Compson III (18??-19??)

Jason Condace Quentin Benjy Lycurgus Compson Compson Compson (1892-1910) (1895- )

Quentin (1901-
APPENDIX C

SOME OF FAULKNER'S WORKS AND THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OR GROUPS WHICH THEY CONCERN

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Sartoris</td>
<td>Sartorises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>The Sound and the Fury</td>
<td>Compsons</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>As I Lay Dying</td>
<td>Bundrens</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>Sanctuary</td>
<td>White Trash and Pretenders</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>Light in August</td>
<td>Joe Christmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Absalom, Absalom!</td>
<td>Sutpens</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>The Unvanquished</td>
<td>Sartorises</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>The Hamlet</td>
<td>Snopeses</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Go Down, Moses</td>
<td>Primitives and Negroes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Intruder in the Dust</td>
<td>Gavin Stevens and Primitives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Knight's Gambit</td>
<td>Gavin Stevens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Requiem for a Nun</td>
<td>Temple Drake and Negroes</td>
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