THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE
AS SOCIAL HISTORY IN THE SOUTH

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE
AS SOCIAL HISTORY IN THE SOUTH

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas
June, 1965
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The term "renascence" has been applied to a phenomenal literary achievement by southern writers during the past half century. In many respects the term is misleading, in that it suggests that art and letters earlier flourished and died away. With the exception of the work of Edgar Allan Poe the South until the twentieth century produced very little literature of merit. Certainly contemporary writers, who have brought acclaim to their region, have displayed remarkable awareness of the past, yet this has necessarily been an awareness not of great artistic achievement by the region but of the blending of agrarian and martial traditions, of chivalry and slavery, and of desperation, defeat, and decay.

The fact that conditions in the ante bellum South failed to produce any artists of note has been commented upon and analyzed by virtually everyone who attempts evaluation of the recent flood of literature. Speculation upon such a problem must certainly yield rather broad generalizations, but, since many aspects of society in the Old South were, on the surface, similar to those of the new, there is perhaps just cause for generalization.
Of course, the most obvious similarity of condition is the presence of the Negro. Slavery was a moral problem, but abolitionists usurped the moral outrage, and by the time slavery became odious it was almost impossible for any southerner to speak against it in his own region.

The ante bellum South's educational system, or lack of it, afforded to a very few the privilege of literacy, and, as Ellen Glasgow pointed out, "here, as elsewhere, expression belonged to the articulate, and the articulate was supremely satisfied with his own fortunate lot, as well as with the less enviable lot of others."¹ The men whose slaves hacked cotton plantations out of wilderness sent their sons to England or to the North to receive the sort of education that would fit them for the genteel tradition; read English literature because they identified themselves with English country life. Also, by the time these frontiersmen had become makeshift aristocrats they felt compelled to turn literary talent to the defense of their "peculiar institution."

Religious dogma was not so strict in the South, and ideological conflict not so pronounced as in New England. There was, of course, a stringent Calvinism among Scotch-Irish in the backcountry, but the Episcopal Church, which

was "charitable toward almost every weakness except the
dangerous practice of thinking," dominated moral codes
established by virtually everyone. Thus in this as in
other areas there was a lack of stimulation for those with
the ability to examine their society critically. So for
literature, as for other necessities, the South accustomed
itself to looking beyond its borders.

The Civil War destroyed the South's hegemony in the
nation and temporarily robbed the region of its acceptance
of itself as the flower of western civilization. For
four years southerners had spent their energy and goods in
violent conflict with the Yankee version of morality and
progress. They would fight less violently for fifty more.
Along with fighting off northern idealism the southern
people were faced with the necessity of constructing one
civilization upon the ruins of another. There could be
little outlet for the artist--few exponents of naturalism
existed anywhere, and the South was too much a "plundered
province" to give the naturalists' contrasts a chance.
Also, the articulate southerner, with his classical education
and his sense of ordered, static society, was most unlikely
to accept naturalism when it presented itself.

Until the turn of the century writers from the South
had shown a remarkable ability to cleave to national

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2Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 136.
standards, however low, and literary fads, sharing "in the doldrums into which national literature had fallen." Despite a desire to appeal to a national audience (and northern publishers) which led to an increased ardor for reunion with the nation, southern writers were faced with a deceptively simple task. Contemporary literature favored romanticism, and southerners, as W. J. Cash has so graphically pointed out, were romantic and hedonistic. Hedonism ran counter to northern Victorian ideals, but it also embellished the romanticism that placed many southerners on best seller lists. Consequently "around the turn of the century there appeared a wave of historical romances unprecedented in American history.... In 1900 six of the ten most popular books were historical novels and three were southern." It seemed that the South was on its way to fulfilling the prophecy of Paul Hamilton Hayne in 1866: "Overthrown in our efforts to establish a political nationality by force of arms, we may yet establish an intellectual dynasty more glorious and permanent by force of thought."  

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Turn of the century literature glorifying the grace and beauty of the ante bellum South, which began to flow from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, found a northern audience quite as receptive as the southern. The Yankee was ready to forgive; politics had already forgotten. Northern writers who had espoused the Cause, as well as southerners with a gift for local color and sentimentality, peopled their novels and poems with fair ladies and happy darkies. These men made their greatest contribution to literature in their creation of the cavalier. Not since the knight-errant of Sir Walter Scott variety had literature produced such completely unrealistic romantic characters. Brave, gentle, well-educated, able to understand the problems of their planter-equals and the lowest field hand, tolerant, humorous, the ultimate of civilized man, the cavalier rode gaily forth to fight the Yankee invader. In novels which depicted Reconstruction the cavalier struggled bravely to rebuild his destroyed life, to discharge his considerable responsibility to neighbors and dependents, and, above all, to defend white womanhood against carpetbag barbarism.7

Doubtless, turn of the century aristocrats and merchants alike could identify with such a dashing character. It

7"And there had been, of course, the Virginia of the cavaliers and they, too, lived in this literature, lived and wrought of it a sort of tapestry of chivalric endeavor." Cameron Rogers, "Barren Ground by Ellen Glasgow, a Novel of Stern Realism Laid in Virginia, Hitherto Devoted to a Literature of Romance," World's Work, L (May, 1925), 99-102.
was equally easy for their womenfolk to place themselves in the role of the cavalier's lady. In romantic novels of the cavalier type, the heroine, often symbolic of the South itself, was gentle, optimistic, tolerant, beautiful, and long-suffering.

Optimism was inherent in the quasi-religious longing for a mythical past. Darwin, Spenser, and others spoke quite eloquently of survival of the fittest—as certainly the cavalier was most deserving of survival. In spite of the South's eager welcoming of industry, the land below the Potomac was still overwhelmingly agrarian both in fact and spirit. The romantic novelist had but to awaken the southern mind to the glories of his graceful past, to chide the South for absorbing Yankee commercialism, to point to the ultimate success of the cavalier in his attempt to reconstruct the old life.

Although many of these assumptions made by the sentimentalists were patently untrue, the presence of a fading aristocracy was a source of pride to many residents of the culturally barren, poverty-ridden South. Gifted writers, hacks, and a whole school of historians exploited the section's mourning for the Lost Cause.

Beginning with the twentieth century and gaining momentum after World War I, the grief began to subside. Many southern writers who had dominated the historical novel
in the nation had been born prior to the Civil War and thus could recall it and its aftermath. The men and women who were to change southern literature from decorous mourning to incisive probing realism were born several years after the war and had only heard or read of it. The past was revealing, perhaps; the present interested them more. They were able now "to escape from the stultification which the dominance of a too great and too immediate patriotic bias involved.... The South was yet swinging slowly and always toward a time when it should come to the use of literature more or less purely for itself."\(^8\)

There was at first only a revisionist approach, milder than H. L. Mencken's affirmation that "the Young South begins to rebel against the cultural dominance of the professional Confederates and their commercial patrons and political and theological lackeys."\(^9\) Not a rebellion, then or possibly ever—the South had too recently experienced one—but a cessation of galloping sentimentality,\(^10\) the shift represented a re-evaluation of what was actually happening to the South in the twentieth century, of the effects of change.

\(^8\)Cash, Mind of the South, p. 152.


\(^10\)"All along from 1900 Ellen Glasgow had of course been exercising her irony on her native land, in a long series of tales which grew constantly more penetrating and impatient of sentimentality." Cash, Mind of the South, pp. 73-74.
upon the region's people. Not realism so much as an honesty, a sharp awareness of actuality appeared in literature of the South.

In Virginia at the turn of the twentieth century a young woman of aristocratic background launched a literary career which dealt in reality. As one critic proclaimed, "Ellen Glasgow was unquestionably the most distinguished novelist who attempted the historical novel during the period."11 In her effort to introduce a more realistic approach the author met with stubborn resistance from this homesickness for the past that flowered, as luxuriantly as fireweed in burned places, a mournful literature of commemoration....What had begun as an emergency measure had matured into a sacred and infallible doctrine. And among these stagnant ideas the romantic memories of the South ripened and mellowed and at last began to decay....The emotions with which they deal are formal, trite, deficient in blood and irony, and as untrue to experience as they are true to an attitude of evasive idealism.12

Glasgow's first book, The Descendent, dismayed the critics. They deemed it improper for a young southern gentlewoman to have any knowledge of, much less write a book about, the wasted life of a bastard whose father had been a Virginia aristocrat. One reviewer saw the man's ultimate ruin as a vindication of custom;13 another

13 Bookman, V (May, 1897), 260.
announced primly that "black books inveighing hopelessly against despair can only increase the world-pain."\textsuperscript{14}

Michael, the hero, railed against marriage and other social institutions and "ruined" a good girl who loved him. After thus spoiling his only chance for spiritual as well as intellectual and physical fulfillment, he became attracted to a woman who represented all the things Michael opposed. Failing to appreciate the irony of this situation, one critic gravely described "a large-natured, wholesome woman of the serenely gracious kind;" reflecting current racial attitudes when he intoned, "she represents the best domestic type of Anglo-Saxon womanhood; and, in spite of himself and every prejudice he has ever cherished, the woman who so nearly embodies the race ideal must affect him powerfully."\textsuperscript{15}

Thus the critics, imbued with romantic sentimentality, rejected or failed to grasp the significance of the work.

Ellen Glasgow's second book, which fell short of the promise of \textit{The Descendent}, simply received bad reviews. \textit{Phases of an Inferior Planet} was rated "disagreeable rather than immoral...written in a style that includes many kinds of objectionableness."\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps the best illustration of

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, VIII (January, 1899), 493.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Critic}, XXX (New Series 27, May 22, 1897), 352-53.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Nation}, LXVII (December 15, 1898), 452.
literary values at the turn of the century came from a review of *The Deliverance*, Glasgow's third novel:

The story as a social study brings vividly before the mind the tragedy of the ancestral home in the possession of the vulgar overseer, while the heir, a farm laborer, lives in poverty within sight of the great chimneys which symbolize the generous hospitality of his fathers. ... It is a novel singularly vivid in its picture of tragic social transition, singularly powerful.17

*The Deliverance* indicated the pattern of Glasgow's work, which was further defined in *The Voice of the People*. Describing the people of Kingsborough, an old town whose "proudest boast was that she had been and was not," the novelist called them "a people without a present."18 She had launched what was to be, by her own definition, a social history of Virginia.19

Although her rather realistic treatment of Virginia's social history had attracted much critical comment, it was not until the late twenties that her work began to acquire the reputation of trend-setting. In a review of *Barren Ground*, Cameron Rogers declared the book to be "the first outrider of what may prove an army, the first note of a clarion hitherto unfamiliar to the South, that of realism."20

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17 *Outlook*, LXXVI (February 13, 1904), 395-97.
18 *Nation*, LXX (May 24, 1900), 402.
20 Cameron Rogers, "*Barren Ground* by Ellen Glasgow," p. 102.
Certainly Ellen Glasgow did more than fill a gap between Thomas Nelson Page and William Faulkner. In criticizing southern codes and values she helped to establish what was to become the standard of many moderate southerners regarding what was sham and what was real in the old concepts of the mythical South. Her approach, while essentially romantic, contained a sharp sense of reality. Realism, when it did force itself into southern consciousness, simply expanded many of the ideas which Glasgow's reality had suggested.

By the time of Barren Ground's publication in 1924 the South, like the rest of the nation, was salvaging its moral and philosophical position from the wake of the World War. Wilson's idealistic programs had offered the nation's southern step-child much in the way of economic improvement, and the South had supported Wilsonian Democracy. Still dependent on an agrarian economy, in spite of all the industrial ballyhoo, the South welcomed its sons back to a land of poor farms in which national prosperity was hardly more than a rumor. Negroes had gone to war too, and some of them returned unreconciled to the fact that black men had died to make the world safe for white men's democracy. Thus once again the South was faced with a labor force which was both poor and dissatisfied. Unwelcome labor organizers filtered into mill villages and industrial centers and southern conservatives again rallied to ward off a tattered
Yankee version of progress. These political and economic conservatives—some aristocratic, some merchant, many of the new breed of southerner, the demagogue—found their strongest ally where conservatism had always had a bulwark, in the hallowed depths of organized religion.

After advocates of Darwin had threatened to uproot the Biblical foundations of custom, fundamentalism, with agrarian leaders like William Jennings Bryan to spark its appeal, took firm root in the South. In a land where worship of a past civilization boasting culture and tolerance had reached epic proportions, the masses fell under the assault of a religious zeal which capitalized upon frontier traditions and denied dissent. Throughout the South, towns came under the control of a religious force established and decreed by people neither Catholics nor Protestants nor even atheists but incorrigible nonconformists, nonconformists not just to everybody else but to each other in mutual accord; a nonconformism defended and preserved by descendants whose ancestors hadn't quitted home and security for a wilderness in which to find freedom of thought as they claimed and oh yes, believed, but to find freedom in which to be incorrigible and unreconstructible Baptists and Methodists, not to escape from tyranny as they claimed and believed, but to establish one.21

21 William Faulkner, The Town (New York, 1957), pp. 306-07. Quotations, particularly those from Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, used throughout this and subsequent chapters are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the novels. It would not only seem an impertinence, but would in most instances destroy the effect for which the quotation is used if the word sic were placed after each deviation in spelling and punctuation. Therefore, the word is not used.
This trend served a multitude of purposes. It helped to keep the Negro docile; it forged the hub of anti-labor sentiment; it assured the masses that the meek would inherit the earth. All across the South an atmosphere of frantic godliness permeated virtually every phase of normal life.22

The South, perhaps only more overtly than the rest of the nation, deplored change.23 With the obvious failure of its traditional agrarian economy and an ill-concealed degeneration among old leading families the South found itself, above all sections of the nation, in the throes of upheaval unmatched even by Reconstruction.24

To defend itself against the encroachments of free thought, labor reform, and racial equality the South once more attempted to retreat behind the barrier of tradition. The region, cloistered as it was, was not to stagnate undisturbed. Mississippi, the hub of the South's stubborn effort to adhere to the mythology of a gracious past, fledged the first and most brilliant of southern iconoclasts.

22 One lasting result of fundamentalism was the revival of "blue laws" which are still in effect, though not strictly enforced. Mississippi is still a "dry" state (though it taxes illegal liquor), which makes the setting of Faulkner's Sanctuary plausible today.

23 Here the South referred to is largely the white South, since Negroes until the 1940's were outside the forces shaping southern destiny, except that their presence constituted what the white South felt to be a threat.

24 For a good discussion of the revolution in the South after 1920 see Thomas D. Clark, The Emerging South (New York, 1961).
William Faulkner, sole owner and proprietor of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, wrote some of the most controversial novels of the century, many of them about the South. He chose to criticize the South and remain there.

To say that Faulkner saved the land only partially relates his immense awareness of the earth's gift of life to man and man's misuse of that gift. Faulkner penetrated far beneath "local color," using the land as more than a setting for a story. Telling of the Mississippi in flood time, Faulkner made the big river a central character whose angry mood dominated the story. His tales of the wilderness reflected the brooding power of an element man could not conquer but merely destroy. Out of this wilderness Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha County, and his "first families," the Compsons, McCaslin, Sutpens, and Sartorises, pushed back the wilderness and built their puny empires, and disappeared. Pushed back also into the little remaining of the wilderness in the twentieth century and retaining frontiersmen's original dignity, the McCallums were as anachronistic as emperors. The Snopes came out of nowhere, long after the wilderness was destroyed, and that fact helped to rob them of that cognizance of man's place in nature which gave him humility.

and dignity. Thus the land played a tremendous part in Faulkner's world, a world which had quite an effect on what the "outside" thought about the South.

In the lawyer Gavin Stevens of *The Town, Knight's Gambit*, and *Intruder in the Dust* Faulkner created a character who was perhaps the best known spokesman for the South. Stevens was the end result of Faulkner's attempt to analyze human by-products of southern myth and southern change, the finest literary representation of the new face of southern conservatism which manifests itself so clearly in social and political life today. Considered a moderate within the region, the lawyer defended the South against the nation as the only region with a homogeneity necessary to produce art, literature, and "the minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty, and perhaps the most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis." Also defensively he attributed to all southerners the innate defiance of a North with the "capacity and eagerness to believe anything about the South not even provided it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough."  

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27 Faulkner once remarked to a friend that...Stevens "was a good man, but he didn't live up to his ideal. But his nephew, the boy [Chick Mallison, the young hero of *Intruder in the Dust*] I think he may grow up to be a better man than his uncle; I think he may succeed as a human being." Horace Judson, "The Curse & The Hope," *Time* (July 17, 1964), p. 45.

No more strange yet certainly as bizarre as anything William Faulkner revealed about the South were the novels and stories of Erskine Caldwell. Often listed with writers of social protest, occasionally with writers of pornography, Caldwell must certainly be considered among those who brought the social history of the South to national attention. Best known for his humorous and pathetic Georgia crackers and Negro victims of barbarous injustice, Caldwell chronicled a southern phenomenon that Ellen Glasgow barely touched, that Robert Penn Warren dealt with either romantically or with distaste, and that William Faulkner knew well and revealed. Caldwell is significant because what he wrote about the South attracted a wider audience than perhaps any other southern writer in the thirties, and he gave an accurate picture of conditions in the rural South.

Robert Penn Warren is as genuinely southern as any of the authors listed above. Associated with the Fugitives at Vanderbilt University in the twenties, he is generally considered one of the most eloquent spokesmen for a return to the values of agrarian society and a re-evaluation of trends brought about by industrialization—a "profound skepticism as to the advantages of 'progress.'" Nevertheless, in his novel closely related to, if not based upon, the career

of the late Huey Long of Louisiana, Warren displayed a degree of sympathy for modern man. His treatment of the origins of a superior southern demagogue was a valuable addition to the worth of the novel as social history.

These four writers, among many others who have brought the South to its position of leadership in national literature, reflect what happened to the region from its earliest settlement to mid-twentieth century. Their primary concerns were with the effect of change from agrarian to industrial society. In varying degrees each reflected southern attitudes toward a fading aristocracy; toward the rise of the Snopes to economic and political importance. Along with these they graphically pointed out the white South's indifference to the backwash of southern society--the poor white--and its all-pervasive consciousness of the Negro. It is for these reasons that Glasgow, Faulkner, Warren, and Caldwell were selected to illustrate the novel as a social history of the South.
CHAPTER II

DECLINE OF THE ARISTOCRACY

William Faulkner said that it was the writer's "privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past." For Faulkner this glory sprang from the frontier South and died untamed on the ridge at Gettysburg, but earlier writers had created a legendary civilization, beginning shortly after the Civil War nullified whatever glory there might once have been. Its grandeur has been exaggerated, but the Old South did produce an aristocracy based on land and Negro slavery. The war freed the slaves; taxes, poor management, and cotton shackled the land. Families which had traditionally provided the region with its political and social leadership had to adjust to the change in economic emphasis as well as to a new status for the Negro. Many of them failed. Despite the presence of an occasional Wade Hampton, leader

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\(^1\) The Faulkner Reader (New York, 1953), p. 3. Faulkner's speech of acceptance upon the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Stockholm, 1950.
ship in the post-war South generally fell to a new, unaristocratic generation of southerners.²

Poverty and destitution, despair of success in a patently unglorious present spurred an almost universal yearning for the graciousness of the past. New leaders, anxious to emulate the ante-bellum manner, bought defaulted plantations from older families and set themselves up as aristocrats. Thus the South at the turn of the century was confronted with two sets of royalty, each based on an agrarian concept that had vanished decades before. No matter how unrealistic the structure, the people themselves were real and their methods of dealing with survival in an alien world make up a significant part of the southern story.

The southern aristocrat has been best described by W. J. Cash as romantic, hedonistic, intolerant, swaggering, unanalytical, and violent.³ He was the product of a world which did not foster complexity, "a world in which horses, dogs, guns, not books, and ideas and art, were his normal and absorbing interests."⁴ Robert Penn Warren in All the

²According to C. Vann Woodward, "men of middle-class, industrial, capitalistic outlook, with little but a nominal connection with the old planter regime" generally dominated those leaders whose ties with the ante-bellum order were stronger. Origins of the New South, p. 20.

³Cash, Mind of the South, Book II, Chapter 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 106.
King's Men indicated the aristocratic tradition:

...it is because he is Adam Stanton...and he has lived all his life in the idea that there was a time a long time back when everything was run by high-minded, handsome men....It is because he is a romantic, and he has a picture of the world in his head, and when the world doesn't conform in any respect to the picture, he wants to throw the world away.5

In the aristocrat's illusory world order and dignity governed a static society, which certain families dominated by virtue of birth. Faulkner's old families were accorded leadership because that was their inheritance; there was an "hereditary determinism at work which tended to motivate a Sutpen or a Sartoris."6 The real world these men and women were forced to live in was outside the realm of what the past could teach them. Often they chose to ignore reality. The majority of Ellen Glasgow's work was developed around this often willful, always tragic shunning of the present. The time around sunset was the setting in which almost all her novels began, the Virginia twilight that had its own unreality. It was in such a setting that Asa Timberlake stood before his old home and felt the "slow oozing up of the past from beneath the dead levels of


consciousness." There was so much in the past that seemed more real than what passed for reality in the present; so much not to be torn down as the old house was destined to be. Life had gone by too fast for Asa, and he did not know what the "happiness" was that his daughters sought so frantically and could not themselves identify. Yet he was more aware of the changes going on about him than most of Glasgow's fading gentility.

The author's tragic, and comic aristocracy often seemed unreal themselves, like fossilized dancers caught in the midst of a minuet. Intentionally Glasgow superimposed their grace and dignity upon the shattering frenzies of modern society; she also placed the grey rumpled mass of democracy's new order against the prim beauty of all that had been fine in that other world, so there could be no mistaking her disapproval of the wreckage strewn in the wake of progress. She did not fail to note that a member of the aristocracy who was patterned after the old life would become a mere poseur or be destroyed by the harsh realities of the present.

7Ellen Glasgow, *In This Our Life* (New York, 1941), p. 6. "There is a tremendous conservative reaction to these changes which destroy old culture patterns and reorient thinking. This institutional reorganization has involved a most intense emotional struggle. The frontier plea to preserve the southern way of life is as unrealistic as asking the return of slavery." Thomas D. Clark, *Emerging South*, p. 121.
Virginia Pendleton Treadwell, a gentlewoman whose manners, morals, and concept of her role as mother and wife (in that order) inextricably bound her to the past was one of the latter. Because of her inability to adjust her pattern of life to fit that of her modern, rather profligate husband, Virginia lost him. According to Blair House, she was "Ellen Glasgow's portrait of the Virginia lady in the days of her terrifying perfection;" the embodiment of an ideal from another era. She was the product of what passed for education for young ladies in the Old Dominion, a victim of the female academy founded upon the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would be to contend with it. Knowledge of any sort...was kept from her as rigorously as if it contained the germs of a contagious disease. And this ignorance of anything that could possibly be useful to her was supposed in some mysterious way to add to her value as a woman and to make her a more desirable companion to a man who, either by experience or by instinct, was expected 'to know his world.'

Virginia's tragedy was that she had not set out to be an anachronism—her surroundings and training had condemned her to be so long before she was able to choose.

Glasgow's doomed aristocracy were for the most part treated with the gentle irony that was the author's out-

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standing contribution to southern fiction. Occasionally, however, her anger at the waste of human talent made her irony less than gentle. She dealt honestly with the decay going on all about her, though her chief weakness as a novelist stemmed from preoccupation with the aristocratic tradition. Her most successfully drawn characters from among the lower class were those commoners who rose to upper class status financially and thus could act out their roles against the genteel setting Glasgow knew best. This flaw did not detract from her contribution to an understanding of the vast changes going on in southern life and of those who could not accept change. John Benham, who, "possessing every grace of character except humanity,... had failed in life because this one gift was absent," was one of Glasgow's typical upper class: hollow, unbending, proper, and a failure. Hers was a war against "evasive idealism" that made the fading aristocratic manner the standard social pattern, a pattern that had no hope of survival in present society.

A few of Faulkner's aristocratic characters, the strong ones like Miss Jenny Dupre of Sartoris and "There

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10 "And irony is an indispensable ingredient to the critical vision; it is the safest antidote to sentimental decay." Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 28.

Was a Queen," tried to conquer the present by simply ignoring it. Miss Jenny represented the last elegant stand of traditional southern womanhood against the encroaching crudeness of modern society. In the words of the servant Elnora, Miss Jenny was "quality....And that's something you [Elnora's son] don't know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her....Born Sartoris or born quality of any kind ain't is, it's does."

Miss Jenny did indeed appear to be "quality" when contrasted with some of Faulkner's younger, more shallow modern women. It was she who managed the plantation, who played a benevolent role in community affairs and who prophesied doom for the present Sartoris generation. She was one of Faulkner's most clearly delineated symbols of the virtue and dignity of the past, reacting haughtily to clamoring materialism of the present.

Also there was Miss Emily, whom Faulkner portrayed as:

a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel

Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.\textsuperscript{13}

Members of degenerating old families who could not ignore reality had to find some method of coping with the strident, disorderly present. Some, like Mrs. Jason Compson, mother of Caddy, Quentin, Jason, and the idiot Benjy, took refuge in the "southern lady" image, withdrawing from reality to rusticate quietly. The escape was never a complete success, for members of her family in their own flailing at reality pushed the world in upon her.\textsuperscript{14} Some of Glasgow's aristocracy, Corrina Page, for example, found escape from tradition impossible. Though Corrina was attracted to Gideon Vetch, the commoner who had become governor of Virginia, she could not admit the fact to herself, for to do so would mean a complete repudiation of her world. She realized that she had been cheated when she renounced the uncertainties and disorder which accompanied "happiness" in return for undisputed sway over her well-ordered, sterile existence.\textsuperscript{15}

Other of Faulkner's decaying aristocracy were suspended between the old world, where human values were clearly defined and placed at the top of social standards, and the

\textsuperscript{13}Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," \textit{Collected Stories}, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{14}Faulkner, \textit{The Sound and the Fury} (New York, 1959).
\textsuperscript{15}Glasgow, \textit{One Man in His Time}. 
mechanized world of the present. Candace Compson, idealized sister of Quentin, was one of these. She, like Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, wife of Young Bayard, partially adhered to the concepts of the old way of life; but traditional values in their decadent society had become formalized, an unwritten code of behavior. The code dictated the posturing of a generation that had lost touch with the past, with real tradition, and established a hollow pseudo-tradition whose values were as obscure as those of the modern world were worthless. Shut away by the code from an animated present by their blood-ties to a dying past, Candace and Narcissa found their lives futile and dull. They attempted to maintain their positions in traditional society while clandestinely joining the world of the present. Consequently, they were banished by both.

Some victims realized that decay meant ultimate destruction and tried to combat the real world which was causing the decay. Young Bayard Sartoris was one of these. He took the advice of a Civil War veteran that one must defy destruction; fly in the face of it; because destruction like any other coward, "won't strike a feller that's a lookin'
hit in the eye lessen he pushes it too close."18 The Sartoris boys succeeded in pushing it too close and accomplished their retreat from life in a burst of violence, which was as near as they could come to glory. Young Bayard wanted death to end the struggle against a way of life in which he could not survive. He was a "beast... trapped in the very cunning fabric that had betrayed him who had dared chance too much, and he thought again if, when the bullet found you, you could not crash upward, burst; anything but earth."19

Members of the old families who could neither ignore the existence of a world they did not understand and had had no part in creating, nor actively combat it could join the modern world and attempt to make a place for themselves in a new society, or they could simply acknowledge the present's victory over them and retreat. Quentin Compson, of Absalom!, Absalom! and The Sound and the Fury, was typical of those who chose to retreat from the world. None of his type was able to deal with the present, so they escaped to the past; to alcoholism; to rationalization of their failure; to suicide. Quentin Compson chose the latter. He had tried to reconstruct the past and found its standards unreconcil-

19Ibid., p. 181.
able with those of the present. He was sympathetic witness to his father's alcoholism and cynical rationalizations. He was the only member of his generation of Compsons who might have been able to maintain the family tradition of leadership, yet he was doomed by the very traditions he was heir to.

Quentin's love for his sister Candace was not a physical attraction; to him she represented the cool purity of a time he could not recapture. When he found that she was pregnant, he could not accept her failure to live up to the unwritten laws of his lost world, and he convinced himself that he was guilty of incest. He could bear his own guilt more easily than his sister's impurity. Quentin's father had sold the idiot brother Benjy's pasture in order to send Quentin to Harvard in a vain attempt to hold to superficial traditional customs, giving up the core of aristocratic superiority—land. Quentin was trapped in time with nothing of the past left, a present to which he could not adjust, and no future at all.

Quentin's symbol of time was the watch given him by his father, saying:

Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human

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20"Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound, A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound." Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, p. 129.
experience which can fit your individual needs no
better than it fitted (your grandfather's) or his
father's. I give it to you not that you may remember
time, but that you might forget it now and then for
a moment and not spend all your breath trying to
conquer it. Because no battle is ever won.21

Quentin, unable to conquer time, withdrew from the contest.

These characters, representative of the South's best
families, failed in their efforts to graft the past onto
the present; neither could they escape the reality of
modern society. By employing traditional methods in their
struggle to overcome the values established by a lower,
unprincipled class, they were destined to fail.22 Perhaps
the decay of traditional principles doomed also any hope of
permanence for the values which replaced them by removing
the roots from which those values could sustain life.

According to Warren:

Each had been the doom of the other....Adam
Stanton...the man of idea, and Willie Stark...the man
of fact, were doomed to destroy each other, just as
each was doomed to try to use the other and to yearn
toward and try to become the other, because each was
incomplete with the terrible division of their age.23

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21 Ibid., p. 131.

22 "The Sartories act traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They repre-
sent vital morality, humanism. Being anti-traditional, the
Snopeses are immoral from the Sartoris point of view. But the
Snopeses do not recognize this point of view; acting only for
self interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty. Really,
then, they are amoral; they represent naturalism of animalism.
And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally the
struggle between humanism and naturalism." George Marion
O'Donnell, Two Decades of Criticism, p. 49.

23 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 462.
Modern values, wholly pragmatic and egocentric, broadened man's scope of ambition for improving his lot, but left him little to fall back on in the event of failure. Asa Timberlake, whose traditional concept of duty had chained him all his life, preferred the old code to that which produced a man "incapable of any permanent motive;" a "futile" person to whom ideas did not "matter enough."

The empty forms of his old beliefs gave meaning to his life; his children "would have nothing left, not even these vague impressions, to live by." Asa Timberlake loved his children, all the while realizing the shallowness of their quest for "happiness" made their lives desperate and futile. Stripped of dignity, scorning patience, Asa's daughter, who was perhaps Glasgow's best definition of modern woman, knew no world but that of her own making; believed in nothing when that world betrayed her.

So there was a vacuum. Absolute truths of the past were discredited or disregarded; now truth could only be defined by individual experience, and those schooled in the old manner could not risk themselves in an alien world in which all experience ran counter to tradition. Thus the group in southern society that had traditionally set

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24Glasgow, In This Our Life, p. 134. Timberlake echoed Faulkner's Harry Wilbourne in The Wild Palms (New York, 1939), who fled conventional life, was imprisoned for violation of traditional codes of morality, renounced escape and rejected suicide: "Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief." p. 148.
the standards of behavior for all levels of society was forced to relinquish its leadership by default. In so doing they left the South without any real values with which to cope with a rapidly changing society; abandoned the region to a group intrinsically incapable of establishing any sort of ethical leadership.
I haven't got much pride, I can't afford it with a kitchen full of niggers to feed and robbing the state asylum of its star freshman. Blood, I says, governors and generals, it's a damn good thing we never had any kings and presidents; we'd all be down there at Jackson chasing butterflies.1

Jason Compson's statement adequately sums up the dilemma of aristocrats who gave up struggling with the Snopes world and attempted to join it. Jason, whose savings had been accumulated by thievery and hoarding, was robbed by his niece, Quentin, (whom he had robbed) who escaped into life by sliding down a rain pipe and running away with a carnival pitchman. Thus Jason was bereft of his pitiful fortune, his reason for entering the modern world; losing in the process his reverence for tradition which was the bulwark of his tribe. Jason was an aristocrat who acknowledged the present, fought for success and lost. He was one of the few examples of aristocratic struggle rather than mere patient degeneracy. Jason was forced to compete with those of the lesser order, and Faulkner intimated that his aristocratic background rendered him incapable of success in the battle.

As the influence of aristocrats waned, a leadership vacuum was created which would be filled by "the blatant portion of the New South--that portion that reviles the Old South--the brazen standard of money making," or more succinctly, the Snopes.²

Ab Snopes appeared in the novel The Unvanquished, an entrepreneur dealing in goods stolen from both sides in the Civil War. He materialized from nowhere, having no ancestors, no lands. But he was prolific. He was also a barn-burner, a fact which gave the first business opportunity to his son, Flem, who was destined to gain world renown and leave his name upon a whole breed of men in modern society. Will Varner owned the land which Ab Snopes cropped and on that land there was a barn. When Ab got the reputation of barn-burner, Flem offered to let Varner employ him in his store in return for Flem's preventing his father's burning

²Hesseltine and Smiley, The South in American History, p. 435. Recent historians of the modern South have noted this change in values. C. Vann Woodward indicated that the new leadership was "preaching laissez-faire capitalism, freed of all traditional restraints, together with a new philosophy and way of life and a new scale of values." Origin of the New South, p. 148. John Samuel Ezell pointed to the demise of planter leadership and the rise of men of "crude energy and calculating shrewdness." The South Since 1865 (New York, 1963), p. 221. W. J. Cash perhaps gave the clearest picture of this rising class, whom he called Babbitts and credited with "passion for money-making, pride in and admiration for acquisitiveness, carelessness as to the means employed to the end, and the spirit of calculation in general." Kind of the South, p. 270. No man penetrated what actually made up the new ruling class better than William Faulkner, whose Snopeses are the southern middle class.
the barn. It was the first time Will Varner had ever bought insurance and the first time a Snopes had risen (crawled, Faulkner said) above the status of tenant.  

Flem married Will Varner's daughter who was already pregnant by another man. They moved to Jefferson, where Eula Varner Snopes began an inadvertant assault upon the consciousness of all males in the town while her impotent husband launched an attack against traditional institutions and ultimately the very foundations of society in Jefferson. After undermining aristocratic economic superiority, Flem took over the Sartoris bank. In order to do so he had to buy Will Varner's stock:

He went, to deal with the old man who despised him for having accepted an already-dishonored wife for a price no greater than what he, Varner, considered the Old Frenchman place to be worth; and who feared him because he, Snopes, had been smart enough to realise from it what he, Varner, had not been able to in twenty-five years; who feared him for what that smartness threatened and implied and therefore hated him because he had to fear.

As Flem's success was assured he began bringing other members of his tribe into Jefferson, displacing entrenched families in the process. Flem set out to attain respectability and tried to force his transplanted relatives into conformity to his standards. Generally his efforts in this direction were futile. Byron Snopes embezzled from

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the bank; Montgomery Ward Snopes ran a photography studio which dealt in whiskey and pornographic pictures; Eck blew himself up, and his son Wallstreet Panic Snopes ran an honest grocery store and competed with Flem financially. (Wallstreet Panic and his wife, who hated the Snopeses, spent their lives fiercely trying to live down the name.) Those Flem could not "elevate" he forced to leave, but there were always others, until Flem seemed to be another Grant at Cold Harbor in his uses and numbers of replacements. The upward creep of Snopeses caused a vague unease among the older citizens of Jefferson, somewhat like the reaction to a rumor that an epidemic was spreading up from the coast; yet only those who were aware that Snopes spelled doom for traditional values (like the lawyer Stevens and V. K. Ratliff, the sewing machine salesman) were actually afraid.

Stevens, who had been in love with Bula Snopes since she arrived in Jefferson, wanted to get Bula's daughter, Linda, out of Jefferson before the town collapsed under Snopeses. Flem wanted Linda's money which she would inherit from old Will Varner, but Will Varner did not appear ready

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5Stevens ordered catalogues from eastern schools "sent direct to her, to Miss Linda Snopes, Jefferson, Miss., the Mississippi to be carefully spelt out in full else the envelope would go: first, to Jefferson, Missouri; second, to every other state in the forty-eight which had a Jefferson in it, before: third, it would finally occur to somebody somewhere that there might be someone in Mississippi capable of thinking vaguely of attending an Eastern or Northern school or capable of having heard of such or anyway capable of enjoying the pictures in the catalogues or even deciphering the one-syllable words, provided they were accompanied by photographs." Faulkner, The Town, p. 210.
to die, and Flem had to hold off Linda's marriage until he could get the money. Since she was more likely to marry should she go away to school, Flem fought Gavin Stevens with all "the ruthlessness and the industry and what talent he had been born with, to serve them; who never in his life had been given anything by any man yet and expected no more as long as life should last." Education was not only a threat to Flem's assured control of Linda's inheritance, it was an embodiment of abstraction, with which Snopeses were incapable of dealing. Here again the Snopeses represented a fundamental departure from traditional southern criteria for success. The old love of rhetoric, the sheltering unreality, the aristocrat with his European education sipping his julep and reading Horace on the veranda: all usurped by men who loved money simply because it had weight and substance and could be exchanged for goods with similar characteristics.

As the Snopeses dominated business and began to set up a social life which, though it was beneath aristocratic notice, nevertheless dictated the mores of small southern towns, inevitably they also made their bid in politics. Having come from nothing, the Snopeses were well-equipped to play upon real complaints from the lower classes. Probably no Snopes had taken active political part in the Populist revolt, but doubtless several had operated concessions at rallies, bought and sold votes, and had an active role in

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6 Ibid., p. 264.
intimidating Negroes. They were, thirty years later, able to sell themselves to the disenchanted po' white voter with the same unscrupulous calculation that they employed in business deals.

There was need for new political leadership in the South. Dissatisfaction among the tenants and laboring classes had not died with populism:

In the cotton mills, in the towns generally on the land, the common white had increasing cause in the decade /1920's/ to feel irritation—there were here powerful forces to move him toward the development of class consciousness all along the line, and to prompt him at last to begin anew where Populism had ended thirty years before.7

Demagogues, the political Snopeses, all over the South eagerly capitalized upon this discontent.8 James K. Vardaman and Theodore Bilbo claimed to fight for poor whites in Mississippi; Cole Blease represented the common whites of South Carolina in the Senate, "where his single service

7Cash, Mind of the South, p. 285.

8Allan P. Sindler's discussion of demagoguery is apt, yet men like Ben Tillman and Blease perhaps gave validity to the odious connotations of the term. Sindler felt that the word demagogue usually referred to a "rider of discontent, one who propounds quack remedies insincerely for personal or political gain....To uncover a demagogue, the observer is supposed to pay particular attention to irrational appeals, attempts to sway emotions....Such criteria, it may be suggested, are inadequate and misleading and have made of the term a subjective epithet to be used with abandon against the politicians one dislikes....An unbiased application of these popularized standards of demagogy, then would lead to the conclusion that demagogy is an inherent part of all political appeals and a tactic of most politicians." Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, State Politics, 1920-52 (Baltimore, 1955), p. 110.
to them was to keep before the startled gaze of the nation the vision of their eternal assault upon the black man."^9 Perhaps the greatest demagogue of them all was Huey P. Long, the Louisiana Kingfish, and All the King's Men was one of the best novels about this social and political phenomenon.

Faulkner's assessment of Snopeses in politics was limited. Clarence Snopes, a state legislator, was obese, flatulent, crafty, and unprincipled. Warren described essentially the same character in a lower capacity: "He was just another fellow, made in God's image and wearing a white shirt with a ready-tied black bow tie and jean pants held up with web galluses. Town from the waist up, country from the waist down. Get both votes."^10 Ellen Glasgow's hero of The Voice of the People was from the "unheroic class... scorned by black and white alike,"^11 but was drawn so early that he was a literary curiosity rather than an accurate characterization. With the publication of One Man in His Time in 1922, Glasgow showed greater awareness of the encroachment of Snopeses in political life: relentless, "disorderly, and strewn with the wreckage of finer things... the loud crash of breaking idols."^12 Describing the rise

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^10 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 60.
^11 Nation, LXXX (May 24, 1900), 402.
^12 Glasgow, One Man in His Time (New York, 1922), p. 5.
to power of Gideon Vetch, a man born in a circus tent, the author appeared awe-struck at her portrait of this new man in southern politics. In spite of her attempts at realism and her achieving a realistic approach, Ellen Glasgow remained an aristocrat. She was sympathetic with Vetch as an individual, but good taste, a certain adherence to the old manner, the bitter taste of democracy's red-necked gaucheries, would not permit an unprejudiced account. Ready to admit that the Old South legend was pure myth, the Virginia gentlewoman could neither understand nor accept poor whites in the role of political leadership.

Robert Penn Warren's sympathy with aristocratic tradition flawed his study of Willie Stark, for Stark's unscrupulous pragmatism was too foreign to Warren's experience. He did, however, acknowledge the need for reform in the state, which had been ruled since Reconstruction by Bourbons. In the words of his realist-narrator, Jack Burden:

*Doesn't it all boil down to this? If the government of this state for quite a long time back had been doing anything for the folks in it, would Stark have been able to get out there with his bare hands and bust the boys? And would he be having to make so many short cuts to get something done to make up for the time lost all these years in not getting something done?*

Willie Stark saw the need for a spokesman for "red-necks, suckers, and fellow hicks;" for a voice from the

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13 *Warren, All the King's Men, p. 133.*

"terrible South that Stark Young and his sort ignore... the beaten, ignorant, Bible-ridden, white South." 15 Willie exhorted them to "stand on their hind legs," to make themselves felt as a political power. 16 He learned to "stir 'em up," perhaps growing contemptuous as Jack Burden, who advised Willie: "They aren't alive, most of 'em haven't been alive in twenty years.... so it's up to you to give 'em something to stir 'em up and make 'em feel alive again.... That's what they come for. Tell 'em anything. But for Sweet Jesus' sake don't try to improve their minds." 17

Swept to power as governor in astonishingly short time, Stark launched his program of good roads and free textbooks, both benefiting his po' white supporters. He met formidable


16 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 101. According to Allan Sindler, "Long provoked a rural lower-class protest which exceeded that of Populism in intensity and durability. The fury and substance of Longism stimulated the interest and participation of masses of whites, and made them aware of the relevance of state politics to the settlement of their demands.: Sindler, E Hue Long's Louisiana, pp. 113-14. Cash felt that Long was the first to accurately measure the "political potentialities afforded by the condition of the underdog....he was the first southern demagogue largely to leave aside nigger-baiting and address himself mainly to the irritations bred in the common white by his economic and social status." Cash, Mind of the South, pp. 286-87.

17 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 77. Arthur Schlesingee Jr. said that 'Long was the common whites' idol, 'themselves as they would like to be, free and articulate and apparently without fear." The Politics of Upheaval, p. 51.
obstacles in the legislature and the press. A typical editorial moaned that "our state was a poor state, and could not bear the burden thus tyrannically imposed upon it;" and Jack Burden observed that with each new tax the opposition's cries grew louder: "The pocketbook is where it hurts. A man may forget the death of the father, but never the loss of the patrimony, the cold-faced Florentine, who is the founding father of our modern world, said, and he said a mouthful."^{18}

No longer "Cousin Willie from the country...with his Christmas tie,"^{19} the Boss now, Willie abused his power and became morally corrupt. At this point the novelist himself seemed to lose control of Willie, and the development of Willie's role in politics was rather obscure. Like Long, Willie faced impeachment early in his career as governor, but the political maneuvering which thwarted impeachment efforts are not sufficiently developed. Although Warren chose to emphasize Willie's corruption by detailing his involvement with various women, he occasionally gave penetrating sketches of Willie's misuse of political power. Stark was ruthless in his control of the legislature:

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^{18}Warren, All the King's Men, p. 417. Schlesinger also pointed out that "the people of Louisiana got a state government which did more for them than any other government in Louisiana's history....Schools, hospitals, roads and public services in general were better than ever before." The Politics of Upheaval, p. 59.

^{19}Warren, All the King's Men, p. 21.
"You know what Lincoln said?...He said a house divided against itself cannot stand. Well, he was wrong....Yeah....for this government is sure half slave and half son-of-a-bitch, and it is standing."
"Which is which?" I [Jack] asked.
"Slaves down at the Legislature, and the sons-of-bitches up here," he said. And added, "Only sometimes they overlap.""20

Burden felt that Willie saw his other self in Tiny Duffy, the fat, cowardly, corrupt politician (the Clarence Snopes Faulkner envisioned), who was lieutenant governor in Willie's second term. Thus the abuse he heaped on Tiny was really criticism of himself.21 Also, his fanatical determination to keep the hospital free of graft and bribes, "clean," (in spite of his opinion that "there ain't a thing but dirt on this green God's globe..."22) reflected an awareness of his own corruption. Willie idolized his son, Tom, whom he felt destined to be all the things that the Boss could not be, and, when Tom's neck was broken, Willie seemed to reverse his corrupt course in an attempt to recapture the old values of his early career. Before he could accomplish a significant change, he was assassinated. Dying, he said, "It might have been all different....You got to believe that,...it might--have been different--even yet."23

Thus Warren created a character who closely paralleled Huey Long. Like Long, Stark was self-educated (and chose to ignore the education), a political power when he was a young

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20 Ibid., p. 165.
21 Ibid., p. 105.
22 Ibid., p. 50.
23 Ibid., p. 425.
man, accused by entrenched Bourbons of wrecking the state all the while setting up a dictatorship, assassinated by a young doctor from an old family whose family honor had been besmirched by the governor, even after death held up as a perfect example of power corrupted. Yet Warren's Stark did not have the scope of Huey Long. Willie was too complex for Jack Burden to analyze; Burden's criteria were simply not adequate. Willie Stark was better drawn when he was ideistically struggling to change things than when he became governor. Warren never made clear just what changes Willie wrought, and what effect those changes might have had upon the "fellow hicks" who kept Stark in power. Willie's statement that "it might have been all different" leaves more questions than it suggests answers. Perhaps Warren felt that the character of Jack Burden could in its development reflect the development of Stark. The fact remains that the novel would have had more power had there been greater emphasis on Willie, for "in Willie Stark, Warren is dealing with a problem of major proportions in our civilization, the corruption of power; but instead of demonstrating it, denying it, or otherwise commenting on it, he teases."24

Perhaps Warren's aristocratic bent made him believe that any man as corrupt as Stark (or Long) must feel guilt. There is no indication, however, that this was true of the

Kingfish, and, had All the King's Men been the novel it promised to be, Willie would have died remorseless also. Warren's summation of Stark's career in the words of Jack Burden paraphrase Raymc'i Moley's assessment of Long:

I must believe that Willie Stark was a great man. What happened to his greatness is not the question. Perhaps he spilled it on the ground....Perhaps he piled up his greatness and burnt it in one great blaze in the dark like a bonfire and then there wasn't anything but dark and the embers winking. Perhaps he could not tell his greatness from ungreatness and so mixed them together that what was adulterated was lost. But he had it. I must believe that.

Because I came to believe that...I came, in the end, to believe that. And believing that Willie Stark was a great man, I could think better of all other people, and of myself. At the same time that I could more surely condemn myself.

Its weakness in character development does not alter the fact that Warren's study of Huey Long made a valuable contribution to social history. Warren chose the best of the demagogues, but his story echoed Donald Davidson's lament that "the common man has risen to power; that, it seems

Neither Allan Sindler nor Arthur Schlesinger in their studies of Long indicated that the Kingfish felt any remorse for his actions.

There "was a sense of tragedy--a tragedy of wasted talent....He had, combined with a remarkable capacity for hard, intellectual labor, an extra-ordinarily powerful, resourceful, clear and retentive mind, an instrument such as is given to very few men. No one can tell what services he could have rendered his state and nation had he chosen to use that mind well." Raymond Moley, quoted in Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 98. Warren, All the King's Men, p. 428.
counts as a liberal gain. But Pitchfork Ben Tillman and Huey Long are somehow not a gain.\footnote{\text{27}}

All the writers discussed in this chapter in varying degrees deplored the rise of the Snopeses to power in the South, and in a sense their horror was justified. The South under the aristocrats had at least recognized the existence of art and music and good literature, and had achieved a grace of manner that hinted at the possession of these things whether true or not. As the commoner, with little formal education and less concern for old values, rose to power, all that seemed crass, crude and uncivilized in northern society was grafted onto southern life.

The fact that southern states were better governed under these commoners largely escaped the notice of Glasgow, Faulkner, and Warren, as well as many historians of the modern South. It was almost sacrilegious to a man like Faulkner that Mississippi Sartorises should be represented in the Senate by a man like Bilbo, but in a very real sense Bilbo was true to the people of his state. He was doubtless better educated than the majority of white men who cast a ballot for him, and his Negro-baiting, corporation-baiting representation was accurate re-creation of what most 'po whites in the state would have felt called upon to do in

\footnote{\text{27} Donald Davidson, review of \text{Liberalism in the South}, by Virginius Dabney, \text{Saturday Review of Literature, IX} (February 11, 1933), 423.}
the United States Senate. Of the two-point program mentioned above, the Bourbons had only omitted corporation-baiting, while accomplishing little in the way of road-building, improved education, and better economic opportunities for citizens of their states.

The type of commoner portrayed by these authors was doomed by the very fact that the people he claimed to represent were changed by his programs. As education fought its way to importance in the South, and industry finally did use improved southern transportation facilities to exploit southern resources and labor, the rural population that created Longs and Bleases no longer existed in sufficient numbers to be a power in the region. From its inception the movement of agrarian interests back into power in the South was an anachronism.

Of course, industrialization is not yet fully realized in the South, educational opportunities still fall short of national standards, and a significant portion of the population remains on the land. Yet these people no longer dominate the temper of state administrations, having given way to the chamber of commerce, better-business type of government which is prevalent in Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas among the lower border states. Only the deep South maintains its agrarian influence, and in some instances even that area has been breached.
CHAPTER IV

THE BACKWASH

The rise of Snopeses to economic and political power resulted in a decline of the paternalistic system which had existed in the South since colonial times. W. J. Cash felt that paternalism in the old South had been exaggerated, pointing out that the system was enhanced by Civil War leaders' being accorded almost complete obedience by the men who had followed them in battle.\(^1\) Also, the post-war apathy, disillusionment with the real or imagined evils of government during the Reconstruction, and the apparent saintly demeanor of the Redeemers caused a firmer entrenchment of a few politicians who claimed to look out for the welfare of the masses. The crop lien system did economically what Redemption had accomplished politically. If paternalism itself was an evil, then increased tenancy in the South magnified the evil, for it stripped the term of whatever benevolence might have accrued to it.

The tenant had no recourse but obedience, which was theoretically repaid by the owner's acting in the interests of both. The owner himself was generally in danger of losing his land to the furnishing merchant and often found it necessary to cheat his tenants of their meager share in

\(^1\)Cash, *Mind of the South*, pp. 64, 121.
the sale of the crop. Falling cotton prices increased the
owner's peril, so that in 1910 fifty percent of all farms
in the South were tenant operated, with South Carolina,
Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia having sixty to seventy
percent tenantry.\(^2\) However, the idea of the owner's con-
cerning himself with the welfare of his tenants (and the
mill-owner with his workers) did not vanish, and even the
protests of Populism could not erase the concept.

The political and economic success of men who had
themselves been tenants or laborers sounded the death-knell
of the paternalistic system (although the concept is still
called up when labor unions or Negro rights are discussed).
The demise of the aristocracy had killed the idea that what
was good for the upper class would filter down to benefit
the lower. The new men in politics had risen from poverty
by their own efforts, and, though they claimed to represent
the interests of the lower class, the emphasis was for
the first time upon class rather than the individual. Also
for the first time the lower class was urged to make its
own way politically, just as it was assumed that members
of that class would fend for themselves economically.

Men who fought their way out of this lower class to
financial success have been referred to as Snopeses, and

\(^2\)For complete figures on cotton prices see Gilbert C.
Fite and Jim E. Reese, *An Economic History of the United
the increase of tenant farming are given on p. 416.
Woodward, Ezell, and Clark, as well as the historians cited,
give similar interpretations of the lien system.
it has been indicated that Snopeses had little interest in any one but themselves. Thus it evolved that men who were too physically weak, ill-educated, or lazy, or whose devotion to the land or hatred of civilization prevented their migration to the city and relative wealth became a social and economic backwash. People in the backwash,

mill workers, miners, and foundrymen, though fewer in number than the tenant farmers, were like them in constituting a new economic and social class in Southern life. Together, these two segments of the poor-white population formed a group without parallel in Southern history—a class without capital, talent, or ancestry to give it preferential claims.3

Some of this class, whose "obscure instinctive attachment for the soil," kept them on the land, attained in Faulkner's hands a dignity inherent with man in nature. Men like the McCallums of the novel Sartoris and the short story "The Tall Men," whose "dependence on the land kept them free from modern superficiality, remained aloof from the conflict of traditional versus modern worlds. Their lives followed a reasonable course and had honor, and they survived and remained intact."4

The McCallums of the South were constantly threatened by the civilization they had rejected, a civilization which

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3Ezell, South Since 1865, p. 223.
would corrupt their lives. An agent of civilization, the selective service representative, did not penetrate the surface of the McCallum world though he expressed a popularly held belief when he said:

These people who lie about and conceal the ownership of land and property in order to hold relief jobs which they have no intention of performing, standing on their constitutional rights against having to work, who jeopardize the very job itself through petty and transparent subterfuge to acquire a free mattress which they intend to attempt to sell; who would relinquish even the job, if by so doing they could receive free food and a place, any ratheole, in town to sleep in; who, as farmers, make false statements to get seed loans which they will later misuse, and then react in loud vituperative outrage and astonishment when caught at it. And then, when at long last a suffering and threatened Government asks one thing of them in return, one thing simply, which is to put their names down on a selective-service list, they refuse to do it.

He at last realized, however, that the McCallums had fought valiantly in the Civil War, and, failing to defeat the Yankee civilization, had come home to plant their crops and mind their own business, having no traffic with the national appendage which the South had become.

Like Jason Compson who could not afford pride, those southerners who remained on the land, hated it, and misused it, were denied dignity. Such men were those of the

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Faulkner, Collected Stories, p. 46.
Bundren family in the novel *As I Lay Dying*. Addie Bundren died watching her son Cash build her coffin. Her husband, Anse, vowed to return her body to Jefferson for burial. Like Ulysses returning from Troy, Anse Bundren seemed to have incurred the wrath of most of the gods. The river rose; the bridge gave way; Cash broke his good leg and finally incased it in cement; Wardaman, the youngest son, boring holes in the casket lid so his mother, whom he believed to be still alive, could breathe also poked a few holes in Addie Bundren's face; all the while the odor of the decaying corpse caused neighboring Snopeses to withdraw any aid they might have given.

Although occasional flashes of almost poetic vision penetrated the humorous carnality, the Bundrens were incapable of understanding or rationalizing their actions. The taint of humanity had never marred their animal existence. They were not detrimental to society: for them society did not exist, and it seemed likely that, other than their Snopes-like neighbors, society was completely unaware of the Bundrens. With the passing of the frontier they were obsolete victims of a civilization they neither knew nor cared about.

In portraying the flotsam of mechanized society Faulkner had only one equal. Erskine Caldwell created Jeeter Lester, an "unwashed, shiftless, profane, incredibly...

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unmoral and monstrously worthless old Georgia farmer."\(^8\)

Inextricably bound to the eroded, barren soil of his ancestors, Jeeter became less human every year. Dependent upon Captain John, who now owned the land where Jeeter's family had once raised cotton and tobacco, Jeeter was destitute when the owner abandoned the farm and moved to Augusta. Caldwell abandoned fiction in favor of social criticism when he pointed out that:

> an intelligent employment of his land, stocks and implements would have enabled Jeeter, and scores of others who had become dependent upon Captain John, to raise crops for food, and crops to be sold at a profit. Co-operative and corporate farming would have saved them all.\(^9\)

Captain John sold the mules and other stock, leaving Jeeter with no means of working the land. With no future crop to borrow on, Jeeter was unable to get food, snuff, or other supplies at the community store. Each year he sank deeper into poverty and each year what had passed for character in Jeeter Lester eroded with the land. Pellagra and a natural laziness had reduced his farming efforts to wistful talk, futile planning. He best described his plight:

> It's in my blood--burning broom sedge and plowing in the ground this time of year. I did it for near

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\(^8\)"Creating an Untidy, But American, Hamlet," Literary Digest, CXVIII (December 15, 1934), 18.

\(^9\)Erskine Caldwell, Tobacco Road (New York, 1932), pp. 82-83.
about fifty years, and my Pa and his Pa before him was the same kind of men. Us Lesters sure like to stir the earth and make things grow in it. I can't move off to the cotton mills like the rest of them do. The land has got a powerful hold on me.10

At one time Jeeter had tried farming on his own. He had borrowed on his future crop from a loan company which sent a man to collect interest on the loan at the first of every month. Jeeter could not pay the interest, and the company added it to the principal, charging him interest on that, too. Interest amounted to three per cent a month at the beginning of the loan, and within a year he had been charged thirty per cent plus thirty per cent on unpaid interest.

Then to make sure that the loan was fully protected, Jeeter had to pay the sum of fifty dollars. He could never understand why he had to pay that, and the company did not undertake to explain it to him. When he had asked what the fifty dollars was meant to cover, he was told that it was merely the fee for making the loan. When the final settlement was made, Jeeter found that he had paid out more than three hundred dollars, and was receiving seven dollars for his share. Seven dollars for a year's labor did not seem to him a fair portion of the proceeds from the cotton, especially as he had done all the work, and had furnished the land and mule, too.11

With the help of his wife and son-in-law, Jeeter discovered that he had actually lost three dollars because renting the mule had cost ten.

When Jeeter appealed to merchants for credit to purchase food and snuff, they usually told him that the rich controlled

10Ibid., p. 20  
11Ibid., p. 148.
all the money and that everyone was forced to wait for them to get some of it back in circulation. Jeeter agreed that the rich, whom he could not identify, were responsible for most of his woe, but that knowledge did not help him to solve the riddle he put to the storekeeper: "What's going to happen to me and my folks if the rich don't stop bleeding us?"\textsuperscript{12} Jeeter, his wife, the starving grandmother (who developed an animal quickness in her quest for food), the hare-lipped daughter, moronic son, and Pearl, the beautiful youngest daughter whom Jeeter had sold to a neighbor, continued to starve on the tobacco road. Negro sharecroppers passing down the road laughed at the Lesters devouring stolen turnips, and Jeeter resented their laughter but was powerless to do anything about it. Jeeter was unable to control any aspect of his miserable life; he "made a false start somewhere nearly every day."\textsuperscript{13}

The characters of \textit{Tobacco Road} were not heroic, not even pathetic. There was about them an atmosphere of sustained hopelessness. The plight of these people seemed so alien in an affluent society (even to a society grappling with depression) that the novel and subsequent stage play were greeted with a sort of shocked fascination by the public. Immediately there developed speculation as to whether \textit{Tobacco Road} and its denizens were modelled on fact.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 150. \textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 102.
Stark Young, a southern writer in the aristocratic tradition, felt that Caldwell had "heighten[ed] the material in the interest of the art he wish[ed] to create." Young further indicated his aversion to dealing with the actual problems brought out by Tobacco Road when he admitted that people "more or less like these Georgia poor-whites occur...where our Anglo-Saxon race has found an isolated occasion for degeneration and decay...where a good deal of the Elizabethan and eighteenth century point of view still holds."\(^{14}\)

Jonathan Daniels dealt with the problem directly:

_Tobacco Road...may be a sign for despair under all our humanitarian programs,...in the back-country South of eroded lands and eroded people, Tobacco Road seems almost as new and true as it was a whole decade of humanitarianism ago._\(^{15}\)

In calling the world's attention to Jeeter Lester and pointing out the depravity and inhumanity that was his life, Caldwell touched the lower depths of mechanized society.

_In God's Little Acre_ the economic condition of the characters was much improved and along with lethargy and peasant brutality the Georgia po' whites reluctantly assumed a few human traits. TyTy Walden owned a farm, where he lived with his daughter, Darling Jill, his two sons, Shaw and

\(^{14}\) Stark Young, "Roads," _New Republic_, LXXVII (December 20, 1933), 168-69.

\(^{15}\) Jonathan Daniels, review of _Tobacco Road_, _Saturday Review of Literature_, XXIII (January 11, 1941), 9.
Buck, and Buck's beautiful wife, Griselda. TyTy and his sons had long ago given up farming in order to dig for gold. All over what would have been good cotton land there were deep holes TyTy had abandoned. Since TyTy had promised the yield of one of his acres to God, it became necessary to move God's acre each time it seemed that God owned the spot where gold might be found. Determined to be "scientific" in his search, TyTy trapped an albino who was reputed to be a diviner. Naturally, when gold was located, TyTy would need more help to dig it out of the ground. He dispatched Darling Jill to Scottsville, North Carolina, to bring back his daughter, Rosamond, and her husband, Will Thompson, who was leading a strike against the cotton mill where he worked. As the story progressed humor gave way to tragedy and the mill-workers' strike pre-empted TyTy's search for gold.

Carl Van Doren, who perhaps overstated Caldwell's motive in writing the novel, felt that:

with TyTy as a kind of chorus...Mr. Caldwell lifts the story of Will Thompson into tragedy. Seen in another light, he might have been regarded as a mill town stallion, a brawling striker killed in a senseless enterprise. But for Mr. Caldwell Will is a hero of the people, who acts out what TyTy feels. Nor is he a mere poor white, land bound and custom ridden. He belongs to the mills, and he feels about them a passion like TyTy's for God and gold. He is a proletarian hero if American literature has ever had one.16

16 Carl Van Doren, "Made in America, Erskine Caldwell," Nation, CXXXVII (October 18, 1933), 443-44.
Victim of low wages, long hours, "stretch-outs," and pellagra, will was a human being, heroic in his defiance of the mill owners and starvation. Caldwell described him and his prototypes in vivid prose:

The men who worked in the mills looked tired and worn, but the girls were in love with the looms and the spindles and the flying lint. The wild-eyed girls on the inside of the ivy-walled mill looked like potted plants in bloom. Up and down the Valley lay the company towns and the ivy-walled cotton mills and the firm-bodied girls with eyes like morning glories, and the men stood on the hot streets looking at each other while they spat their lungs into the deep yellow dust of Carolina... In the Valley towns beauty was begging and the hunger of strong men was like the whimpering of beaten women.

The fact that women worked while men could get no jobs spurred Will Thompson's desire for Griselda. According to Jonathan Daniels, Caldwell's story of "industrial conflict grows in a room where a mill hand is committing adultery with his sister-in-law, and it grows there more clearly than in any detailed tractarian description that has ever been written."  

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17"No wonder manufacturers cry, 'Agitator,' as they would cry, 'Snake,' at every union organizer. Most of the manufacturers came originally from the same red hills as those from which their workers come. They know a secret which they have steadily and loudly denied; they know there is no dependable docility in their cousins at the looms. These cousins are the grandchildren of those who opined that it was a rich man's war but a poor man's fight and who fought like lank and indestructible devils just the same....But the looms are not the only machines they can see. Their secret concern is with the wheel, not shuttle. They mean to move." Jonathan Daniels, A Southerner Discovers the South (New York, 1938), p. 29.


19Jonathan Daniels, review of God's Little Acre, Saturday Review of Literature, IX (February 18, 1933), 437.
In the strikers' futile attempt to take over and run the mill, Thompson was killed. Buck Walden, knowing that Will had made love to his wife, vented his rage and frustration in the murder of his own brother, Jim Leslie Walden, who came to the farm with the intention of taking Griselda's beauty back with him into the Snopes-life he had made for himself in the city. God's little acre's yield had been tragedy, which TyTy had foretold: "There was a mean trick played on us somewhere. God put us in the bodies of animals and tried to make us act like people. That was the beginning of trouble."^{20}

Caldwell's humorous treatment of TyTy and his tribe during the first part of the novel left the reader somewhat unprepared for the tragic events at its close. Critic Louis Kronenberger disapproved of the fact that "in God's Little Acre we are wrenched out of a fantastic world of mad searching and robust animality into a world of low greed and willfull lust."^{21} The word "fantastic" here was the key to Kronenberger's misunderstanding of TyTy Walden's world. If certain heroic impulses lifted the characters, making them more than "crackers running wild in the sun,"^{22} the fact that Caldwell's novel had firm roots in realism made

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^{20}Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 298.


^{22}Carl Van Doren, "Made in America, Erskine Caldwell," p. 444.
the juxtaposition of humor and tragedy not only acceptable
but necessary. Erskine Caldwell's characters were a product
of heat and red clay and pellagra, in a land where civiliza-
tion had not yet shackled man's thirst for life. TyTy's
code of behavior, which governed all the characters, as
well as the general purpose of the novel, was geared to
primitive life and met disaster when it encountered civil-
ization. Will Thompson was perhaps the best example of this
conflict. His violent life seemed directly motivated by
TyTy's philosophy that:

People ought to live like God made us to live. When
you sit down by yourself and feel what's in you, that's
the real way to live. It's feeling. Some people talk
about your head being the real thing to go by, but it
ain't so... People have got to feel for themselves....
It's folks who let their head run them who make all
the mess of living.23

While the characters of God's Little Acre found tragedy
in their pursuit of life, the men and women of Caldwell's
novel, Journeyman, were victims of a man who made the
savoring of life a thing of evil. Semon Dye was a "lay
preacher" who came to Rocky Comfort, Georgia, to save soul.
His brutality coupled with a total lack of morals outraged,
yet fascinated, the people he came in contact with. As a
catalyst, Semon Dye failed to produce any lasting changes
in the lives of the people he victimized. His preaching,
which was the climax of a week of debauchery and violence,

23Caldwell, God's Little Acre, p. 258.
culminated in an evening of religious fervor not unlike an orgy. Yet he left the people of Rocky Comfort largely unchanged, simultaneously despising the source and lamenting the loss of an evil in their midst. Semon Dye was the po' white Elmer Gantry—the human prototype of evil coupled with force.

Although the characters of Journeyman were a bit more prosperous than those of God's Little Acre or Tobacco Road, there remained the lethargy, the brutality, the sense of hopelessness which dominated even the humorous aspects of the previous novels.  

Caldwell's descriptions of the gawky, shiftless, painful dregs of southern society certainly brought the world's attention to their condition. These people had no control over their own lives. They were victims of an agricultural system which would not permit proper use of the land; of cotton mill villages thirsty for progress; of a society whose basic tenet was that a man got what he deserved, and the Jeeter Lesters of the South were surely not outwardly deserving. The world took up Caldwell's challenge to its credulity, perhaps to the exaggerated extent about which Faulkner complained, becoming eager "to believe anything about the South not even provided it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough."  

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24Caldwell, Journeyman (New York, 1936).  
Caldwell, and Faulkner himself, drew characters and situations strange to the average American, but the social backwash from which these stories came does exist in the rural (and, increasingly, in the urban) slums of the South. These outcasts which society would prefer to forget, even to the extent of bribing them with welfare checks to stay off the middle class streets, are "denied equality with other whites except perhaps at political rallies." To these people "proposals for Negro equality caused fear that the equalizing would start at their own doors," which, of course, it has.

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26 Ezell, *South Since 1865*, p. 224.
CHAPTER V

THE NEGRO’S PLACE

The white South tried to forget the existence of its po' whites, but it made up the difference in its awareness of the Negro. The Negro’s place in southern life has been the most debated single topic in the region’s history. His slavery was at the base of southern society before the Civil War; Reconstruction thrust him into political prominence, then abandoned him in 1877. He maintained a fairly active role in politics until the Populists seemed about to win him away from the Bourbons, whereupon his disfranchisement became politically expedient. Violent, corrupt elections in 1892, 1894, and 1896, wherein the Bourbons justified their ballot-box stuffing on the grounds that they were justly fighting a reunion of Negro and scalawag (Populist), and the Populists blamed the Negro for their defeat, led to state conventions which placed voting restrictions on the Negro. At the same time Jim Crow legislation institutionalized white supremacy. Thus the Negro’s place in southern society for the time had been decided.¹

¹The best historical survey of the establishment of the Negro’s place in society is C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York, 1957).
The North was too busy justifying imperialism to censure the South for its racist legal maneuverings, and Darwinism was a basic force in such justification. "Scientific" racial doctrines echoed Rudyard Kipling, and, if the northerner did not quite agree with his southern neighbor that the Negro was inferior, he certainly felt that the Anglo-Saxon was superior. Perhaps the best summation of this race-conscious nationalism, which sent men from both sides of the Potomac into battle together, was Faulkner's:

He could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide, the burden which he now assumed and carried as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass: a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life.2

The nation accepted the South's solution to what had been the divisive force between the sections, with historians minimizing basic reforms and playing up the corruption of Reconstruction, and novelists helping to cement national attitudes on race. The bulk of historical novels maintained their ethereal quality in treatment of the Negro, picturing him as the happy, childlike servant; but Thomas Dixon, Jr. lashed out at the black man in two widely circulated novels,

The Leopard's Spots and The Clansman, which became the motion picture "Birth of a Nation." Ellen Glasgow failed to deal adequately with the problem, showing occasional racial conflict, but in general her books were only "cognizant of...that portion of the Negro populace which comes under the classification of household servants." Her striving to treat Negroes fairly in her social history derived from the same sympathy the author felt for mistreated animals.

Under northern benediction the South no longer felt constrained to defend its treatment of the Negro, and the old southern penchant for violence found outlet. W. J. Cash felt that, despite the fact that there was on the part of the upper class an attempt to dissociate itself from "nigger-hazing," the pervasive belief in the rightness of preserving the southern social system triumphed, and at "the end of the thirty years the South was solidly wedded to Negro-lynching because of the cumulative power of habit, obviously." Even vigorous social critics such as H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan overlooked the aristocracy's part in lynching and passed the whole barbaric custom off as a "phenomenon of isolated and stupid communities..."

Following the hookworm and malaria belt." Yet lynching

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3 Howard Mumford Jones, "Product of the Tragic Muse," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII (March 29, 1941), 5-6.
4 Cash, Mind of the South, p. 128.
was, finally, to haunt the South, for when the nation recovered from its orgy of corrupted Darwinism it would turn on the South once again and point accusingly at lynching as the prime example of southern race relations.

Progressivism alleviated the Negro's condition only indirectly, in that it made some gains for the lower class white, whose implacable hatred of the Negro was based upon economic competition. Doubtless Progressive campaigns against the convict lease system and child labor also benefited the Negro, but, while the spirit of reform called attention to the Negro's status in society, little was actually done until the Negro himself struggled to improve his condition.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was officially organized in 1910, issuing a clear statement of Negro hopes for political and social justice. The movement's hierarchy was largely white, and its support came from the North. It was not until Negroes had served in World War I that NAACP leaders like William E. Burghardt DuBois gained national recognition for their cause. DuBois spoke for returning Negro soldiers when he stated that Negroes, having saved democracy in France now intended to do something about it in America.6

Faulkner, plagiarizing Kipling, had his returning warrior, Caspey of the novel Sartoris echo DuBois:

I don't take nothin' offen no white man no mo!... War showed de white folks dey can't git along widout de cullud man. Tromp him in de dus!, but when de trouble bust loose, hit's 'Please suh, Mr. Cullud Man; right dis way whar de bugle blowin', Mr. Cullud Man; you is de savior of de country!' And now de cullud race gwine reap de benefits of de war, and dat soon.7

As usual, Faulkner followed fact in his legend, and an older, wiser Negro warned Caspey to "save dat nigger freedom talk fer town-folks: dey mought stomach it."8

For the most part, town folks did not stomach it, either. Miss Jenny Dupre expressed southern disgust with "nigger freedom talk": "Who was the fool anyway, who thought of putting niggers into the same uniform with white men? Mr. Wardaman knew better; he told those fools in Washington at the time it wouldn't do."9 For the first time Negroes and whites had gone from the South in large numbers and returned. The experience left the Negro dissatisfied with his situation; it had little effect upon white attitudes toward the Negro. Professor Franz Boas' re-evaluation of racial theories had as yet had little national effect, and prevailing opinion enabled the South to keep the Negro in a subservient position. Concurrently, the "Red Scare" of the 1920's placed a stigma on any agitation. According to Cash:

8Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 89.
9Ibid., p. 77.
The South was afraid for the precarious mastery it had with such great difficulty established. And the fear and hate conjured up by these things poured out to meet the world currents of fear and hate (nowhere else did the two streams more signally fuse) to conjure up yet another reason for fear and hate—the bogy of the Negro turning Communist and staging Red revolution in the South.10

The war had wrought changes in Negro docility, but a general effort to elevate him in society would be held in abeyance until another war gave him better opportunity to press his case. Faulkner reflected the situation in the early twenties; Caspey, who had "returned to his native land a total loss, sociologically speaking, with a definite disinclination toward labour, honest or otherwise, and two honorable wounds incurred in a razor-hedged crap game," was readmitted to his former position in society by a shout on the head with a stick of stove-wood in the hands of Bayard Sartoris.11 Faulkner's novels of the thirties and early forties also reflected the theories of Negro inferiority which were prevalent in the nation. Quentin Compson in 1909 made the statement that "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among."12 Faulkner himself singing the "saga of the mule" said that the mule was misunderstood "even by that creature, the nigger who drives him, whose impulses and mental processes most

10Cash, Mind of the South, p. 328.
11Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 77.
closely resemble his. And in the same story, "Ten a.m.'s might early in the day to start carvin' white folks," Dr. Peabody boomed. "Nigger's different. Chop up a nigger any time after midnight." Yet Faulkner made the transition in fiction that the South was forced to make in reality.

Joe Christmas (Light in August, 1932) murdered the white woman he had been living with, and it was only after the murder that citizens of Jefferson found out that he was part Negro:

"That's right," he Lucas Burch, Christmas' partner, says....Accuse the white and let the nigger run...." "Nigger?" the sheriff said, "Nigger?" "You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about," the marshal says. "I don't care if he is a murderer or not." Even before Lucas Burch's revelation, the townspeople were convinced that Joanna Burden, who had devoted her life to helping Negroes yet understood them only as an oppressed, inferior race, had been killed by a Negro:

what are we doing, standing around here? Murdering a white woman the black son of a None of them had ever entered the house. While she was alive they would not have allowed their wives to call on her. When they were younger, children (some of their fathers had done it too) they had called after her on the street, "Nigger lover! Nigger lover!"16

13 Faulkner, Sartoris, p. 239.
14 Ibid., p. 101.
15 Faulkner, Light in August, p. 91.
16 Ibid., p. 275.
After Christmas was caught, one man expressed the general outrage:

"He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad.... I was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too.... And so Halliday... hit the nigger a couple of times in the face, and the nigger acting like a nigger for the first time and taking it."17

But the men who spilled Joe Christmas' black blood were not to forget that blood. "It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant."18

While Faulkner indicated some southerners' awareness of the injustice to the Negro, Erskine Caldwell published stories condemning the viciousness of the southern system. In the novel *Journeyman* Caldwell used the incidents of Semon Dye's rape of a mulatto woman and shooting the husband who tried to protect her to evince an outrage which was to be more clearly delineated in the short story, "Kneel to the Rising Sun." Lonnie was a Negro tenant farmer, living on short rations and allowing without protest his dog's tail to be cut off by the plantation owner. Clem, another Negro, who was dangerously close to thinking himself the equal of a white man, helped Lonnie to drag the torn body of his father from the jaws of hogs kept by the plantation owner. When summoned, the owner cursed Lonnie for waking him and, when

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17 Ibid., pp. 331-32.  
18 Ibid., pp. 439-40.
Clem pointed out that the hogs were to blame for the death, the owner threatened to whip him. Refusing to be whipped, Clem struck the white-man, while Lonnie stood helpless as he had been when his dog was mutilated. The owner telephoned his neighbors and they gathered, eagerly anticipating the hunt. Lonnie, under pressure, revealed Clem's hiding place, and found himself swept along in the excitement of running the Negro to earth. Finally Clem was treed like a 'coon; the men pumped shell after shell into his lifeless, falling body, while Lonnie again was the helpless onlooker. As the sun rose, Lonnie knelt in the red dust of Georgia, realizing his cowardice, knowing that he could be no other way and stay alive.  

"The End of Christy Tucker," illustrated pointedly the futility of one Negro's trying to improve his lot. Christy Tucker painted his tenant shack, his wife planted flowers, and Christy got the reputation of being "uppity." When he questioned the plantation manager about his share of the crop, the manager shot him remorselessly as he would swat a fly. Candy Man Beechum was dealt with in the same manner by a southern law enforcement officer.  

Caldwell's lash was aimed not at the Lonnies of the South, nor even the plantation owners, but at the passive


observers, who were outraged by the horrors they witnessed and were too indifferent to try to prevent. Caldwell's chief concern was showing how the Negro was robbed of any opportunity to escape from his "mud-sill" status.

Warren on the other hand showed how white men robbed themselves in order to maintain a feeling of superiority over the Negro in Willie Stark's struggle to get county commissioners to take the low bid for construction of a school. One commissioner, who had a financial connection with the highest bidder, harped on the fact that the low bidder would bring in Negro labor until the whites forgot that there were two bids between high and low. As one white put it, "Couldn't save enuff to pay fer bringen no passel of niggers in here." 21

The idea that the white South was in bondage to the Negro was developed more fully by William Faulkner than any other novelist of the period. Around 1940 Faulkner's characters reflected changed national attitudes. Particularly those educated outside the South began to say "Negro," and the author himself also employed the term. (Warren's Jack Burden had been educated in the South; he still said "nigger," but when he employed the term he seemed to have lifted that single word out of context. Warren's po' whites said "nigger" with ease.) Faulkner

21Warren, All the King's Men, p. 58.
also revealed an inkling of his "southern guilt-complex" theme which would culminate in the novel Intruder in the Dust. He created Lucas Beauchamp in a collection of stories about the conquering of the wilderness, Go, Down, Moses. Lucas was the grandson of old Carothers McCaslin, working the land now belonging to McCaslin's white great-grandson, Carothers Edmonds:

Lucas himself made one, himself and old Cass coevals in more than spirit even, the analogy only the closer for its paradox: --old Cass a McCaslin only on his mother's side and so bearing his father's name though he possessed the land and its benefits and responsibilities; Lucas a McCaslin on his father's side though bearing his mother's name and possessing the use and benefit of the land with none of the responsibilities. . . .Zack, who was not the man his father had been but whom Lucas, the man McCaslin, had accepted as his peer to the extent of intending to kill him, right up to the point when, his affairs all set in order like those of a man preparing for death, he stood over the sleeping white man that morning forty-three years ago with the naked razor in his hand.22

Lucas was going to kill Zack Edmonds because his wife had gone to Edmonds' house a year before to tend Edmonds' son and had not returned home. Facing Edmonds, Lucas said, "You thought because I am a nigger I wouldn't even mind....You tried to beat me. And you wont never, not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning, you wont never."23

22Faulkner, Go, Down, Moses (New York, 1940), p. 44.
23Ibid., p. 53.
Again faithful to reality, it was Edmonds' son in his relationship with Lucas's son, not the older white man, who felt "the old curse of his fathers, 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."\(^{24}\)

Out of this feeling that the white South had cursed itself by enslaving the black man, but that the curse could only be lifted by that same white South itself according justice, came *Intruder in the Dust*. In acknowledging the South's shame, Faulkner issued his Monroe Doctrine of southernism five years before the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Gavin Stevens, the moderate who could cope with the present despite his link with the past, said, "I only say that the injustice is ours, the South's. We must expiate and abolish it ourselves, alone and without help nor even (with thanks) advice."\(^{25}\) His vow to defend the Negro against "private and personal avengers" who, by intervening in his behalf would set him back countless decades, was prophetic of southern moderate attitudes well into the 1960's. His threat to these avengers was at one point polemic, angry, the old South again defending its peculiar institution:

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a people divided at a time when history is still showing us that the anteroom to dissolution is division and you say At least we perish in the name of humanity and we reply When all is stricken but that nominative pronoun and that verb what price Lucas' humanity then...26

He asked that justice be relinquished to the Negro by the South, "rather than torn from us and forced on him both with bayonets, willynilly into alliance with them with whom we have no kinship whatever in defence of a principle which we ourselves begrieve and abhor..."27

Lucas Beauchamp, heir to the best white blood in the county, "once the slave of any white man within whose notice he happened to come, now tyrant over the whole county's white conscience,"28 assumed guilt for the murder of a white man. The man's po' white relatives obviously intended to lynch the Negro, when Lucas placed upon the shoulders of a sixteen year old white boy the responsibility of digging up the body to determine the real killer. The boy, Chick Mallison, together with an aristocratic old woman, and a Negro youth (who perhaps symbolized a new generation of southerners white and Negro, aided by experience and tradition, striving to right the wrong done the Negro by the South), dug up the murdered man, exculpated Lucas, and averted the lynching. In so doing Chick Mallison realized that manhood was not inherited with pigment and came to

26Ibid., p. 132.  
27Ibid., pp. 138-39.  
28Ibid., pp. 128-29.
understand the South's desire to turn its back on "the whole dark people on which the very economy of the land itself was founded, not in heat or anger nor even regret but in one irremediable invincible inflexible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame." 29

_Intruder in the Dust_ was an inaccurate reflection of southern attitudes chiefly because Faulkner concocted it as a plea to his own region and a warning to others. The story itself was contrived and unconvincing. It fell far short of Faulkner's usually faithful chronicling of what was actually happening in the South.

Gavin Stevens spoke to the North of what he considered to be the changing trend in the South's handling of its race problem. At the same time he urged the South to "swap _[the Negro]_ the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive. Then we would prevail." 30 In trying to show the rest of the country that the South acknowledged its guilt and at the same time warning that only the South could solve its problem, Stevens failed to grasp fundamental issues involved. He spoke for a generation of southerners who had grown up during the Darwinist era; who, politically, were trying to reconcile their business-oriented policies all the while keeping a

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29Ibid., pp. 64-65. 30Ibid., p. 148.
firm hold on the rural vote; who, economically, were chiefly interested in maintaining antipathy of lower class whites for the Negro because it hampered labor organization; who loudly proclaimed that the individual southerner knew what was best for the individual Negro. In this respect men like James O. Eastland, Allen Ellender, John Stennis, or Richard Russell were much better indications of southern thinking than the moderate Stevens. Faulkner's lawyer-spokesman failed to understand the younger generation of white southerners, some of whom were willing to accept (with thanks) northern help in solving the problem. He did not realize the extent to which the two sections differed in their approach to the problem; that the North was again willing to use federal power against the southern states. Perhaps Stevens' greatest shortcoming lay in his misinterpretation of the change in Negro attitudes. His experience with Mississippi rural Negroes could give him little indication of the new type of Negro leadership, largely northern-bred and not willing to wait for the South to confer "freedom." Lucas Beauchamp would not himself have understood James Farmer, or John Lewis, or James Forman. Thus Stevens' pronouncement was anachronistic at the same time that it appeared prophetic.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Glasgow, Faulkner, Warren and Caldwell, while probing "the human heart in conflict with itself,"¹ portrayed the South in transition. Each of them made substantial contribution to a deeper understanding of the region, its people and problems, and their work was only a part of the vast literary heritage established by their generation.

Perhaps the most intriguing question arising out of the abundant growth of literature in the South is that of cause. Though the region has undergone sweeping changes, some conditions which existed in the Old South still prevail. Why, then should these parallel conditions fail to produce a literature in one era while engendering a deluge of it in another? Again speculation upon such a broad question yields for the most part generalization, but the issue is complex enough to support extensive examination—and generalization.

Most obvious of the parallels is the presence of the Negro. While his slavery did not, and, as has been indicated, perhaps could not, produce critical analysis in

¹The Faulkner Reader, p. 3. Faulkner's speech of acceptance upon the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Stockholm, 1950.
fiction, his second class status has been the center of a number of contemporary novels and is almost always recognized in every recent work of fiction. There are a number of explanations. The most reasonable one seems to be the southern writers' appreciation of the individual. When the Negro is treated in southern fiction, it is the individual Negro, and the dehumanizing effects of segregation are revealed through him. This is, of course, to be expected, for to treat him as a class or institutional problem would be to make the novel a social protest or a clinical observation. Yet there is more to it than this. The slave was not often possessed of a distinct character—he was merely the product of a system; Lucas Beauchamp had an individual character worth analyzing. He was alive, with emotions, pride, fears peculiar to him alone. He may have been representative of the "whole dark people," but he was first of all Lucas Beauchamp. Also, the Negro is part, and a major part, of the South's transition. His struggle for equality is a dramatic, frustrating, sometimes pathetic, sometimes exhilarating experience, greatest of its kind ever tried in America. Novelists could hardly fail to note such a struggle.

The aristocracy which existed in the Old South as the only true "articulates" did not, could not, probe their own success. It was only after they were casualties of the South's struggle over "sentimental tradition" and "patriotic
materialism"² that the aristocracy became fit subjects for modern fiction. All the authors discussed, with the exception of Caldwell, were themselves torn in this struggle; all were conscious of the past and of certain values that should be preserved. C. Vann Woodward paraphrased Allen Tate's analysis of this historical awareness:

After the First World War the South arrived at a crossroads of history where an old traditional order was being rapidly obliterated and a new modern order was being simultaneously brought to birth. Caught at these crossroads, the Southerner was made more keenly conscious at once of the present and of the past. His sensitivity to the current change heightened his awareness of past differences, and his intensified remembrance of things past added corresponding poignancy to his awareness of things present.³

Howard Odum felt that Faulkner was a product of the conflict between the "folk-regional culture" and the "state civilization." Odum, arguing against Donald Davidson's statement that, according to all sociological ethnological data, Mississippi could not produce a Faulkner, stressed the fact that Faulkner

has been contemporaneous with the growth stage of a folk-regional culture....in identifying him with the folk culture of the South we identify him with struggle and travail, in conflict with race, nation, and powerful tradition, fighting for survival for itself and its people.⁴

²Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 144.
Fighting for survival was, in Faulkner's case, for survival of the dignity and worth of a single individual in a world whose impersonal mass production made men valueless adjuncts of the consumer ideal. For Glasgow, perhaps the survival of manner, of taste, order and tranquillity; Warren allied himself most distinctly with a group whose sole purpose was the preservation of values similar to those already listed (though he broadened the concept to include individual responsibility as the motive force in man's attempt to find identity in an impersonal world).

When Faulkner, Caldwell and Warren began writing in the late twenties and early thirties, the old rural agrarian atmosphere characteristic of the ante-bellum South still held true. Virtually all these writers' novels about the South were in a rural setting, with the old agrarian emphasis on individualism. When a Compson or a Sartoris struggled against the forces of change, his doom was personal, though he represented a whole way of life disintegrating. Woodward, stressing the southerners' involvement with their past, felt that they treated man

not as an individual alone with his conscience or his God, as the New Englanders were inclined to do,... but as an inextricable part of a living history and community, attached and determined in a thousand ways by other wills and destinies of people he has only heard about.5

The demise of individualism is at the core of a complex problem facing writers who wish to continue the region's literary tradition. At the time Ellen Glasgow began urging the nation to take a realistic look at the South, southerners fell into three fairly clearly delineated categories: aristocrats (or those who fancied themselves aristocrats), po' whites, and Negroes. Faulkner, Warren, and Caldwell discovered another had been created by simply dividing the po' whites into Snopes and non-Snopes.

Industrialization-urbanization has immeasurably altered the face of the land. Southern cities, recently grown, often do not have very many distinguishing marks; Dallas looks almost exactly like Atlanta, which looks like Denver, and so on. Some of the older cities, such as New Orleans, have maintained a core of old buildings, but even the French Quarter is a besieged island that has lost much of its charm because of its isolation. Southerners' innate distrust of government has caused city fathers to forego metropolitan planning, so that pre-fabricated slums spring up in suburban areas.

Along with revolutionary change in the land itself, the South in recent years has experienced an influx of "outsiders" who come to man its new machines. These people share little of the southerner's feeling for the past; their very livelihood depends upon "patriotic materialism."
The southern novelist is confronted not only with changes imposed from outside, but with increasing diversification among native southerners. Few aristocrats remain, but there are now several varieties of Snopeses; an urban as well as rural group of po' whites; and the Negro is no longer only a field hand or household servant. If the southern writer is to continue to give an accurate reflection of his region, he must make the change from the old agrarian, personal, individualistic atmosphere to an impersonal, mechanistic new South. Current writers of fiction seem to have accepted the challenge, though it will be difficult to rival the quality and abundance of literature that flowered in the rural South.
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