

GAVIN STEVENS: FAULKNER'S UBIQUITOUS KNIGHT

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GAVIN STEVENS: FAULKNER'S UBIQUITOUS KNIGHT

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1931 William Faulkner introduced to the scrutiny of the public eye one of his most admirable and delightful characters, and for the following three decades the history of Yoknapatawpha County was enriched and deepened by the appearance of this gentleman and man of words--Gavin Stevens.

There has been no lack of critical attention given to Gavin Stevens and his role in Faulkner's stories and novels, and that criticism encompasses a variety of opinions, ranging anywhere from intelligent and sympathetic interpretation to unsympathetic rejection. With such an abundance of critical opinions and evaluations, perhaps justification for another piece of criticism on Stevens might best be stated in negative terms, in pointing out limitations in the criticism that already centers on Stevens.

Olga Vickery comes closest in treating the major concern of this paper--the progressive development of Gavin Stevens as a character--in the interesting and lucid discussion of Stevens contained in her article "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic."<sup>1</sup> Vickery opens her discussion with

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<sup>1</sup>Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, II (Spring, 1953), 1-4.

Light in August, stating that Stevens' first appearance occurs in this novel. It is surprising that Vickery--certainly one of the major Faulkner critics--did not know that Stevens had actually appeared a year earlier in two short stories and two different roles. The major treatment of Vickery's article, however, concerns the dual nature of Faulkner's character--Gavin Stevens the Man and Gavin Stevens the Voice. Written before the publication of The Town and The Mansion, the article is limited by exclusion of these novels and by too brief discussions of Stevens as he appears in Light in August, Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun.

Admirable and sympathetic discussions of Stevens as a character can be found in such articles as "Faulkner's Unsung Hero: Gavin Stevens,"<sup>2</sup> in which James Farnham introduces Stevens as the embodiment of Faulkner's tragic but hopeful view of man, and "The American Hero as Gentleman: Gavin Stevens,"<sup>3</sup> in which Arthur Mizener discusses Stevens as an example of the intelligent, sensitive man whose values sometimes conflict with the values of the provincial community. Warren Beck's Man In Motion contains the most balanced and best view of Stevens as a character; however, his discussion is predominantly limited to The Town and The Mansion. John L.

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<sup>2</sup>James R. Farnham, "Faulkner's Unsung Hero: Gavin Stevens," Arizona Quarterly, XXI (Summer, 1965), 115-132.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Mizener, "The American Hero as Gentleman: Gavin Stevens," in The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel (Boston, 1964), pp. 161-181.

Longley's chapter on "The Comic Hero: Gavin Stevens"<sup>4</sup> from his book The Tragic Mask is valuable as a piece of criticism in that it opens a new avenue of interpretation concerning Stevens. However, Longley's discussion is limited by its brevity. Surely the most unflattering and unsympathetic interpretation of Gavin Stevens is contained in William Faulkner: A Critical Study. Irving Howe's myopia concerning Stevens leads him to believe that Faulkner will someday have to answer for the creation of his loquacious bore.

Most books on Faulkner's work restrict their treatment of Stevens to the four or five novels in which he appears as a major character. Such critics as Michael Millgate (The Achievement of William Faulkner), Olga Vickery (The Novels of William Faulkner), and Cleanth Brooks (The Yoknapatawpha Country) generally offer a better critical reading and a more valuable assessment of Stevens as a character than are found in other discussions of the Faulkner novels. However, these authors by no means offer a comprehensive study of Gavin Stevens in his development as a character. Noticeably few critics even mention the role of Stevens in Light in August or Go Down, Moses. Knight's Gambit, too, has received only cursory examination.

In order to arrive at a comprehensive and balanced interpretation of Gavin Stevens and Faulkner's view and use of his

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<sup>4</sup> John L. Longley, Jr., The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill, 1963), pp. 37-49.

character, it seems necessary that full consideration should be given to all short stories and novels in which Stevens appears. Only then can accurate assessment be made of Stevens' growth and development as a character, of Faulkner's changing view of Stevens, and of Stevens' position in Yoknapatawpha fiction as a whole.

In creating Gavin Stevens, Faulkner added to the population of Jefferson--and presented to his readers--one of his most puzzling and enigmatic characters. Irony and ambiguity permeate Stevens' whole nature. And it is this ironical and ambiguous nature of Stevens that allows him to function so well for Faulkner. At times one must stand in profound admiration of this Faulknerian figure of respect, sophistication, and dignified manhood, and listen as his voice swells in crescendo, speaking of man's aspirations, of truth, or of the old traditions of Yoknapatawpha and the South--speaking almost in the same voice as his creator. But in other places, at other times, Stevens' ambiguous bombast, rhetorical exclamations, and digressions have been such that Irving Howe was led to proclaim Stevens guilty of "frantic verbal outpourings . . . and a passion for rant."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Stevens' verbosity and his proclivity for abstraction and theorizing are characteristics to which he remains constantly, and sometimes exasperatingly, true for his twenty-eight years in Yoknapatawpha fiction.

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<sup>5</sup>Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, rev. ed. (New York, 1962), p. 284.

Faulkner delivers Stevens from the fate of becoming simply a loquacious "wind-bag" by endowing him--beneath that garrulous exterior--with a profoundly deep and sensitive mind. Gavin Stevens is not just Yoknapatawpha's "intellectual," for he is a Harvard Phi Beta Kappa and a University of Heidelberg Ph. D. Faulkner said of Stevens that "the passion he had for getting degrees, for trying this and trying that and going all the way to Europe to get more degrees, to study more, was in his own nature. . . ." <sup>6</sup> Yet, it is also in his nature--and again the ambiguity arises--to spend long complacent hours with simple country people conversing in simple country idiom. This might partially be attributed to his characteristic verbosity, but it may also be attributed to his deep and sensitive concern for man.

As previously noted, Gavin Stevens is a man of words--or, more appropriately, a man of too many words--and an intellectual possessing strong humanistic ethics. There is, however, another dominant characteristic in Stevens' nature. He is an idealist. Throughout his career Stevens possesses fine, though sometimes unrealistic, ideals and demonstrates the need to intensify the heroic emotions. This tendency is most marked during Stevens' youth, although he never quite escapes his frustrated knight complex. Commenting on Stevens' quixotic nature, Faulkner said,

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, editors, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 141.

that's a constant sad and funny picture too. It is the knight that goes out to defend somebody who don't want to be defended and don't need it. But it's a very fine quality in human nature. I hope it will always endure. It is comical and a little sad.<sup>7</sup>

Stevens is both comical and sad, but the resoluteness and dedication of this anachronistic knight to whatever unrealistic purpose or romantic quest he is following at the time are reflections of a magnanimous nature.

Stevens' propensity for verbose abstraction, his sensitive intellectual nature, and his romantic, idealistic outlook on life are the three predominant characteristics which form the central "I Am" of Gavin Stevens.

If Faulkner had a "real-life" model for his conception of Stevens, it has not, as yet, been definitely established. However, the similarities between Gavin Stevens and Faulkner's companion, friend, and literary mentor Phil Stone are too pointed to be ignored. The similarities have provoked Warren Beck, commenting on the Faulknerian spectator-character's "attempt to identify, differentiate, and define"<sup>8</sup> in fullness, to say that this propensity is "a practice which may seem to have rubbed off on them all from Lawyer Stevens (or is it via Faulkner from his friend Phil Stone, and will literary history some day have to cope with the theory that he wrote the novels?)."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Warren Beck, Man In Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison, Wisconsin, 1961), p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Robert Coughlan in his discussion of Phil Stone in The Private World of William Faulkner provides the most generous insight into the parallelisms existing between Gavin Stevens and Phil Stone. Coughlan relates that the Stones were one of the old established families of Oxford. Stone's father was a lawyer and political figure, and he planned for his son to join him in the family law firm. When Faulkner and Stone began their friendship, Stone had already graduated from the University of Mississippi with a B. A. degree and had completed another B. A. degree at Yale. He later received a law degree from the University of Mississippi and in 1918 returned to Yale for a second law degree. However, Stone's major enthusiasm was not for law; it was for literature, especially poetry. Stone introduced Faulkner not only to classical literature, but to such avant garde writers as Joyce. Phil Stone was generally a person of great intellectual ability and possessed a definite gift for oratory.<sup>10</sup> Stone gave Faulkner his friendship, encouragement, and help at a time when most of the people in Oxford considered Faulkner "not only . . . a loafer but . . . a sort of mild lunatic."<sup>11</sup> That Stone was warm, generous, and humane is obvious.

In order to appreciate the similarities between the two men, it seems necessary to review pertinent information

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Coughlan, The Private World of William Faulkner: The Man, The Legend, The Writer (New York, 1954), pp. 46-58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

concerning Gavin Stevens. His family is one of the three founding families in Jefferson, which would gain him membership in the group of old, established aristocrats in Yoknapatawpha County. Like Stone's father, Stevens' father was a lawyer and at his father's death Stevens replaced him in his responsibilities. Stone's passion for degrees is certainly equalled by Stevens' ability to complete two degrees at Harvard, a law degree at the University of Mississippi, and a doctorate at the University of Heidelberg.

Stevens' love of literature again coincides with the view of Stone. Howe has noted that when the Faulkner-Stone friendship began in 1914, Phil Stone was "a young Mississippian studying to be a lawyer but [was] already lost to a lifelong passion for literature."<sup>12</sup> To Stevens, his "office was his hobby, although it made his living for him. . . . [His] serious vocation was a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek."<sup>13</sup> Just as Stevens' oratorical skill is his trademark in Yoknapatawpha, so too is his warm, generous, and humane nature. That the two men share definite similarities is beyond question, and possibly Faulkner used Phil Stone as the prototype for Gavin Stevens. It must be noted, however, that Faulkner appears to

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<sup>12</sup>Howe, William Faulkner, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, The Modern Library Edition (New York, 1942), p. 371.

take deliberate steps in The Town to refute the identification, for he purposefully names a lawyer in that novel Phil Stone.

Stevens is one of Faulkner's ubiquitous characters, filtering in and out of Yoknapatawpha fiction with due regularity between the years 1931 and 1959. These decades witness the transformation of Gavin Stevens from an obscure and minor character into a fully-developed and major contributor and participant in the sometimes tragic, sometimes comic, unfolding of life in rural Mississippi.

During the decade of the thirties, Gavin Stevens remains a relatively obscure and minor character, achieving a small status in numerous short stories and a minor role in Light In August. For Faulkner, the thirties was a period of great creative genius. Between the years 1929 and 1936, six of his major novels were published: Sartoris (1929), The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), Light In August (1932), and Absalom, Absalom! (1936). Each of these novels produces a deep, penetrating cry of despair. The protagonists are people obsessed, people who are living in a world they find excruciatingly painful, and who are being torn apart either by their own obsessions or by a harsh, indifferent world which they do not understand. Stevens is too different from these early protagonists for him to belong or participate in their world. However, he does share with Bayard Sartoris (Sartoris), Quentin Compson (The Sound and the Fury), Darl Bundren (As I Lay Dying), Gail Hightower

(Light In August), and Henry Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!) one basic characteristic--a sensitive, idealistic, intellectual nature. But he is more philosophical, and he is freed from the obsessive nature which most of these early protagonists possess. During these years too much of "the agony and sweat of the human spirit"<sup>14</sup> was pushing inside Faulkner's mind for him to develop beyond the embryonic stage a character with the qualities of Gavin Stevens. Time and Faulkner's mood are, as yet, "out of joint" for Stevens.

The decade of the forties shows Faulkner's increased interest and preoccupation with Gavin Stevens. He appears in several more short stories, has a minor part in the novel Go Down, Moses, plays a major role in Intruder in the Dust, and is the star performer in Knight's Gambit. Faulkner's increased interest and development of Gavin Stevens may be attributed to a change of emphasis in his work as a whole. Frederick J. Hoffman has termed this phase of Faulkner's work a "period of consolidation and affirmation"<sup>15</sup> in which Faulkner tried "to make a clear, affirmative statement concerning the 'eternal verities' and man's responsible trust."<sup>16</sup> Through this decade the Faulknerian hero gradually shifts away from

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<sup>14</sup>William Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, 1963), p. 347.

<sup>15</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York, 1961), p. 20.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

the obsessions and paralysis of the early protagonists and moves toward a positive, moral affirmation of life. The hero now possesses a "spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."<sup>17</sup> Within this framework, Stevens becomes Faulkner's primary candidate for moral spokesman, and his importance as a major character is established.

During the decade of the fifties, Stevens functions as a major character in three of Faulkner's novels: Requiem for a Nun in which he plays his most generous role as moral spokesman, and The Town and The Mansion in which he functions as an observer-commentator on the evils of Snopesism and as an often fallible, generally ineffective "guardian angel" of Yoknapatawpha morals.

By 1959 Stevens had served Faulkner for twenty-eight years in Yoknapatawpha fiction. He had appeared in numerous short stories and novels, serving his creator in the capacities of reflective observer and commentator, moral spokesman, and roving knight in search of women to protect or dragons to slay. Stevens' career in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County had encompassed such roles as "super-detective," lawyer and counselor, City Attorney, County Attorney, and District Attorney. His career had been long and varied, and he had emerged as a figure of major importance in Faulkner's fiction. It is the contention of this study that Gavin Stevens holds a

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<sup>17</sup>Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," p. 348.

unique and significant place in Yoknapatawpha fiction and that for the three decades in which he pervades Faulkner's writing he undergoes significant development and growth in characterization, importance, and function, thus providing a veritable reservoir for Faulkner's deep and remarkable vein of creative power.

## CHAPTER II

### GAVIN STEVENS: THE THIRTIES

In 1929 Faulkner, entering his period of great creativity, introduced his own special world--the mythical Yoknapatawpha County. The chronicle of Yoknapatawpha County, as related in the novels of the thirties, presents a world in agony and tension, a world clashing with violent disruption upon the inner sanctum of the mind. The roster of characters who occupied Faulkner's mind during this decade include tortured adolescents (Quentin Compson and Bayard Sartoris), people living in limbo without past or present (Joe Christmas), self-deluded idealists living a tragic charade of the past (Quentin Compson and Gail Hightower), neurotics, psychotics, and fanatics (Quentin Compson, Darl Bundren, McEachern, and Doc Hines), disillusioned people (Addie Bundren and Mr. Compson), evil men (Popeye and Jason Compson), and people of low mentality groping to live in a world in which they do not and cannot belong (Benjy and Vardaman). During the thirties the whole cosmos of Yoknapatawpha twisted and writhed in the pain of its abnormalities and cruelties.

It is not surprising that during this period Faulkner would have little inclination or time to develop a "man of normality"

into a major protagonist. Thus Gavin Stevens remains, during the decade of the thirties, a relatively minor character, appearing in four short stories and one major novel. These years, however, mark the beginning of his ubiquitous reign.

In 1931 Gavin Stevens made his first appearance in the short story "Hair."<sup>1</sup> For readers of Faulkner "Hair" is something less than even a mediocre short story; however, its significance for this discussion lies in its introduction of Stevens as a character.

"Hair" relates the experiences of Hawkshaw--alias Henry Stribling--and Susan Reed, an orphan. Hawkshaw is a barber in Jefferson who gives Susan her first haircut when she is five years old. Hawkshaw becomes infatuated with her and gives her a small present each Christmas for the twelve years he remains in Jefferson. Susan's "straight, soft hair not blonde and not brunette"<sup>2</sup> reminds Hawkshaw of Sophie Starnes, his young wife who died shortly after their marriage. In time, Hawkshaw had buried her father, her, and her mother. He paid the mortgage on the Starnes's house and spent two weeks every April during his vacation repairing and cleaning the empty house.

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<sup>1</sup>"Hair" first appeared in the American Mercury in May of 1931. After some revision it was published in a collection of short stories entitled These 13 on September 21, 1931. It was later reprinted in Collected Stories, August 21, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>William Faulkner, These 13 (New York, 1931), p. 208.

Susan Reed, meanwhile, has been growing up loose and wild, having affairs with school boys and married men. Hawkshaw, patiently waiting for her to grow up, is unaware of her conduct. However, when Hawkshaw returns from his last two-week vacation, he marries Susan and they leave Jefferson.

Gavin Stevens is not a participant in the central action of this short story; therefore, very little characterization of Stevens is developed. He is an observer-commentator who is described by the narrator of the story as "the district attorney, a smart man: not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard. . . ." <sup>3</sup> This brief description is the only comment on Stevens included in the short story. Stevens functions, along with the narrator, to focus attention and offer details and comments on the central figure of the story. In commenting on Hawkshaw's promise to his mother-in-law to complete the mortgage payment, Stevens shows early what is to develop into his characteristic loquacious flair:

So he did what he promised her he would. . . .  
So the old lady could rest quiet. I guess that's what the pen was trying to say when it ran away from him: that now she could lie quiet. And he's not much over forty-five. Not so much anyway. Not so much but what, when he wrote "Paid in full" under that column, time and despair rushed as slow and dark under him as under any garlanded boy or crownless and crestless girl. <sup>4</sup>

Stevens' comment on Hawkshaw foreshadows another characteristic

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

which will later form an integral part of Faulkner's major conception of Stevens--his interest in the lives and affairs of people and his love of humanity. Stevens and Hawkshaw, in one respect, bear a striking similarity. They are both men of extraordinary devotion. Hawkshaw's twelve years of devotion are exceeded only by Stevens' enduring devotion to Melisandre Harriss, Eula Varner Snopes, and her daughter, Linda Snopes.

Stevens' major contribution to the short story is to inform the narrator, a traveling salesman who has been away, that "'On the night Hawkshaw came back from his last vacation, they were married. He took her with him this time.'"<sup>5</sup>

Approximately a year passed before the second appearance of Gavin Stevens, again in a rather undistinguished short story, "Smoke."<sup>6</sup> In this short story, Faulkner places Stevens in a new genre--the detective story--and casts him in the role of a superior and all-wise detective. At moments he appears as Reason personified. William Doster has commented,

His information is disclosed in long questioning and speculative sessions with the defendant without any of the difficult leg work which goes along with routine police activity. . . . /He is/ an almost perfect picture of the use of pure reason. . . . He arrives at the solution through his knowledge of the backgrounds of the characters. . . .<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>6</sup>"Smoke" was first published in Harper's in April of 1932. It was reprinted with minor changes in Doctor Martino, a collection of short stories published on April 16, 1934. It was again reprinted in Knight's Gambit on November 7, 1949.

<sup>7</sup>William Doster, "The Several Faces of Gavin Stevens," Mississippi Quarterly, XI (Fall, 1958), 191.

"Smoke" is concerned with Anselm Holland, a violent and cantankerous man, and his effect on the lives of his twin sons, Anse and Virginius, and their cousin, Granby Dodge. Anselm Holland is holding in trust for his two sons a large portion of rich and valuable farm land bequeathed to them by their mother. When the boys came of age, Young Anse, who is as violent tempered as Old Anselm, made formal demand that his father divide the land and give the two sons their shares. The father's violent refusal so enraged Young Anse that he left home, never to return. Virginius, reasonable and mild tempered, stayed to farm the land which he loved. In time, however, Virginius was forced to leave home and went to live with Granby Dodge. Old Anse let the land fall into ruin and refused to pay taxes on it. The taxes were paid anonymously each year by Dodge. One day Old Anse was found dead, apparently having been dragged to death by his horse. Shortly afterward, Judge Dukinfield, who was probating Old Anse's will, was found murdered, shot between the eyes. It is left for Stevens to unravel the events so that justice can prevail.

"Smoke" presents a dramatically different and somewhat fuller picture of Stevens than was achieved in "Hair." Whereas in "Hair" Stevens was the complacent district attorney sitting in his office observing and commenting on the lives of the central characters, in "Smoke" he is possessed with inimitable shrewdness as a lawyer-detective and is directly involved in

at least part of the action. The final dénouement of the story occurs in the courtroom and is directed by his capable hands.

The tense courtroom scene shows Stevens easy, anecdotal, and in perfect command of the action, executing a spectacular and almost unbelievable trick. Working with little information and no actual evidence, Stevens deduces by a superb use of reason and logic that Granby Dodge is the murderer of Old Anse, the man responsible for hiring the killer of Judge Dunkinfield, and, if allowed to go unchecked, the future murderer of Virginius. Dodge's motive in perpetrating the crimes was to gain control of the land.

In the courtroom, Stevens, reaching the culmination of his rather extended rhetorical passage on smoke, produces a small brass box taken from Judge Dukinfield's office on the day of the murder and addresses the jury, "'You can shut up smoke, for instance, in a metal box with a tight lid like this one, and even a week later it will still be there.'"<sup>8</sup> The credibility of his statement here is more than questionable, but he succeeds with great finesse in duping the court. Granby Dodge rises from his chair, as if caught by some compulsive force, and rushes forward to knock the box out of Stevens' hand. The scene ends with Dodge on the floor frantically flapping his hands at the thin vapor of smoke, while above him stands the master detective and upholder of justice.

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<sup>8</sup>William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York, 1949), p. 33.

Outside the courtroom, Stevens, commenting to Virginius, says that Dodge is

a man both shrewd and ignorant at the same time: a dangerous combination. Ignorant enough to believe that the law is something like dynamite: the slave of whoever puts his hand to it first, and even then a dangerous slave; and just shrewd enough to believe that people avail themselves of it, resort to it, only for personal ends.<sup>9</sup>

When asked by townspeople if he thought his method of convicting Dodge was unfair, Stevens replied, "'But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?'"<sup>10</sup> These two comments made by Stevens early in his career show a development toward Faulkner's major conception of Stevens. In these two statements on justice there is a hint of Stevens' proclivity for theorizing and his concern for abstract justice, which will grow to enormous proportions later in his career when he appears in such novels as Intruder in the Dust. In 1932, however, there are only these small hints, for in "Smoke" Stevens does more than just sit in his office and theorize about abstract justice; he momentarily steps to the foreground and takes a hand in bringing about justice.

The themes of justice and moral rightness presented in "Smoke" provide an interesting contrast to the themes of doom and decay so prevalent in Faulkner's work during the thirties. It is significant to note that justice in "Smoke" is presented optimistically, and Gavin Stevens is integral to the dominance

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

of optimism in this story. It is true that isolation, murder, and greed are present in "Smoke," but they do not prevail. In the end the murderer is caught and the land returned to the one person in the story who has a genuine love and concern for the land, Virginius. Stevens is, of course, the instrument for this justice, and, as Albert Gerard has noted, "Faulkner's main interest has been in punishment; but with the character of Stevens, new aspects of justice are introduced: reward, hope, salvation."<sup>11</sup> Stevens demonstrates an inclination toward moral rightness when Virginius wishes to divide the land with his brother. Stevens knows that Anse does not have a true love for the land and that he would let it fall into ruin by neglecting to farm it. He tells Virginius to keep the land, "'You just treat it right, as he knows you will. . . . Anse don't need any land.'<sup>12</sup> This emphasis on justice, optimism, and moral rightness is characteristic of much of Faulkner's later work, and it is interesting that in 1932 Faulkner presented a preview, however sketchy it may be, of the character who would develop into his chief moral spokesman and advocate of justice.

Although "Smoke" provides a definite foreshadowing of several of Stevens' major characteristics, he remains a more or less undeveloped character, for he is essentially a man

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<sup>11</sup>Albert Gerard, "Justice in Yoknapatawpha County: Some Symbolic Motifs in Faulkner's Later Writing," Faulkner Studies, II (Winter, 1954), 55.

<sup>12</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 34.

without a background or family and only a sketchy personality. Faulkner does elaborate upon the description of Stevens given in "Hair" by providing a few more details about Stevens' position, personality, and physical appearance:

He had been county attorney for almost as long as Judge Dukinfield had been chancellor. He was a Harvard graduate: a loose-jointed man with a mop of iron-gray hair, who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who spent whole afternoons among the squatting men against the walls of country stores, talking to them in their idiom. He called these his vacations.<sup>13</sup>

Faulkner seems to be, here, directly pointing out Stevens' congeniality and interest in people.

In "Smoke," Stevens functions mainly in the investigation and interpretation of events. These events do not involve Stevens directly since he plays the role of investigator and upholder of justice; thus the effect of these events upon Stevens remains unrepresented. It is for this reason that Stevens appears more as personified Logic or Reason than as a character with believable human qualities.

Approximately six months after Faulkner cast Stevens in the role of detective, he included him in a major novel--the powerfully dramatic and intense Light In August.<sup>14</sup> Stevens plays a minor role in Light In August; and following his pattern in "Hair," he remains on the periphery of the action, serving in the capacity of observer-commentator. Stevens'

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Light In August first appeared on October 6, 1932.

appearance and dialogue in Light In August encompass only a brief section--some six or seven pages--but even in his brevity Faulkner continues his development of Stevens, reiterating some details from the two previous stories and also adding new ones.

In Light In August Stevens is again district attorney as he was in "Hair," a Harvard graduate as he was in both "Hair" and "Smoke," and is still spending a great deal of time conversing with the country people as he did in "Smoke." However, he is now referred to as a Phi Beta Kappa, has acquired a cob pipe, which will become a minor trademark and constant fixture with him the remainder of his career, and is provided with the beginnings of a family background. In short, Faulkner relates Stevens to the context of Jefferson and its history.

He is the District Attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa: a tall, loosejointed man with a constant cob pipe, with an untidy mop of irongray hair, wearing always loose and unpresed dark gray clothes. His family is old in Jefferson; his ancestors owned slaves there and his grandfather knew (and also hated, and publicly congratulated Colonel Sartoris when they died) Miss Burden's grandfather and brother. He has an easy quiet way with country people, with the voters and the juries; he can be seen now and then squatting among the overalls on the porches of country stores for a whole summer afternoon, talking to them in their own idiom about nothing at all.<sup>15</sup>

By far the most significant development of Stevens in Light In August centers upon two characteristics which were

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<sup>15</sup>William Faulkner, Light In August, The Modern Library Edition (New York, 1968), pp. 419-420.

noticeable in the two earlier stories--Stevens' humane interest in people and his propensity for theorizing. In order to appreciate the development of these two characteristics, it seems necessary to turn momentarily to the plot of the novel.

When Stevens makes his first appearance in the novel, Joe Christmas--a man who has existed in a state of limbo all his life, not knowing but believing that he is part Negro--has already been shot to death and castrated in the kitchen of Gail Hightower's house. His grandparents, Doc Hines and Mrs. Hines, have come from Mottstown, where Christmas was captured for the murder of a white woman, Joanna Burden. Christmas does not know his grandparents, just as Mrs. Hines does not know for sure that Joe is her grandson. However, the insane Doc Hines does know, for he is responsible not only for kidnapping Joe after letting Joe's mother--his daughter--die, but for leaving Joe at an orphanage and for instilling in Joe the suspicion that he is part Negro. Mrs. Hines's purpose in coming to Jefferson was to see and talk to the boy she believes is her grandson, while Old Hines's sole purpose was to instigate a lynching party. After the death scene in Hightower's kitchen, Stevens enters the plot and helps the insane old man and his wife onto the train back to Mottstown. In his commiseration for pitiful humanity, Stevens has taken the responsibility upon himself of seeing that the body of Joe Christmas is returned to Mottstown for burial:

"Yes, yes" Stevens was saying, in a tone soothing and recapitulant; "he'll be on the train tomorrow morning. I'll see to it. All you'll have to do is to arrange for the funeral, the cemetery. You take Granddad on home and put him to bed. I'll see that the boy is on the train in the morning."<sup>16</sup>

For an old man--dirty, poor, and almost catatonic in his insanity--and an old woman--defeated, without hope, and almost insane herself--Stevens assumed the thankless task of interceding with the sheriff for possession of the body, of making arrangements for the trip on the train, and of incurring the expenses for the train fare. In this compassionate act, the sensitive, magnanimous, and humane nature of Gavin Stevens is definitely established. If Stevens appeared as an interested commentator in "Hair," and a man of phenomenal powers of deduction in "Smoke," he gains status in Light In August as a gentle man possessed with a depth of compassion few Faulknerian characters can equal.

On the same Monday night that Stevens put Doc Hines and Mrs. Hines on the train to Mottstown, there arrived on another train an old friend of Stevens'. The appearance of this old Harvard schoolmate allows Stevens the opportunity to demonstrate his predilection for theorizing and his fondness for rhetorical exercise--he does not reach his peak of abstraction, however, until Intruder in the Dust.

In reconstructing for his visiting friend the events preceding the death of Christmas, Stevens uses his ability in

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 420-421.

generalizing and rationalizing to force these events into an ordered verbal pattern. His theory is of great importance to the novel in that it crystallizes into words the major dilemma of Joe's tortured life:

But there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. . . . It was not alone all those thirty years . . . but all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. . . . But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. . . . Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there. . . . It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand.<sup>17</sup>

It is significant to note that even though Stevens' role in the novel is small, his function in that role is of paramount importance. Stevens' function is to focus upon and verbalize one of the central issues of the novel--whether Joe Christmas has Negro blood. Faulkner says of Stevens' theory:

that is an assumption, a rationalization which Stevens made. That is, the people that destroyed him [Joe] made rationalizations about what he was. They decided what he was. But Christmas himself<sup>18</sup> didn't know and he evicted himself from mankind.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 424-425.

<sup>18</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, editors, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 72.

Stevens then is not Faulkner's mouthpiece in this novel; he has merely been used to bring Joe's problem to the foreground. Stevens does not know, just as Joe and the rest of Jefferson do not know, whether Joe has Negro blood. Perhaps Stevens, as a Southerner, has assumed too much, generalized too much; for as Olga Vickery points out, "He assigns definite though arbitrary moral values to black and white blood, claiming that it was the former that made Joe strike Hightower and the latter which enabled him to die heroically."<sup>19</sup> Stevens now has a weakness, a Southern weakness, the weakness of over-assumption and over-generalization in regard to the Negro. This weakness will lead Stevens into confusion and misunderstanding in Go Down, Moses and almost crippling myopia in Intruder in the Dust.

Stevens' whole appearance in Light In August points out what Olga Vickery calls Stevens' "dual nature."<sup>20</sup> This will become more obvious in later novels, but it is significantly noticeable in Light In August. Gavin Stevens is at once a man, capable of action as in the courtroom in "Smoke" and the train depot in Light In August, and a voice in which all action drowns in a labyrinth of verbal sounds and abstract conjecture. Stevens' appearance in Light In August "becomes a dramatic

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<sup>19</sup> Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge, 1954), p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, II (Spring, 1953), 1.

image . . . [dividing him] into the man on the platform, the living, visible occupant of space and the voice, the invisible embodiment of the rational intellect."<sup>21</sup>

Five years after Light In August, Stevens appeared in the short story "Monk."<sup>22</sup> "Monk," appearing in 1937, merely provides Gavin Stevens another occasion for a sleuthing expedition, although it is much less spectacular than his earlier detective work.

"Monk" is the story of Monk Odlethrop, "a moron, perhaps even a cretin,"<sup>23</sup> who is convicted of a murder he did not commit and sentenced to life in prison. Monk is without family or friends, a homeless man who arouses sympathy in no one except Gavin Stevens. Stevens becomes Monk's self-appointed guardian angel, and his persistence, devotion, and sheer continuance in this role strongly point toward his quixotic glory in The Town and The Mansion. Five years after Monk's conviction, the real murderer confesses to his crime, whereupon Stevens "got the pardon, wrote the petition, got the signatures, went to the capitol and got it signed and executed by the Governor, and took it himself to the penitentiary and told Monk that he was free."<sup>24</sup> But Monk, having developed a great devotion to

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"Monk" was first published in Scribner's in May of 1937. It was later reprinted in Knight's Gambit.

<sup>23</sup>William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York, 1949), p. 39.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

the warden, refuses to leave the penitentiary. In less than a week, however, Stevens hears the news that Monk, while attempting a jailbreak, had killed the warden. Monk is hanged for the crime, and three years later Stevens' powers of detection uncover the fact that another prisoner had prompted the feeble-minded Monk to commit the crime.

Faulkner's presentation of Stevens in "Monk" centers mainly upon the development of Stevens' moral nature. It may be recalled that in "Smoke" Stevens' moral intention concerning the treatment of the land was the first indication given by Faulkner that Stevens was a man committed to the side of moral rightness and that he possessed moral sensitivity. In "Monk," Stevens' moral nature becomes of considerable importance to the story.

The occasion on which Stevens reveals his humanistic values and crusader spirit is at the meeting of the Pardon Board of the penitentiary. The meeting is called by the governor, a man whom Stevens believes is pardoning prisoners only to gain votes from their families. As the spokesman for the convicts steps forward, Stevens notes the similarity between his speech and Monk's last words. Stevens tells the governor that the man is a murderer, whereupon the governor replies,

"Mr. Stevens, you are what my grandpap would have called a gentleman. He would have snarled it at you, hating you and your kind; he might very probably have shot your horse from under you someday from behind a fence--for a principle. And you are trying to bring the notions of 1860 into the politics of the nineteen hundreds. And politics

in the twentieth century is a sorry thing, smelling to high heaven in somebody's nose. But, no matter. . . . Take the advice of a well-wisher even if he cannot call you friend, and let this business alone. As I said before, if we let him out and he murders again, as he probably will, he can always come back here."<sup>25</sup>

But Stevens cannot leave "this business alone." It is Stevens' nature to "bring the notions of 1860 into the politics of the nineteen hundreds." It would appear that Faulkner has, here, selected Stevens for his mouthpiece: "'So you would still turn him loose on the citizens of this state, this country, just for a few votes?'"<sup>26</sup> The moral significance is obvious. Stevens has functioned to allow Faulkner, as Michael Millgate has noted, the "opportunity for an attack upon the cynical manipulation of human lives for sordid political ends."<sup>27</sup>

Stevens' interview with the convict assures him of the man's guilt. He leaves the penitentiary glad to be outside in the heat "sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been."<sup>28</sup> Stevens' role in "Monk" is thus far Faulkner's most deliberate step toward his final characterization of Stevens. Faulkner has hitherto neglected to present the effect upon Stevens of the circumstances and events occurring about him. However, in "Monk," Faulkner not only reveals Stevens' reaction to the events which occurred in the prison, but he uses Stevens'

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York, 1965), p. 266.

<sup>28</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 60.

reaction to reveal the didactic element in the story. The corrupt and tainted prison system and Pardon Board are repulsive to Stevens' sense of values and moral sensitivity, and he is glad to escape from them, outside where "God's long-fecund, remorseless acres . . . would outlast any corruption and injustice."<sup>29</sup>

Before the decade of the thirties came to an end, Stevens appeared once more in the role of detective. Stevens' sleuthing in "Hand Upon the Waters"<sup>30</sup> is reminiscent of the earlier short story "Smoke," in which the shrewd and omniscient detective triumphs over crime by the use of superior reason, uncanny powers of observation, and subtle trickery. However, "Hand Upon the Waters" does little to forward what has become a progressing development of Stevens as a character. Faulkner presents a few bits of supplemental information about Stevens' background in Jefferson, reiterates previously established characteristics, and brings to the foreground one new characteristic.

Stevens' relationship to Jefferson is developed a little more fully than was previously done in Light In August. It is now learned that Stevens is a descendant of one of the three original founders of Jefferson. This would indicate the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>"Hand Upon the Waters" was first published in the Saturday Evening Post on November 4, 1939. It was later reprinted in Knight's Gambit.

importance of Stevens' family in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County and place him in the class of old, established aristocrats.

Stevens' now well-established interest in people and his ability to spend long afternoons talking to them in their own idiom is seen in a slightly different context when it is learned that the country people do not always understand him:

they knew him, voting for him year after year and calling him by his given name even though they did not quite understand him, just as they did not understand the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain.<sup>31</sup>

Again, as in earlier stories, Faulkner is hinting at Stevens' garrulity and abstraction, which will in the future constantly hinder communication between him and other people.

One characteristic which has not thus far been mentioned or associated with Stevens is revealed in "Hand Upon the Waters." Faulkner, adding further dimension to his character, introduces the intrepid side of Stevens. Unarmed and unaided, Stevens makes a night trip out to the murdered man's cabin, where he finds Boyd and Tyler Ballenbaugh--the murderer and his accomplice--ransacking the cabin. Stevens is held at the point of a gun while he tells the two men what his intentions are: "'I want an indictment for murder.'"<sup>32</sup> During the ensuing scuffle Boyd takes the gun from Tyler and shoots him. Stevens thinks "Now

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<sup>31</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

it's my turn,"<sup>33</sup> but as Boyd fires the shot, Joe--the deaf and dumb boy who had been raised by the murdered man--drops from his hiding place in the tree and kills Boyd. Stevens had sustained a head injury as the bullet grazed his head.

Stevens' involvement in an episode of this kind is atypical. Perhaps Faulkner recognized the incongruity between the pictures of Stevens the fearless and brave and Stevens the verbose intellectual, for he does not pursue the development of this characteristic.

At the end of the thirties, Stevens emerges, perhaps not yet as a major character, but as a character possessed with great potentialities which are relatively untapped. During this decade Faulkner laid the basic framework for Stevens' personality and for the roles in which he would be cast in the future; and from the context of Stevens' five appearances in Yoknapatawpha fiction, it is obvious that Faulkner had a positive valuation of his character. Stevens will increase in prestige and importance and show further development during the early forties. By the late forties Stevens will have emerged as Faulkner's major spokesman-character.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

## CHAPTER III

### GAVIN STEVENS: THE EARLY FORTIES

Beginning in 1940, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha fiction reveals a major shift in emphasis and tone which most critics have noted as the beginning of the third important phase of his career. After serving an apprenticeship during the twenties and undergoing the storm and stress of his period of genius during the thirties, Faulkner entered, during the decade of the forties, his last major phase--a period of "consolidation and affirmation."<sup>1</sup>

Any attempt to comprehend the message presented in Faulkner's work during this period and its relevance to the presentation of Gavin Stevens--the major voice of the message--must necessarily begin with the words of William Faulkner himself. In the Stockholm Address of 1950, Faulkner voiced the views which had already become significantly evident in his writings a decade earlier:

[The writer] must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York, 1961), p. 20.

lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed-- love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. . . . He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood alone and watched the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last red and dying evening, that even then there will be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.<sup>2</sup>

Directly related to the assertions of the Stockholm Address and to the changing emphasis in Faulkner's work as a whole is the corresponding change required in the type of protagonist which Faulkner would now need. Faulkner now required a protagonist who could serve as a moral spokesman, a man who was positively and articulately virtuous.

In order to appreciate the full significance of this phase of Faulkner's career in the development of Gavin Stevens, it seems wise to review briefly Frederick J. Hoffman's discussion of Faulknerian heroes contained in the introduction to his book William Faulkner. Hoffman views the development of the Faulkner hero in three stages: the "young esthete," the "good weak man," and the "good strong man." The "young

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<sup>2</sup>William Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, a Harbinger Book Edition (New York and Burlingame, 1963), p. 348.

esthete," appearing at the beginning of Faulkner's career, is intensely introspective, meditative, overwhelmed by his view of evil, and incapable of any constructive action against it. Gradually the "young esthete," exemplified by Quentin Compson, merges into the "good weak man" who is characterized as "good" simply because his intentions are to act constructively, positively, and virtuously. However, because of his weaknesses, his intentions are never actualized. Hoffman cites Horace Benbow as the primary candidate for this group. It appears almost as if Benbow, the primary candidate for "good weak man," merges into Stevens, the primary candidate for "good strong man," for when Faulkner continued the subject of Sanctuary into Requiem for a Nun, Lawyer Benbow is replaced by Lawyer Stevens.<sup>3</sup>

In order to better understand Stevens and to answer the question as to why he is a candidate for "good strong man," certainly the major position in Faulkner's last phase, it is necessary to delve a little deeper into the comparison of Benbow and Stevens. It has been noted that Benbow possesses weaknesses, weaknesses so great in fact that he suffers from a deterioration of will; this is what makes him the "good weak man" instead of the "good strong man." But Stevens also possesses weaknesses. By the early forties, it is already evident that he is quite a garrulous individual--so garrulous

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<sup>3</sup>Hoffman, William Faulkner, pp. 33-36.

in fact that he leads his nephew, in Knight's Gambit, to describe his talk as "listening not even to fiction but to literature."<sup>4</sup> Stevens is a great thinker and talker, but rarely a man motivated to action. His weakness is truly, at times, a damaging one. However, Stevens' weakness provides him with a zone of safety.

Olga Vickery pointed this out when she said,

Gavin avoids the disintegration of will which Benbow suffered as a result of discovering the scope and intensity of evil resident in mankind, but he does so by employing language as a rhetorical buttress. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Stevens' rhetorical tendency is, as Vickery suggests, a buttress. Stevens is constantly analyzing, philosophizing, theorizing, speculating, and dealing in abstractions; in short, he is more often engaged in verbalizing than in action. Stevens, as an idealist and as a virtuous and moral man, is possessed with high, fine, impeccable ideals which do not always coincide with the reality of circumstance. Stevens' rhetoric provides him with a kind of isolation, or at least keeps him at a distance from reality and allows him to maintain a certain equanimity, confidence, and self-assurance. Viewing events and human nature from a distance, Stevens can generally draw from his thinking and talking certain truths, often

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<sup>4</sup>William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York, 1949), p. 141.

<sup>5</sup>Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, II (Spring, 1953), 2.

profound truths. Here, Stevens' "weakness," his garrulousness, serves Faulkner's design by providing him with an articulate spokesman.

As was noted, during this "period of consolidation and affirmation," Faulkner is seeking a new kind of protagonist-- a man who can analyze and speculate on human nature and then articulate the truths which he has uncovered. Faulkner, during his entire career as a writer, has been engaged in just this process; but his emphasis is now on bringing to the foreground the positive, affirmative, moral truths about man. Thus, he needs a spokesman who can recognize and articulate these truths. Gavin Stevens, by his own nature, is essentially this man.

Faulkner's last major phase, then, provides the time and opportunity for Stevens' emergence as "good strong man," chief moral spokesman, and philosopher on human nature. His career during the early forties--the beginning of the period of "consolidation and affirmation"--might best be referred to as a prelude, a "build-up," to his introduction as the major Faulknerian voice and sagacious counselor of Yoknapatawpha. During this time Stevens' appearances reveal him to be a man becoming increasingly aware of the motivations and intricacies of the human heart, as well as a man becoming increasingly articulate, verbalizing his discoveries, his truths about his fellow man.

The decade of the forties begins with Stevens' appearance in a familiar role--that of the lawyer-detective--in the short story "Tomorrow."<sup>6</sup> "Tomorrow" is narrated by Stevens' young nephew, Chick Mallison, who relates the fact that when Stevens took the case he

was a young man then, twenty-eight, only a year out of the state-university law school where, at grandfather's instigation, he had gone after his return from Harvard and Heidelberg; and he had taken the case voluntarily, persuaded grandfather to let him handle it alone, which grandfather did, because everyone believed the trial would be a mere formality.<sup>7</sup>

The case involves a farmer from Frenchman's Bend, Homer Bookwright, who commits a justifiable homicide in order to protect his seventeen-year-old daughter from the worthless bully and intended bigamist, Buck Thorpe. The case, however, proves to be more than just a mere formality, for one man, Stonewall Jackson Fentry, refuses to vote for Bookwright's acquittal, thereby dividing the votes of the jury.

During the trial Stevens' behavior demonstrates on two occasions that this is, thus far, his most active role as a compassionate and humanistic campaigner for justice. The first instance involves the tone and context of his summation plea to the jury:

" . . . I am talking about--not about the dead man and his character and the morality of the act he was

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<sup>6</sup>"Tomorrow" was first published in the Saturday Evening Post on November 23, 1940 and was later reprinted in Knight's Gambit in 1949.

<sup>7</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 85.

engaged in; not about self-defense, whether or not this defendant was justified in forcing the issue to the point of taking life, but about us who are not dead and what we don't know--about all of us, human beings who at bottom want to do right, want not to harm others; human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice, trying to do the best we can with them or despite them--this defendant, another human being with that same complexity of passions and instincts and beliefs, faced a problem--the inevitable misery of his child who, with the headstrong folly of youth . . . was incapable of her own preservation--and solved that problem to the best of his ability and beliefs, asking help of no one, and then abode by his decision and his act."<sup>8</sup>

Stevens' address to the jury comes not from his Heidelberg-trained brain but from his heart and compassionate spirit. It is a plea for humanism, and is, hitherto, Stevens' most eloquent appeal for the law to include what Faulkner referred to in his Stockholm Address as "the old verities and truths of the heart." Compared to earlier appearances, Stevens is now verbalizing his understanding of the "complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs" and is upholding the man who made the sacrifice for his child "and then abode by his decision and his act."

The second instance involving Stevens' active campaign for justice concerns the instructions he gives to his nephew while the jury is still in debate. It is obvious that the jury is in disagreement when Stevens instructs Chick to climb the mulberry tree in order to ascertain the nature of the disagreement. Stevens realizes that "'This is not cricket. . . . But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 87-88.

at."<sup>9</sup> Stevens' crusader spirit has allowed him to act, perhaps in defiance of the law, in order to effect justice.

The jury remains divided and the case results in a mistrial, for Jackson Fentry "'can't help it. . . . I ain't going to vote Mr. Bookwright free.'"<sup>10</sup> Jackson Fentry's refusal to vote for Bookwright's acquittal is the issue which incites the sleuthing expedition of the story. Stevens' sleuthing and his involvement with Jackson Fentry serve Faulkner in a major capacity in this story. Faulkner uses Stevens as a medium through which he brings to the foreground a group of people whom he greatly admires--critics generally refer to these people as Faulkner's "tall men." It seems pertinent, at this point, to mention that M. E. Bradford, in his article "Faulkner's 'Tomorrow' and the Plain People,"<sup>11</sup> has noted the appearance of this group of people in "Tomorrow" and has given an admirable and in-depth study of them. However, Bradford's brief reference to Stevens and the importance of his association with these people leads to a reopening of the topic for further exploration.

The people in "Tomorrow" are the simple, sturdy people of the earth, people possessed with faith, courage, and endurance. Jackson Fentry is a representative of this group,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>11</sup>M. E. Bradford, "Faulkner's 'Tomorrow' and the Plain People," Studies in Short Fiction, II (Spring, 1965), 235-240.

"a thin man, small, with thin gray hair and that appearance of hill farmers--at once frail and work-worn, yet curiously imperishable--who seem to become old men at fifty and then become invincible to time."<sup>12</sup> The Fentrys owned a small farm, "made a living for themselves and raised families and paid their taxes and owed no man. . . . And Jackson was helping from the time he got big enough to reach up to the plow handles."<sup>13</sup> These are Faulkner's invincible people and it is significant of Stevens' role that Faulkner chose him to verbalize his (Faulkner's) own views and deep respect for them.

During the course of his sleuthing activities, Stevens uncovers the fact that Jackson Fentry had once had a son--Buck Thorpe, the murdered man. Fentry had married, on her deathbed, a woman who had been deserted by her husband. Her maiden name had been Thorpe. She died soon after the birth of her son. Fentry took the child and began to raise him, serving the boy as both mother and father. After three years, the Thorpe brothers arrived to take the child home with them. Both Fentry and the child fought to remain together, but father and son were separated as the Thorpes rode away.

When Fentry came into contact with his son again, the old love and anguish of the heart were revived, thus he

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<sup>12</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, pp. 86-87.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

could not vote free the man who had shot his son. Stevens' nephew cannot understand this "'because Buck Thorpe was bad.'"<sup>14</sup> Stevens reminds Chick that

somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy . . . even though the man the boy had become didn't know it, and only Fentry did. And you wouldn't have freed him either. Don't ever forget that. Never.<sup>15</sup>

Stevens' instruction here is primarily concerned with reminding Chick never to forget the old "truths of the heart . . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." Again, Stevens, in a voice clearly Faulkner's own, explains to Chick the fate of the Jackson Fentrys of the world, "'The lowly and invincible of the earth--to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.'"<sup>16</sup>

Stevens, here, possesses the deep Faulknerian wisdom of the heart, and he is delegated the important responsibility of verbalizing this truth. Stevens recognizes that Jackson Fentry is a man who loved a son, lost the son, suffered the anguish, accepted his fate, endured his fate, and in the end, rose and made his voice heard "not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."

In his discussion of "Tomorrow," Bradford commented that  
 Its burden is wisdom, the kind of truth which . . .  
 is superior to facts--the truth which poets and

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 104.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 105.    <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

country people know very well. . . . The wisdom Gavin Stevens acquired in such experiences as this, his first case, provided him work toward his development into the more or less proprietary wise man and choric overvoice which he appears to be in much of Faulkner's later fiction.<sup>17</sup>

Although "Tomorrow" is primarily concerned with revealing Stevens as a man developing a greater understanding of the motives of the human heart, the story does possess a few minor details which serve to create a note of humor in the characterization of Stevens. It is learned that Stevens is Captain Stevens' son, and that his father is aware of his son's garrulous nature, "'Well, Gavin, at least you stopped talking in time to hang just your jury and not your client.'"<sup>18</sup>

Stevens is again associated with Faulkner's invincible people in the 1941 short story "The Tall Men." Stevens does not have a participating role in the story and is only briefly referred to when "Buddy come to town one day to see Lawyer Gavin Stevens. Not for legal advice how to sue the Government or somebody into buying the cotton, even if they never had no card for it, but just to find out why."<sup>19</sup>

The MacCallums of the story are truly Faulkner's "tall men," proud, independent, and invincible. For the MacCallums to seek advice from Lawyer Stevens is a sign that Stevens is

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<sup>17</sup>Bradford, "Faulkner's 'Tomorrow' and the Plain People," p. 239.

<sup>18</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 88.

<sup>19</sup>William Faulkner, Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York, 1950), pp. 56-57.

a man that the people of Yoknapatawpha trust and respect. It is true that Stevens is a lawyer and the most highly educated man in Jefferson and would thus be the most obvious choice for any Yoknapatawphian seeking advice or information concerning the intricacies of the government. But as Investigator Pearson in "The Tall Men" discovered, the MacCallums-- or other Yoknapatawphians, either, for that matter--are not always guided by the obvious. Stevens has gained the respect, trust, and confidence of these people, not because of his credentials from Harvard and Heidelberg; but, perhaps, even in spite of them, for to the general Yoknapatawphian, Stevens' Phi Beta Kappa key--"that luck-charm on . . . [his] watch chain"<sup>20</sup>--signifies nothing. Something of this same idea about Stevens was revealed in "Tomorrow" when Stevens went to Mr. Pruitt, Fentry's neighbor, seeking information about Jackson Fentry. Chick narrates,

And Pruitt told him, even though at the time Uncle Gavin would forget now and then and his language would slip back to Harvard and even to Heidelberg. It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using.<sup>21</sup>

It is Stevens' own enduring qualities that stand him in good stead among his fellow men: his compassion and kindness, his honesty and basic forthrightness, and his integrity and dignity as a man. In this respect, Stevens is a "tall man" himself.

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<sup>20</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

Within the next year, Stevens appears in Go Down, Moses, a major Faulkner novel, which delves, most importantly for a study of Stevens, into the problem of Negro-white relationships. It may be recalled that Stevens' first encounter with this problem occurred ten years earlier in Light In August, in which it was noted that he had the Southern weakness of over-assumption and over-generalization in regard to the Negro--a misconception which critics have generally termed the "myth of the Negro." Stevens has difficulty understanding the Negro, again, in Go Down, Moses, a novel in which he appears in the final section and title story.

Essentially, "Go Down, Moses" relates an episode in which Mollie Worsham Beauchamp, an old Negress, enlists the aid of Gavin Stevens in locating her grandson. Unknown to Mollie, her grandson is to be executed for the murder of a Chicago policeman--a fact which Stevens discovers soon after his meeting with Mollie. Stevens also receives a visit from Miss Worsham, a white woman whose relationship with Mollie is almost that of a sister. Stevens and Miss Worsham decide that the circumstances involving her grandson's death should be kept from Mollie. Miss Worsham leaves with Stevens the sum of twenty-five dollars which he is to use in arranging for transportation of the body home, a casket, flowers, and a hearse. Stevens, with the aid of the newspaper editor and a few local merchants, makes up the remaining two hundred dollars needed for expenses. Stevens completes the

arrangements for the funeral and persuades the editor to omit the story from the paper. By the end of the story, Stevens has arrived at the conclusion, "'she doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right.'"<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that Stevens, on several occasions in the story, both misunderstands and is exasperated by the situation and circumstances in which he is involved. When Mollie first visits Stevens, telling him that Roth Edmonds sold her boy into Egypt and that she has come to find him, Stevens replies,

"Wait. . . . Wait, Aunty. . . . If you don't know where your grandson is, how do you know he's in trouble? . . . I'll try to find him. . . . It may take some time, if you don't know where he went and you haven't heard from him in five years."<sup>23</sup>

When Stevens encounters Miss Worsham, he informs her that Mollie's grandson "'is a murderer, Miss Worsham. He shot that policeman in the back. A bad son of a bad father. He admitted, confessed it afterward.'"<sup>24</sup> When she tells him that Mollie will want the boy brought home, he can only say, "'Him? . . . The body?'"<sup>25</sup> Later, in the Worsham house as Mollie chants her sorrow and grief that Edmonds sold her boy, sold her Benjamin into Egypt, Stevens interrupts, "'No he

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<sup>22</sup>William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, The Modern Library Edition (New York, 1955), p. 383.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

didn't, Aunt Mollie. It wasn't Mr. Edmonds. Mr. Edmonds didn't. . . ."<sup>26</sup> Feeling completely out of place, Stevens apologizes and rushes out, "'I ask you to forgive me. I should have known. I shouldn't have come.'"<sup>27</sup>

Stevens' actions in "Go Down, Moses" are at times confusing and have led critics to a variety of interpretations. Before making an assessment of Stevens as he appears in "Go Down, Moses," it seems necessary to turn momentarily to critical opinions that have already been offered in assessment of Stevens' actions.

Michael Millgate is of the opinion that Stevens completely fails to understand, or seriously affect, either the situation or old Molly herself . . . and nowhere in the whole of Faulkner's work is there a more persuasive dramatisation of the gulf dividing the white man's mind from the Negro's than the scene in which Stevens, confronted by Molly's grief, flees from the house in a kind of terror.<sup>28</sup>

He further insists that "the book seem[s] to suggest that Stevens would have been better advised to confine himself to the job which he is paid, and presumably competent, to perform."<sup>29</sup> Edmond L. Volpe, who is of a similar mind, suggests that Stevens

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>28</sup>Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York, 1965), p. 212.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

is continually surprised and continually exasperated by the Negroes, treating them as children, as inferiors. . . . He is too much the social man to understand a person like Molly, who, close to her primitive sources, can respond to the feelings of her blood.<sup>30</sup>

The opinions of Millgate and Volpe do, perhaps, contain validity within the confines of the point in question; however, a true appraisal of Stevens as he appears in "Go Down, Moses" must be based on a broader and more complete view than is expressed by these critics. It must be remembered that, throughout his career, Stevens is in a constant process of analyzing, delving, and probing into the motivations of the human mind and heart. At times, as in "Tomorrow," his perceptive insight and his humanistic inclination lead him to a truth about human nature. At other times, as with Mollie, he cannot attain the same depth of comprehension.

Early in the story Stevens is guilty of confusion and perplexity in regard to Mollie, and in this respect he represents the typical twentieth-century white Southerner. Stevens, however, reacts with kindness and generosity which may be interpreted as his attempt to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding which exists between white and Negro minds. As the story progresses, Stevens reaches a significant awareness during the scene in Miss Worsham's house when he realizes the true depth of his misunderstanding and just how

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<sup>30</sup> Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, 6th printing (New York, 1969), p. 250.

inept were his attempts to reach Mollie. He had tried to reason with her, but she had not even heard him. His logic and reason thwarted, Stevens lapses into confusion and rushes from the scene. But he has gained something of value from this experience--the realization of his own misunderstanding of the emotional nature of the Negro. This point becomes apparent at the conclusion of the story when Mollie says that she does want the story of her grandson's death put in the paper. Stevens thinks,

"Yes. . . . It doesn't matter to her now. Since it had to be and she couldn't stop it, and now that it's all over and done and finished, she doesn't care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car."<sup>31</sup>

Cleanth Brooks, having already noted this point, says, "Gavin Stevens, who does not always understand matters, does understand here."<sup>32</sup> Stevens, then, has shown a growth in awareness. His exasperation and condescending helpfulness have given way to at least a partially true and an empathetic understanding of Mollie. Stevens understands that Mollie loved her grandson, and that she knew, sensed, he was in trouble. Because she could not change circumstances, there remained only one thing that she could do in her love and

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<sup>31</sup>Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, p. 383.

<sup>32</sup>Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, 1st paperback edition (New Haven and London, 1966), p. 277.

grief--that was to bring him home to his people, to her, in the "right way."

This is similar to the realization which Stevens reached, recognized, and accepted with little difficulty about Jackson Fentry in "Tomorrow." Fentry's son was a worthless bully and bigamist and Fentry knew this; yet it did not matter to him, for he would not betray, for even an instant, the memory of the little boy that had been taken from him, his "own," his son. That same truth of human nature--that love for one's own, the ties of blood, run strong and deep and can surmount or even deny frailties or faults--exists in the Negro, too. Mollie's grandson was just that, her grandson; it is incidental that he is a worthless murderer also. Herein lies Mollie's true motivation and the cause for her grief, and they are the same as Fentry's. Yet, Stevens reaches this awareness only after confusion, exasperation, and difficulty, whereas he did not have difficulty in comprehending Fentry's refusal to vote for acquittal. The discrepancy between Stevens' easy comprehension of Fentry's motivation and his difficult and only partial understanding of Mollie's points to a large inconsistency in Faulkner's humanist. The Negro, evidently, presents something of a stumbling block to Stevens' mind, for he suffers from myopic understanding in all three novels in which he is in relationship with the Negro.

There are no positive and definite answers as to why Stevens--the man Faulkner is to make his chief humanist and

moral spokesman--cannot comprehend or fully understand the Negro's nature. Nor does Faulkner provide any help. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Stevens, having been born in the South and raised as a Southern aristocratic gentleman, would naturally have inherited the old traditions and codes of the South, specific ways of viewing and seeing events and people. In which case, such entrenched heritage would be a difficult thing for Stevens to even recognize in himself, let alone to change. Stevens' proprietary attitude toward the Negro is too strong for him to ever rid himself of it, as is revealed in Intruder in the Dust when he bitterly denounces the North for interfering with the South's Negro problem.

But Stevens' Southern heritage can be only a partial answer as to why he constantly misunderstands the Negro. Stevens is an intellectual, much more a man guided by reason than by emotion. He is cosmopolitan and sophisticated. Mollie and the Negro in general in Faulkner's writing are non-intellectual, simple, emotional people. Note, for example, Mollie's ritualistic chant--a blood response--from which Stevens fled in confusion. Stevens is a man who has been socially conditioned. A ritualistic chant is not the way that Stevens would express his grief. He has difficulty in understanding why Mollie wants her grandson's death in the newspaper. Her grandson had been part of the Chicago underworld's "numbers racket" and had killed a policeman. This

is hardly something to publicize. If it had been Stevens' grandson, instead of Mollie's, he might have wanted him brought home for a quiet burial, but he would hardly have wanted to ride around the town square, in full view of the town, behind his grandson's hearse. But Mollie did want this, insisted upon this. The gulf is so wide between Mollie's response and the response to which Stevens has been socially conditioned that perhaps he does well to come as close to understanding Mollie as he does. Although Stevens never reaches a true understanding of the Negro, Go Down, Moses reveals Stevens as a man growing in his awareness of human nature and achieving at least a partial and empathetic understanding of the Negro.

In 1946, four years after Go Down, Moses, Stevens returns to Yoknapatawpha fiction in the short story "An Error in Chemistry."<sup>33</sup> "An Error in Chemistry" is a melodramatic detective story with dubious plausibility which allows Stevens, once more, to be cast in the role of all-wise detective, as well as philosopher and moral spokesman. The short story involves Stevens' discovery of the truth concerning the murder of Ellie Pritchel Flint and the disappearance of her husband and murderer, Joe Flint.

After killing his wife, Flint calls the sheriff, announces the fact, and is taken to jail. During the night he escapes

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<sup>33</sup>"An Error in Chemistry" was first published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine in June of 1946. It was later reprinted in Knight's Gambit in 1949.

from jail and disappears without a trace. Soon afterward, Old Pritchel, Ellie's cantankerous father, sends for Lawyer Stevens and the sheriff. He informs them that he is selling his farm to a Northern firm which is interested in the clay deposits on the land and that he will use the money from the transaction to catch the man who killed his daughter. Pritchel then offers a "drink to goodbye and better days"<sup>34</sup> to Stevens and the sheriff. While mixing the toddies, he makes a serious mistake--instead of stirring the sugar into the water first, he stirs it into the whiskey. Any native Southerner would not have made that mistake, and Stevens suddenly realizes that the man in front of him is not Pritchel, but is Flint himself impersonating Pritchel. Further investigation uncovers the fact that Flint is an ex-carnival entertainer, alias Signor Canova. His vanity had impelled him to impersonate the man he had just murdered, and that vanity had led to his apprehension.

For Stevens, "An Error in Chemistry" is rich in the moral overtones of Faulkner's Stockholm Address, and his opportunity to serve as moral spokesman is ample. Early in the story, while in conversation with the sheriff, Stevens alludes briefly to truth and justice. The allusion, however brief in words, is long in message and strongly humanistic in appeal.

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<sup>34</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 127.

"I'm interested in truth," the sheriff said.  
 "So am I," Uncle Gavin said. "It's so rare.  
 But I am more interested in justice and human  
 beings." "Ain't truth and justice the same  
 thing?" the sheriff said.  
 "Since when?" Uncle Gavin said. "In my time  
 I have seen truth that was anything under the  
 sun but just, and I have seen justice using  
 tools and instruments I wouldn't want to touch  
 with a ten-foot fence rail."<sup>35</sup>

Stevens' statements, here, are reminiscent of his compas-  
 sionate campaign for justice six years earlier in "Tomorrow."  
 He is again voicing the same message. Man, the individual,  
 with his "complexity of human passions and feelings and  
 beliefs" is the ultimate issue. As Faulkner said at Nagano,  
 "People can always be saved from injustice by some man. . . .  
 Anyone can save anyone from injustice if he just will, if  
 he just tries, just raises his voice."<sup>36</sup> Stevens is, of  
 course, Faulkner's man who will increasingly "raise his voice."

A second example of Faulkner's humanism, reflected in the  
 voice of Gavin Stevens, occurs at the conclusion of the story.  
 Again in conversation with the sheriff, Stevens is analyzing  
 what motivation Flint must have had that would compel him to  
 commit the acts of murder and impersonation:

"Think what he did: he convicted himself of  
 murder when he could very likely have escaped  
 by flight; he acquitted himself of it after he  
 was already free again. Then he dared you and  
 me to come out there and actually be his witnesses

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>36</sup>Robert A. Jelliffe, editor, Faulkner at Nagano (Tokyo,  
 1956), p. 76.

and guarantors in the consummation of the very act which he knew we had been trying to prevent. What else could the possession of such a gift as his have engendered, and the successful practising of it have increased, but a supreme contempt for mankind? You told me yourself that he had never been afraid in his life."

"Yes," the sheriff said. "The Book itself says somewhere, Know thyself. Ain't there another book somewhere that says, Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride? You ought to know; you claim to be a book man. Didn't you tell me that's what that luck-charm on your watch chain means? What book is that in?"

"It's in all of them," Uncle Gavin said. "The good ones, I mean. It's said in a lot of different ways, but it's there."<sup>37</sup>

Joseph Gold, in a discussion of Faulkner's humanism, has stated that

Faulkner is convinced . . . that no act can be good or evil in itself. He has plentifully peopled his novels to show that evil resides in attitude. . . . What distinguishes them [the evil men] is their consciousness of their own separateness, their non-human estimates of others, and their insistence on the gratification of selfhood. They are cold and lack the compassion which is man's highest attribute.<sup>38</sup>

Stevens, then, has recognized and isolated Flint's ultimate crime--not murder, but "his supreme contempt for mankind." Stevens' analysis and his pronouncement of Flint's deeper crime lead directly to the moral of the story, "Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride."

Stevens' appearance in the 1946 short story "An Error in Chemistry" marks the end of his preparatory period, for in

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<sup>37</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup>Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse (Norman, Oklahoma, 1966), pp. 9-10.

his next appearances, he emerges fully as a major character in major novels. His appearances during this phase of his development have brought to the foreground certain important and lasting characteristics about Stevens which directly prepare him for the important role he is to assume during the late forties and early fifties. "Tomorrow," "Go Down, Moses," and "An Error in Chemistry" have revealed Stevens to be a man interested in human nature, interested in the complexities and motivations of the heart. Howbeit with difficulty, as in "Go Down, Moses," he has gained in wisdom, grown in his awareness and understanding of his fellow man. He has come forth also as a man crusading for justice and right and humanistic values. His compassionate nature, too, has been revealed. During this period Stevens has become increasingly verbal, speaking out, voicing the discoveries he makes, the truths he uncovers in his constant analysis of human nature. His rhetorical tendencies have not, as yet, become intrusive to his role as moral spokesman; however, as he gains more responsibility as a spokesman-character, his garrulousness will detract from his role. The early forties have clearly established Faulkner's purpose and function for Gavin Stevens; it remains to be seen what success he has in that role.

## CHAPTER IV

### GAVIN STEVENS: THE LATE FORTIES AND EARLY FIFTIES

In Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun--the novels of the late forties and early fifties--Stevens reaches his full potential as moral spokesman, the position toward which his career during the thirties and early forties had been slowly evolving. He emerges now as Faulkner's major spokesman. His career during this period presents an unusual mixture of excellence and failure. Up to this point Stevens has appeared, from a general viewpoint, in a positive light. The obvious exceptions, of course, are his misunderstanding of Mollie in Go Down, Moses and Joe Christmas in Light In August. However, his fallibility on these occasions is balanced, in the long run, by the apparent "perfection" he achieved in the detective story series. Faulkner collected the five previously published stories and, with the addition of one extra story, published them during this period under the title Knight's Gambit. The detective stories present Stevens as the rational--super rational--man, arriving at the solution of a crime with little effort; in fact, it appears at times that he never leaves his office chair. But Stevens does more than solve the crime, he analyzes the man. In doing

so, his analysis is generally deep, profound, and accurate. At times he appears to be the voice of Faulkner himself.

Beginning in the late forties, however, Stevens' garrulousness, his "rhetorical buttress," which provides him with a kind of detachment, equanimity, and self-assurance, becomes, as Vickery says, "a buttress which threatens to imprison him even while it protects."<sup>1</sup> His past appearances, indeed, have been no preparation for the onslaught of ambiguous words which Intruder in the Dust holds. Stevens, at the height of his career as a spokesman-character, may be at times profound; but, he is, equally as many times, guilty of "obscurantism [that] makes even his clear ideas suspect."<sup>2</sup>

In order to account for the greatly increased, almost driving, pushing verbosity of Stevens, it is necessary to analyze further Faulkner's writing during his last major phase. Hyatt H. Waggoner, in his book William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, offers an excellent interpretation of the general tendencies of Faulkner's works during this phase. In his chapter entitled "The Artist as Moralist," Waggoner notes that

in the middle forties Faulkner's work began to show a marked reversion toward one of the characteristics of his earliest novels. The voices of the characters began to have to compete with, even to give way to, the voice of the artist whose message was so important that he could no longer be wholly content with the indirection of fiction. . . . It is as

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<sup>1</sup>Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, II (Spring, 1953), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington, Kentucky, 1959), p. 219.

though Faulkner, having long wanted a platform and having got it at last, were determined to make the most of it, even if it became necessary to say things twice that they might not go unheeded.<sup>3</sup>

Waggoner's analysis has pinpointed one major characteristic of Faulkner's later fiction--the pulpit, platform, or speech-making tendency. Waggoner is not alone in this opinion, for numerous critics assert essentially the same opinion. Joseph Gold has stated that "one detects in Faulkner's later fiction an urgency, almost a desperation, to convince and explain. There is an overabundance of rhetoric and speech-making, dragged into novels with little justification. . . ."<sup>4</sup> Michael Millgate has noted that "Intruder in the Dust, Requiem for a Nun . . . the 'committed' novels of the post-war years, are all patterned in accordance with a deliberate and preconceived intention to enforce some kind of moral or social statement."<sup>5</sup> Also, William Van O'Connor feels that "in Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun there are various attempts to elevate political programs and sermons into the self-sufficient, isolated entities of art forms."<sup>6</sup> And Edmond L. Volpe asserts that Faulkner "sacrifices

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 212-213.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse (Norman, Oklahoma, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Millgate, Faulkner, Writers and Critics Series (New York, 1961), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis, 1954), p. 151.

his art to social analysis and preaching. The result is a propaganda novel."<sup>7</sup>

Of direct correlation to the aforementioned characteristics of Faulkner's later fiction--the rhetorical tendencies and the increased emphasis on moral, social, and political issues--is the presentation of Gavin Stevens. Gold has said that "the persistent use of Gavin Stevens and his rhetorical tendencies indicates that Faulkner could not overcome his need to make forthright and unveiled statements."<sup>8</sup> Stevens' loquaciousness appears to be fully in keeping with Faulkner's apparent urgency and need to make his "message" explicit. But a difficulty arises, now, in that it is no longer clear just when his speeches reflect the views of Faulkner himself or when they belong exclusively to Stevens. Intruder in the Dust, Stevens' first appearance as a major spokesman, amply demonstrates all of the major criticisms, difficulties, and issues which have centered around his role as a moral spokesman.

Stevens' appearance in this novel is reminiscent of his earlier appearance in Go Down, Moses, in that he is again confronted by the nature, mind, and motivation of the Negro. He is dealing now, not with Mollie, but with her husband, Lucas Beauchamp, who appears to be just as obstinate and just

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<sup>7</sup>Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, 6th printing (New York, 1969), p. 253.

<sup>8</sup>Gold, A Study in Humanism, p. 5.

as insistent as Mollie was earlier; and Stevens appears to be just as guilty of misunderstanding as he was earlier, or at least, initially so. Millgate has noted that

the final chapter of Go Down, Moses seems directly to anticipate the principal emphases and even something of the action of the later novel, with the figure of Gavin Stevens serving as an active and thematic link between the two.<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, Intruder in the Dust is the story of the near lynching of Lucas Beauchamp, a proud old Negro who has been accused of shooting a white man--Vinson Gowrie. Circumstantial evidence against Lucas is heavy; he was arrested near the scene of the murder carrying a pistol from which one bullet had been fired. In jail, Lucas sends for Lawyer Stevens, who arrives apparently already convinced of Lucas' guilt.

The conversation between Lucas and Stevens during the jail scene certainly lends support to Vickery's contention that "Gavin's excessively rational approach blinds him to the human and moral issues."<sup>10</sup> Stevens, at various times, replies to Lucas with such highly assumptive statements as "'I dont defend murderers who shoot people in the back,'"<sup>11</sup> and "'You just shot him in the back. And then you stood over him with the fired

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York, 1965), p. 215.

<sup>10</sup>Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge, 1964), p. 141.

<sup>11</sup>William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, The Modern Library Edition (New York, 1948), p. 60.

pistol in your pocket and let the white folks come up and grab you.'"<sup>12</sup>

Stevens invites comparison with Mr. Lilley, a fellow Jeffersonian, who has "'nothing against what he calls niggers. . . . All he requires is that they act like niggers,'"<sup>13</sup> when he asks Lucas "'has it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?'"<sup>14</sup> Here, again, as in Go Down, Moses, Stevens demonstrates the strong aristocratic, proprietary attitude typical of the white Southerner who is caught by the customs and traditions of the past.

Vickery has noted that

Stevens is simply the most articulate spokesman for this mass reaction to Lucas. . . . It appears that not only a man's reactions but also his very thoughts are determined by the customs of his land and even Harvard and Heidelberg are powerless to counteract them.<sup>15</sup>

Volpe takes Vickery's analysis one step further when he states that Stevens is

more enlightened than the Mr. Lilleys of the town, /and/ comes to the defense of Lucas, not, however, because he is aware of the man. Gavin interposes the abstraction of due process of law upon the abstraction Negro. He opposes the traditional method /lynching/ but not the code. Gavin does not doubt, even momentarily, that Lucas is guilty. He does not seek justice, merely due process.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 64.      <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 48.      <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>15</sup>Vickery, Novels, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup>Volpe, A Reader's Guide, p. 258.

Volpe's judgment is, perhaps, a little harsh, since circumstantial evidence against Lucas is strong. Stevens is not only exasperated with Lucas, but it is clear that he thinks Lucas is guilty--that he has "'played hell at last.'"<sup>17</sup>

After Stevens and his nephew, Chick, leave the jail, Chick returns alone and is told by Lucas that Gowrie was not shot with his Colt 41. When Chick tries to enlist his aid, Stevens still persists in his attitude, "'Of course. . . . That's exactly what I would claim myself if I were Lucas--or any other Negro murderer for that matter or any ignorant white murderer either for the matter of that.'"<sup>18</sup>

It is left for Chick, Aleck Sander, his Negro friend, and an old spinster, Miss Habersham, to go out to the graveyard late at night and dig up Gowrie's coffin. The body in the coffin is that of Jake Montgomery, a lumber dealer. Learning of the new discovery, Stevens is willing to admit the seriousness of his moral mistake, "'It took an old woman and two children . . . to believe truth for no other reason than that it was truth, told by an old man in a fix deserving pity even when none of them really believed him.'"<sup>19</sup> Stevens is aware, too, that he is still in the process of learning, "'When did you really begin to believe him? When you opened the coffin wasn't it? I want to know, you see. Maybe I'm not too old to learn either.'"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 79.      <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 126.      <sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Stevens, Sheriff Hampton, and Chick return to the churchyard where they are unexpectedly joined by Vinson's father, Nub Gowrie, and his twin sons. They discover that Vinson's grave is now empty. In their search they find Montgomery's body buried in a shallow grave and Vinson's body sunk in quicksand. The bullet in Vinson's body came from the gun belonging to his brother, Crawford Gowrie.

Lucas later reveals that Crawford had been stealing lumber from the mill that he and his brother had operated. To avert discovery, Crawford had killed Montgomery, who had tried to blackmail him. And Crawford tried to frame Lucas, who knew of the theft also, for the murder of Vinson. With Lucas' innocence proven, and the lynching averted, the crowd scatters without even an apology to Lucas.

As noted earlier, much of the criticism of Faulkner's later fiction centers on the platform or speech-making tendency evident in many of his novels. This is especially true of Intruder in the Dust, where critical objections are almost entirely confined to Stevens' rhetoric--in particular, his speeches on the racial problem. Criticism in some cases has been severe enough to consider the novel a work of propaganda and Stevens as the instrument of that propaganda. Edmund Wilson, in one of the early reviews of the novel, stated that

. . . Intruder in the Dust does not come to us merely as a novel: it also involves a tract. . . . The book contains a kind of counterblast to the anti-lynching bill and to the civil-rights plank in the

Democratic platform. The author's ideas on this subject are apparently conveyed . . . by the intellectual uncle, who . . . gives vent to long disquisitions that . . . become so "editorial" in character. . . .<sup>21</sup>

To suggest that Stevens is speaking directly for Faulkner in Intruder in the Dust is not entirely to be on safe grounds. There is evidence in Stevens' speeches to support Wilson's conclusion, but there is, equally, evidence to disprove it. Careful analysis of Stevens' speeches will reveal this.

Stevens' long disquisitions are incorporated into the context of the novel through his efforts to instruct Chick and help him toward moral maturity. Stevens' function as mentor to Chick, as Cleanth Brooks has noted, is one of the justifications for the presence of these long tirades in the novel.<sup>22</sup> For Chick, the whole experience has been disillusioning and disheartening. He is horrified that his fellow Southerners would come so near murdering an innocent man merely because he was a Negro. He feels betrayed by his own town, his own people, and he is torn between his revulsion against the attitude and actions of Jefferson and his strong loyalty and identity with Jefferson. It is Gavin Stevens who helps Chick to reach a better understanding of the South and

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<sup>21</sup> Edmund Wilson, "William Faulkner's Reply to the Civil-Rights Program," Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), p. 222.

<sup>22</sup> Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, 1st paperback edition (New Haven and London, 1966), p. 288.

of the people in Jefferson, thereby bringing him back into the society he has come to repudiate.

In Stevens' first speech on the South, he argues for its homogeneity, that it is unique and must be preserved. He begins by saying, "'It's because we alone in the United States (I'm not speaking of Sambo right now; I'll get to him in a minute) are a homogeneous people.'"<sup>23</sup> Stevens' use of the word "Sambo," derogatory to the Negro, points to the fact that he is referring to Lucas in terms of a stereotype. However, careful reading reveals that he has no intention of belittling or disparaging Lucas or the Negro. As Brooks has noted, "We may feel that Gavin's rhetorical device is strained or in bad taste, but we misread if we say that he uses Sambo in order to deprecate Lucas Beauchamp and the race he represents."<sup>24</sup> Continuing his speech, Stevens says,

"I mean the only one of any size. The New Englander is too of course back inland from the coastal spew of Europe which this country quarantined unrootable into the rootless ephemeral cities with factory and foundry and municipal paychecks as tight and close as any police could have done it. . . . So we are not really resisting what the outland calls (and we too) progress and enlightenment. We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life, but simply our homogeneity from a federal government. . . . Only a few of us know that only from homogeneity comes anything of a people or for a people of durable and lasting value--the literature, the art, the science, that minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty,

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<sup>23</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 153.

<sup>24</sup>Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 421.

and perhaps most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis. . . .

That's why we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves nor even the two of us as one to remain one nation because that will be the inescapable by-product of what we will preserve . . . the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and hence must be free. That's what we are really defending: the privilege of setting him free ourselves: which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can. . . . But it won't be next Tuesday. Yet people in the North believe it can be compelled even into next Monday by the simple ratification by votes of a printed paragraph. . . .

And as for Lucas Beauchamp, Sambo, he's a homogeneous man too. . . . I mean the rest of him who has a better homogeneity than we have and proved it by finding himself roots into the land where he had actually to displace white men to put them down: because he had patience even when he didn't have hope, the long view even when there was nothing to see at the end of it, not even just the will but the desire to endure because he loved the old few simple things which no one wanted to take from him. . . . We--he and us--should confederate: swap him 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; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened by a mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of failure of national character which they hide from one another behind a loud lipservice to a flag."<sup>25</sup>

Stevens' first speech on the South--the preservation of its homogeneity--serves to intensify Chick's identity with his homeland. Before analyzing the content of Stevens' speech, it would seem best to discover exactly what he means by his use of the word homogeneity. His definition must have a broader base and encompass more than just a similarity or

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<sup>25</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, pp. 153-156.

genetic likeness of race, which the face value of the word would seem to suggest. Stevens means, as Brooks has suggested, "that they [all Southerners] have a community of values that is rooted in some kind of lived experience."<sup>26</sup>

Many of Stevens' words during this speech project almost a bitterness. He sees the people of the North as a "coastal spew" which was "quarantined unrootable into the rootless ephemeral cities." By contrast, the Southerner, in particular the Negro, has "roots into the land." The Northerners have "a frantic greed for money," "a basic fear of failure of national character," and they hide this from each other "behind a loud lipservice to a flag." Stevens' idea of the North is definitely unflattering. He feels the ties to his Southern homeland strongly. He recognizes the South's faults, its guilt, but his loyalty is too overpowering to allow interference from anyone.

In contrast to the North, Stevens tells Chick that the South contains the only homogeneous people of any size left. Only from homogeneity will come things of lasting value-- literature, art, science, government, and a national character. The South is defending, not politics or beliefs, but its homogeneity. The Negro is another homogeneous group within the South, with an even better homogeneity than the white man. The South is defending the privilege of setting free the

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<sup>26</sup> Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 421.

Negro, which would be the inescapable by-product of the preservation of the South's homogeneity. If the Southern white man and the Negro would unite, they would present an impregnable front to the Northerners.

It is almost as if Stevens is suggesting and speculating anything in order, at all costs, to keep the North out of the South. He does not condone the injustice in the South; he recognizes and agrees that "economic and political and cultural privileges" are the Negro's right. He simply feels that only the South can handle the South's problems. Stevens is, perhaps, guilty of idealizing the South. Brooks has noted this in his statement that "Gavin overrates the value of community. He certainly has the country-bred man's distrust of urbanization and industrialism, and he has evidently been irritated by the guff of Madison Avenue."<sup>27</sup> But Stevens' argument is prompted by a deeper motivation than distrust of industrialization or irritation at Madison Avenue. He is simply a Southern man to the very essence of his being, loving and defending his homeland from what he considers an intrusion by an outsider.

During his disquisition on the South, Stevens admonished the North for its speed, its haste in believing that equality for the Negro "can be compelled even into next Monday by the simple ratification by votes of a printed paragraph." Perhaps much of the argument about whether Stevens is speaking for

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 422.

Faulkner in this novel stems from Stevens' statement here. His words do invite a comparison with Faulkner's own, as can be seen in Faulkner's "Letter to a Northern Editor":

. . . I have been on record as opposing the forces in my native country which would keep the condition out of which this present evil and trouble has grown. Now I must go on record as opposing the forces outside the South which would use legal or police compulsion to eradicate that evil overnight.

The rest of the United States assumes that this condition in the South is so simple and so uncomplex that it can be changed tomorrow by the simple will of the national majority backed by legal edict.

So the Northerner, the liberal, does not know the South. He can't know it from his distance. He assumes that he is dealing with a simple legal theory and a simple moral idea. He is not. He is dealing with a fact: the fact of an emotional condition of such fierce unanimity as to scorn the fact that it is a minority and which will go to any length and against any odds at this moment to justify and, if necessary, defend that condition and its right to it.<sup>28</sup>

In his "Letter" Faulkner cautions the North, again and again, to "Wait, wait now, stop and consider first,"<sup>29</sup> and "Go slow now. Stop now for a time, a moment."<sup>30</sup> It does appear that Faulkner and Stevens, at least on this point, are saying the same thing.

Stevens' speech on the homogeneity of the South has helped to increase Chick's awareness of his identity with

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<sup>28</sup>William Faulkner, "Letter to a Northern Editor," in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters of William Faulkner, edited by James B. Meriwether (New York, 1966), pp. 86-91.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

the South, but his reconciliation is not complete for he denounces the people of Jefferson, his people, in saying, "They ran. . . . They saved their consciences a good ten cents by not having to buy him a package of tobacco to show they had forgiven him."<sup>31</sup> Chick still sees the lynching mob as "a Face, the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood . . . a Face monstrous unravering omniverous [sic] and not even uninsatiate. . . ." <sup>32</sup>

But Chick remembers something that Stevens had told him three or four years earlier:

"It's all now you see. Yesterday wont be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance. . . . A small voice, a sound sensitive lady poet of the time of my youth said the scattered tea goes with the leaves and every day a sunset dies: a poet's extravagance which as quite often mirrors truth upside down and backward since the mirror's unwitting manipulator busy in his preoccupation has forgotten that the back of it is glass too: because if they only did, instead of which yesterday's sunset and yesterday's tea both are inextricable from the scattered indestructible uninfusable grounds blown through the endless corridors of tomorrow, into the shoes we will have to walk in and even the sheets we will have (or try) to sleep between: Because you escape nothing,

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<sup>31</sup> Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 192.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

you flee nothing; the pursuer is what is doing the running and tomorrow night is nothing but one long sleepless wrestle with yesterday's omissions and regrets."<sup>33</sup>

In this passage, Stevens is at times incomprehensible and there is some doubt as to the relevance of his total speech to the story. Perhaps the best justification for this long tirade would be, again, to increase Chick's identity with the South--to recall to his mind Pickett's charge at Gettysburg which every Southern boy can relive again and again. But Stevens is doing more than just recalling the "glorious" days of the South's past. He seems also to have a message--that time is continuous and that the events of the past determine the present, and the events of the present determine the future. He brings Chick to a realization. Volpe has noted that

what happened to the South a hundred years earlier . . . shaped the people and the attitudes that nearly cost Lucas his life; the past also shaped Chick to save Lucas's life. And what Chick has done now will help to determine what happens in the South tomorrow.<sup>34</sup>

Stevens cautions Chick that he cannot simply repudiate or run or flee from the injustice that he sees in the South. He must stay and try to correct it, and by staying, his act will, in part, shape the future. Stevens' view on the continuity of time is indeed Faulkner's own view, for this idea

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 194-195.

<sup>34</sup>Volpe, A Reader's Guide, p. 261.

appeared thematically in many of his earlier works, and it becomes integral to an understanding of Requiem for a Nun.

But Chick is not yet convinced. He still insists, "They didn't even wait to send him a can of tobacco and say It's all right, old man, everybody makes mistakes and we wont hold this one against you."<sup>35</sup> Stevens explains:

" . . . Lucas will ultimately get his can of tobacco; they will insist on it, they will have to. He will receive installments on it for the rest of his life in this country whether he wants them or not and not just Lucas but Lucas: Sambo since what sets a man writhing sleepless in bed at night is not having injured his fellow so much as having been wrong. . . ." <sup>36</sup>

Stevens is explaining to Chick that the town will be apologizing to Lucas for a long time, and that the mob dispersed, not in order to avoid apologizing to Lucas, but to show their revulsion from the man who had killed his own brother: "' . . . Gowrie must not kill Gowrie's brother: no maybe about it, no next time . . . because there must be no first time."<sup>37</sup> Stevens further explains that the crowd would not have actually lynched Lucas:

"there is a simple numerical point at which a mob cancels and abolishes itself, maybe because it has finally got too big for darkness, the cave it was spawned in is no longer big enough to conceal it from light and so at last whether it will or no it has to look at itself, or maybe because the amount of blood in one human body is no longer enough, as one peanut might titillate one elephant but not two or ten. Or maybe it's because man having passed into mob passes then into mass which abolishes mob by

<sup>35</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 198.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

absorption, metabolism, then having got too large even for mass becomes man again conceptible of pity and justice and conscience even if only in the recollection of his long painful aspiration toward them, toward that something anyway of one serene universal light."<sup>38</sup>

As Brooks has noted, "Gavin evidently finds in the unanimity of the community something of hope rather than menace."<sup>39</sup> Taking an affirmative view, Stevens sees man passing into the mob which grows too large and passes into mass which, again, grows too large, and becomes man who is capable, again, of "pity and justice and conscience." When Chick asks Stevens if he thinks man is always right, it becomes obvious that Stevens places his faith, not in individual man, but in Man. In reply to Chick's question, Stevens answers:

"No. . . . He tries to be if they who use him for their own power and aggrandisement let him alone. Pity and justice and conscience too--that belief in more than the divinity of individual man . . . but in the divinity of his continuity as Man. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

Stevens' belief in the continuity of Man is echoed in Faulkner's words at the University of Virginia when he stated, "Well, the individual is not too much, he's only a pinch of dust, he won't be here very long anyway, but his species, his dreams, they go on."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>39</sup>Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 292.

<sup>40</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, editors, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 286.

Continuing their discussion, Chick accuses Stevens of defending and excusing the people of Jefferson for their actions. Denying this accusation, Stevens enters into his second disquisition on the South, reiterating the same ideas he had touched on earlier:

". . . I'm defending Lucas Beauchamp. I'm defending Sambo from the North and East and West. . . . 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."<sup>42</sup>

Stevens continues to repeat the same ideas in his third and final pronouncement on the South:

"to defend not Lucas nor even the union of the United States but the United States from the outlanders North East and West who with the highest of motives and intentions (let us say) are essaying to divide it at a time when no people dare risk division by using federal laws and federal police to abolish Lucas' shameful condition . . . [we will be] 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. . . ." <sup>43</sup>

In Stevens' third disquisition on the South, he voices strongly his fear of division "at a time when no people dare risk division." Violence, federal laws, and federal police are not a solution. They will only lead into "the anteroom to dissolution." At this point, it seems necessary to interject Faulkner's own words, in his interview with Russell

<sup>42</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 264.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 215-217.

Howe, for they bear a striking resemblance to what Stevens is saying:

First of all, take off the pressure. Give him [the white Southerner] time--don't force us. . . . The top will blow off. The government will send in its troops and we shall be back at 1860. They must stop pushing these people. The trouble is the North doesn't know that country. They don't know the South will go to war. . . . The Negro has a right to equality. His equality is inevitable, an irresistible force, but as I see it you've got to take into consideration human nature, which at times has nothing to do with moral truths. Truth says this and fact says that. . . . To oppose a material fact with a moral truth is silly.<sup>44</sup>

Faulkner, like Stevens, is urging the North to stop pushing, to "take off the pressure." Only division can result.

Chick's reconciliation with his society is complete when, embarrassed, he senses that he is becoming self-righteous. Stevens' final instruction to him is that "'it's all right to be proud. It's all right even to boast. Just dont stop."<sup>45</sup>

Stevens' long disquisitions, as noted earlier, have been the main point of criticism of Intruder in the Dust. His verbal ramblings are not only lengthy, taking up a large portion of the second half of the book; but, they are often obscure and ambiguous, even, at times, appearing to be unrelated to the plot. Joseph Gold has stated that Stevens "can never quite make the distinction between a universal commentary on

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<sup>44</sup>Russell Howe, "Interview (1956)," in Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, edited by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York, 1968), pp. 259-260.

<sup>45</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 244.

man and a series of observations on race relations in the South."<sup>46</sup> And, again, he states that

betrayal of the plot reaches its extremes in the many passages where, without justification by the narrative, the characters, especially Stevens, make speeches. . . .  
 [Many] remarks obviously have . . . nothing to do with the action. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Of the same opinion, Frederick J. Hoffman states that

the book from chapter eight, with the exception of the neatly comic final scene, is editorial bombast and digression containing a succession of cheap metaphors of which only a person whom Faulkner wishes to ridicule can be proud.<sup>48</sup>

Although Stevens is certainly guilty of much reiteration and platform-pounding, and even intrusion into the story, such harsh criticism of the novel is not completely deserved. What Stevens says is not that intrusive or completely without function. His tirades do have relevance, perhaps not in all cases to the external plot; but in relation to the internal, emotional process going on within Chick, they are of profound importance. Intruder in the Dust is, essentially, the story of a young man's--Chick's--moral maturing. Stevens functions as an instructive guide, or, as Vickery states it, ". . . Gavin Stevens concerns himself with fostering Chick's intellectual comprehension of public morality and social

<sup>46</sup>Gold, A Study in Humanism, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>48</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York, 1961), p. 101.

relationships."<sup>49</sup> In this respect, Faulkner has delegated to Stevens an important responsibility. Chick must learn to recognize injustice and to take a stand against it. But he can do nothing if he repudiates his own people, his homeland wherein the injustice lies. He must exercise his morality within the framework of his own society and, thereby, take his "one anonymous chance . . . to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle. . . ."<sup>50</sup> The process of personal maturation is not just one of action, of deeds; actions and deeds must be brought into the right perspective by thought and by verbalization of that thought. As Vickery says, Intruder in the Dust provides "room not only for the revivifying action of Chick but for the verbal readjustments of Gavin Stevens."<sup>51</sup>

Stevens' "verbal readjustments" do lose ground in comparison to Chick's action, and numerous critics have accused him of inactivity. His inactivity is most pointed when, early in the novel, he does not believe in Lucas' innocence and accompany Chick, the first time, to the graveyard. Stevens has received much criticism for this act, for he is usually in character as the sensitive moral agent. In defense of Stevens, however, it must be noted that circumstantial evidence against Lucas is heavy, and it may be

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<sup>49</sup>Vickery, Novels, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 193.

<sup>51</sup>Vickery, Novels, p. 144.

remembered also that Lucas did not even bother to deny the crime. At any rate, the trip to the church by Chick and his friends opens the way for Stevens' instruction and moralizing which is integral to the story of Chick's moral development. As Gold has noted, "the failure of Stevens to believe Lucas, to take the case on trust, is necessary to make Lucas' dependence on Chick a real one, growing out of need."<sup>52</sup>

One further point of contention, which was noted earlier, remains to be cleared--that is whether Stevens can be considered Faulkner's mouthpiece in this novel. The answer to this problem is plagued by difficulties, for Faulkner, between the publication of the novel in 1948 and his later years, took differing positions, or at least his emphasis differed, in regard to the racial question. It has already been noted that Stevens' idea on the continuity of time and his placing his faith in Man appear to be Faulkner's own views. There are strong similarities too between Stevens' statements on the intrusion of the North and Faulkner's own words in such articles as his "Letter to a Northern Editor" and such talks as his interview with Russell Howe. However, on other and later occasions, Faulkner took a viewpoint which comes much closer to Northern ideas than do Stevens' statements. For example, in his article "On Fear: Deep South in Labor: Mississippi," Faulkner says:

If we had given him [the Negro] this equality ninety or fifty or even ten years ago, there

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<sup>52</sup>Gold, A Study in Humanism, p. 85.

would have been no Supreme Court ruling about segregation in 1954.

But we didn't. We dared not; it is our southern white man's shame that in our present economy the Negro must not have economic equality; our double shame that we fear that giving him more social equality will jeopardise his present economic status; our triple shame that even then, to justify our stand, we must becloud the issue with the bugaboo of miscegenation; what a commentary that the one remaining place on earth where the white man can flee and have his uncorrupted blood protected and defended by law, is in Africa--Africa: the source and origin of the threat whose present presence in America will have driven the white man to flee it.<sup>53</sup>

Faulkner's emphasis here is at variance with his earlier cautioning of the North to go slow and stop pressuring the South. In a letter "To the Editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal," Faulkner, discussing the South's school system, states that "We beat the bushes, rake and scrape to raise additional taxes to establish another system at best only equal to that one which is already not good enough . . . we will have two identical systems neither of which are good enough for anybody."<sup>54</sup> One observes here an implicit approval of integration. In another letter to the Commercial Appeal, Faulkner, discussing funds for better schools, says "this only solves integration: not the impasse of the emotional conflict over it. But at least it observes one of the oldest

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<sup>53</sup>William Faulkner, "On Fear: Deep South in Labor: Mississippi," in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters of William Faulkner, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup>William Faulkner, "To the Editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal, March 20, 1955," in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters of William Faulkner, p. 216.

and soundest maxims: If you cant beat'em, join'em."<sup>55</sup> This idea is distinctly not what the Gavin Stevens of Intruder in the Dust could ever have sanctioned.

It is obvious that Faulkner and Stevens do not always agree, either in kind or degree. It is wisest to conclude that Stevens is not Faulkner's mouthpiece in Intruder in the Dust, and, joining Brooks, agree that "his theories and arguments are not privileged utterances, but have to take their chances in the total artistic context."<sup>56</sup>

For Gavin Stevens, Intruder in the Dust has served to raise him to the status of a major character in Yoknapatawpha fiction. He has continued in the tradition of many of his earlier roles. He is still the commentator and reflective observer of events, even something of the detective after his initial balking at Lucas' innocence; and, most important, he emerges in a major role as a moral spokesman. His fostering of Chick's moral awareness and growth foreshadows his major role in The Mansion, in which he functions as guide and protector of Linda Snopes. In Requiem for a Nun, too, he serves as moral developer of Temple Drake Stevens.

A little more than a year after the publication of Intruder in the Dust, Stevens appears as the star performer

<sup>55</sup>William Faulkner, "To the Editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal, April 3, 1955," in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters of William Faulkner, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup>Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 424.

in a collection of short stories entitled Knight's Gambit, published in November of 1949. Five of the six short stories had previously been published: "Smoke" in 1932, "Monk" in 1937, "Hand Upon the Waters" in 1939, "Tomorrow" in 1940, and "An Error in Chemistry" in 1946. The remaining and title story, "Knight's Gambit," often considered a novella rather than a short story, was published for the first time in this collection.

All of the stories, including "Knight's Gambit," were written before the publication of Intruder in the Dust, and probably Intruder in the Dust should be considered the "end-product of the development reflected in the successive stories of Knight's Gambit."<sup>57</sup> Millgate has accurately noted that in the short stories of this series "it is almost as though Faulkner were trying out Gavin Stevens, testing him under a variety of difficult conditions. . . . Knight's Gambit might appropriately have been entitled 'The Education of Gavin Stevens.' . . ."<sup>58</sup> The Knight's Gambit detective stories reveal Stevens in a process of learning, increasing in his awareness of human nature. As was noted in the earlier discussions of the various stories in this series, Stevens becomes with each story increasingly an instrument for Faulkner--a voice attuned to moral, social, and political problems. Stevens can be

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<sup>57</sup>Millgate, Achievement of Faulkner, p. 269.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

more readily identified as a mouthpiece for Faulkner in these stories than he can in his later appearances in such stories as Intruder in the Dust. However, the experience he gained in the Knight's Gambit stories prepared him for the role of spokesman and counselor which he assumes in Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun. The stories, as well, bring him into focus as one of the leading citizens of the Yoknapatawpha world.

As five of the six short stories contained in Knight's Gambit have been discussed earlier, they will not be recounted here. Compared to the final story of the series, "Knight's Gambit," the earlier stories reveal, more or less, a surface-level appearance of Stevens. He is a man solving crimes, growing in his humanistic inclination, and voicing moral truths, but he is not a direct participant in the central issue of the story. As such, only a glimpse of the personal details, emotions, and life of the man himself show through. "Knight's Gambit" corrects this omission, and, in doing so, becomes a most important story in the understanding of Gavin Stevens. The details which "Knight's Gambit" affords place this story in the position of a "missing link" between the Gavin Stevens of the thirties and early forties and the Gavin Stevens of the late forties and fifties. Stevens' garrulity, which was not particularly obvious earlier but which became blatantly obvious in Intruder in the Dust, is brought to the foreground as one of Stevens' personal characteristics in

this story. The romantic, idealistic side of Stevens, which is integral to his nature, and which plays an important part in The Town and The Mansion, is first revealed in this story. Incidentally, Stevens' marriage to Melisandre Backus Harriss, which occurs in this story, also has important ramifications for Stevens' future appearance in The Town and The Mansion.

"Knight's Gambit" is narrated by Chick Mallison. As the story opens, Chick and his uncle are engaged in a chess game, which is rudely interrupted by Max Harriss and his sister. Harriss wants Stevens, since as County Attorney he represents the law, to do something about deporting Captain Gualdres, his mother's house guest. He tells Stevens that Gualdres has jilted his sister and is trying to marry his mother for her money. Stevens tells him that he does not see any grounds on which to take the case. Harriss departs in a brusque manner, literally dragging his sister out of the room. Shortly afterward, she returns without her brother and confesses that she fears Max may try to kill Gualdres. Max fancies himself to be quite expert in fencing and riding. Gualdres had beaten him at both.

Chick learns the next day that Max has bought a wild, uncontrollable, "killer" stallion. Stevens, together with Chick and Rafe McCallum, the former owner of the horse, hurriedly leave for the Harriss' place and arrive just in time to prevent Gualdres from being killed by the horse.

The next day, Max Harriss, prompted by Stevens, enlists in the army; Gualdres and the Harriss girl marry and leave for Argentina; and Stevens and Chick drive out to the Harriss mansion to visit Mrs. Harriss. Shortly afterward, Chick enlists in the service, and by the time he returns, Stevens and Melisandre, the mother, are married.

Intermixed with the rather lifeless plot of the story are informative and revealing facts about Gavin Stevens the man, which are brought into the context of the story either by conversation between Chick and Stevens or through Chick's comments as narrator.

One of Chick's first observations concerning his uncle occurs soon after the Harriss brother and sister had gone. Chick and Stevens return to their chess game and Stevens sitting "there with his thin quick face and his shock of premature white hair and his Phi Beta Kappa key and the dime corn cob pipe and the suit which looked as if he had slept in it every night since the day he bought it . . ." <sup>59</sup> calmly continues the game as if they had had no interruption. Chick, after the initial surprise of the abrupt and informal entry of the Harriss brother and sister, admits that there is something that surprises him even more. His uncle is acting completely uninterested and calm "in the face of what should

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<sup>59</sup>William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York, 1949), pp. 140-141.

have supplied . . . [him] with food and scope for garrulity for the rest of the night. . . ."60 Chick sees his uncle as

that glib and talkative man who talked so much and so glibly, particularly about things which had absolutely no concern with him, that his was indeed a split personality: the one, the lawyer, the county attorney who walked and breathed and displaced air; the other, the garrulous facile voice so garrulous and facile that it seemed to have no connection with reality at all and presently hearing it was like listening not even to fiction but to literature.<sup>61</sup>

Chick's description of Stevens' dual nature defines precisely the image of Stevens which Intruder in the Dust presents.

Chick's surprise at his uncle's behavior leads him to recall something he had heard, something he had inherited "from his grandmother by means of childhood's simple inevitable listening. . . ."62 Chick next engages in a mental review of the early history of Melisandre Backus--now Mrs. Harriss.

It was something about a previous involvement, prior to the marriage: an engagement, a betrothal in form in fact, with (so the legend said) the father's formal consent, then broken, ruptured, voided--something--before the man she did marry ever appeared on the scene;--a betrothal in form according to the legend, yet so nebulous. . . . So it--the first, the other one, the true betrothal, worthy of the word for the simple reason that nothing came of it but apocrypha's ephemeral footnote, already fading: a scent, a shadow, a whisper; a young girl's trembling Yes in an old garden at dusk, a flower exchanged or kept; and nothing remained unless perhaps the flower, the rose pressed between the pages of a book as the successors to his grandmother's generation occasionally did--was probably, without doubt, it had

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-142.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

to be, the aftermath of some boy-and-girl business of her schooldays. . . .

But the man (or the boy) had no face, no name. He had no substance at all, in fact. He had no past, no yesterday; protagonist of a young girl's ephemeris: a shade, a shadow; himself virgin as the untried passions of that cloistered and nunlike maiden.<sup>63</sup>

Chick discovers, by the end of the story, from his uncle himself, that the young man in the "legend" is Stevens. While driving out to the Harriss mansion, with Stevens constantly asking him "'what are you poking along for?'"<sup>64</sup> Chick listens to his uncle relate the story of his early romance with Melisandre.

"It was after I saw her the third or the tenth or the thirtieth time, I dont remember which, but one morning I stood beside the halted carriage with the barefoot nigger on the box and she like something preserved from an old valentine or a 1904 candy-box against that faded soiled expanse of back seat. . . ."

"'I'm Gavin Stevens,' I said. 'And I'm going on thirty years old.'

"'I know it,' she said. But I felt thirty, even if I wasn't quite. She was sixteen. And how could you say to a child (as we said then): 'Give me a date?' And what would you (at thirty) do with it? And you dont simply invite the child: you ask the child's parents if it can come. So it was just dusk when I stopped your grandmother's car at the gate and got out. There was a garden then . . . with old bushes of roses and callicanthus and paintless collapsing arbors and trellises and beds of perennials re-seeding themselves without outside meddling help or let, and she standing in the middle of it watching me as I entered the gate and went up the walk . . . and I mounted the steps to where the old gentleman sat . . . and I said,

"'Let me be betrothed to her' (mark how I put it: me to her). 'I know,' I said. 'I know: not now. Not now. Just let us be betrothed, and we wont even have to think about it again.'

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-145.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

"It was . . . I who tilted up her face though it took no more strength than to raise a strand of honeysuckle. It was like tasting sherbet. . . . It was like sherbet: the rest of spring, and summer and the long rest of summer: the darks and silence to lie in, remembering sherbet: not retasting it because you dont need to retaste sherbet; it doesn't take much sherbet because you dont forget it. Then it was time for me to go back to Germany and I took the ring out to her. I had already looped it onto the ribbon myself."<sup>65</sup>

As Stevens continues his story, Chick learns the reason for the broken engagement. While at Heidelberg, Stevens had written to Melisandre; but he had also written to another woman, a Russian woman he had known in Paris in 1918. By mistake, he had placed the letters in the wrong envelopes and mailed them. Later, after Melisandre had married Harriss, Stevens saw her in Paris, and asked her, "'But why didn't you wait for me? . . . Why didn't you cable?'"<sup>66</sup> She answered, "'You didn't want me. . . . I wasn't smart enough for you.'"<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note Melisandre's answer. She is apparently not resentful or bitter, for she does not accuse him of being interested in another woman, of jilting her, or of "two-timing" her. She does not resort to the typical woman's behavior of defending hurt pride. Her answer is direct, honest, and reveals that she has accurately assessed the circumstances of their earlier romance. Stevens has told Chick that he was confused "'Not how she got the German

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 233-235.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

translated. . . . But how whoever translated the German for her, translated the English too."<sup>68</sup> He had also revealed that writing to Melisandre "'didn't even demand any cerebral process . . ."<sup>69</sup> and perhaps he was "'simply incapable of sherbet. . . ."<sup>70</sup> The difference in their ages--sixteen and almost thirty--plus the vast difference in their experience--a girl who had never left Jefferson and a man who was at home in the world--probably accounts for Stevens' hesitancy. At any rate, to Melisandre's direct answer, Stevens' is left somewhat speechless, and falls back on the decorous reply, "'Good afternoon, Mrs. Harriss."<sup>71</sup> For a man of Stevens' refined sensitivity, that moment must have been painfully embarrassing. Thus began his long years of quiet devotion.

When Chick and Stevens arrive at the Harriss mansion, Chick notes that Stevens immediately and impatiently begins walking toward Melisandre, saying "'I'm Gavin Stevens and now I'm almost fifty."<sup>72</sup> After many years of devotion, the betrothal, the wrongly-sent letter, Melisandre's marriage, her widowhood, and the encounter with her children, Stevens is able to complete the marriage which had its beginnings twenty years earlier. As Warren Beck has noted, Melisandre

is not only free but maturely his equal, whom he can meet in love without reticence or the kind of

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

anxious fostering he had accorded the inexperienced girl. And Gavin senses such distinctions quite clearly; it is a part of his gentility, a behavior based on a code earnestly held.<sup>73</sup>

Stevens' sustained affection and devotion to Melisandre is a reflection of both the kind of man Stevens is, and what Melisandre symbolizes and represents to him. It may be recalled that the first thing Stevens noted about Melisandre was that she reminded him of "something preserved from an old valentine or a 1904 candy-box." Chick adds to this picture of Melisandre when he recalls his first meeting with her:

She looked exactly as he had known she would, and then and even before they stopped, he could smell it too: the scent of old sachet, lavender and thyme and such, which, you would have thought, the first touch of the world's glitter would have obliterated, until in the next second you realised that it--the scent, the odor, the breath, the whisper--was the strong and the enduring, and it was the inconstant changing glitter which flashed and passed.<sup>74</sup>

Chick recalls also that the Christmas cards Melisandre would send from Europe were "the old-timey cards out of the old time, giving off the faint whisper of old sentiment and old thought. . . ."<sup>75</sup> The letters she would write talked "not only of the old homey things but in the old unchanged provincial terms, as if in ten years of the world's glitter she still hadn't seen anything she had not brought with her. . . ."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Warren Beck, Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison, Wisconsin, 1961), pp. 99-100.

<sup>74</sup>Faulkner, Knight's Gambit, p. 163.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

Melisandre is something of an anachronism in the flash and glitter of the modern-day world. But then, so is Stevens. Melisandre represents the "perfection," the lasting and enduring "best" of a bygone age. She is something "saved from a quieter time than this one, when the houses that people were born in didn't always even know they lacked electric wiring and water pipes."<sup>77</sup> There is an essence about her of gentility, fragile loveliness, and the quiet and lasting womanly virtues.

Gavin Stevens would be unable to love or to accept into a life long partnership any woman other than such a one as Melisandre. This, perhaps, explains his long bachelorhood. Stevens lives physically in a modern-day world, but mentally and spiritually he belongs to that world of gentility, that old world, that surrounds Melisandre. The Governor in "Monk" was the first to vocalize this quality about Stevens.

"Mr. Stevens, you are what my grandpap would have called a gentleman. He would have snarled it at you, hating you and your kind; he might very probably have shot your horse from under you some-day from behind a fence--for a principle. And you are trying to bring the notions of 1860 into the politics of the nineteen hundreds."<sup>78</sup>

Stevens definitely embodies the virtues of Faulkner's gentlemen. He is at times wrong, generally is long-winded; but he is never less than a true gentleman, following a code of behavior in which he honestly believes. His code dictates

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

a refined and genteel manner in his relations with all people, honesty, integrity, a deep personal loyalty to the old and important values in life, and chivalrous conduct toward women. In this respect, Stevens is one of the finest people in the Yoknapatawpha world. Perhaps it is a little sad and a commentary on the modern world that people possessed with the qualities of Stevens are often labeled idealists, romantic, chivalrous knights of yore and, as such, have difficulty in meeting the level of "reality" in the world. This is the facet of Stevens' personality which Faulkner chose to bring to the foreground in The Town and The Mansion where Stevens stands in opposition to the Snopeses, Faulkner's "modern men."

As noted earlier, "Knight's Gambit" represents something of a flashback in Stevens' history and emphasizes his verbosity which becomes evident in the late forties and early fifties in Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun, and his idealistic, chivalrous nature which becomes integral to his appearances during the late fifties. Knight's Gambit is followed, in 1951, by Requiem for a Nun, and in this novel Stevens returns to the status he had achieved in Intruder in the Dust--that of moral spokesman.

Requiem for a Nun is similar, in many respects, to Intruder in the Dust. Whereas in the earlier novel Stevens was concerned with fostering his nephew Chick's moral development in relation to community responsibility, in Requiem for a Nun he is concerned with fostering Temple Drake Stevens'

moral development in relation to individual responsibility. Another parallel occurs in that Temple's husband, Gowan Stevens, is Stevens' nephew, or at least, in Requiem for a Nun he is. In The Town, however, Chick Mallison--Gavin's sister's son--and Gowan Stevens are second cousins. In both novels it is a Negro in jail--Lucas Beauchamp in Intruder in the Dust and Nancy Mannigoe in Requiem for a Nun--which provides Stevens the opportunity to instruct Chick and Temple in their moral re-examination. Both novels, too, are characterized by Stevens' "sententious monologue[s]", didacticism, overt moralizing, and . . . circuitous style."<sup>79</sup>

Hoffman has noted that Faulkner, in his later fiction, runs the risk of sacrificing "characterization to conviction."<sup>80</sup> The Gavin Stevens of Requiem for a Nun provides an excellent example of Hoffman's statement. In this novel, Stevens has essentially reached "sainthood." He appears as a father-confessor, a priest, an inquisitor who relentlessly forces Temple on and on, never abating, until she finally reaches an awareness of and accepts her share of the moral responsibility of the crime that has been committed. Legally, she is without any responsibility for the crime, but morally, the guilt is predominantly hers. Stevens, in his role of guiding and directing Temple's "soul," becomes, as Vickery has phrased it,

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<sup>79</sup>Gold, A Study in Humanism, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup>Hoffman, William Faulkner, p. 37.

"a Socratic midwife presiding over the moral dialectic which focuses on Temple Drake."<sup>81</sup> Stevens performs this duty with such constancy, intensity, and relentlessness that his human vitality, personality, and emotion are nearly stifled. Compared to his appearance in the short story "Knight's Gambit," he appears in Requiem for a Nun as a vocal, wooden manikin. Requiem for a Nun casts him, however, in his most overt, and presumably, most prestigious role as moral spokesman.

Requiem for a Nun is the thematic sequel to the events which occurred in Sanctuary, a novel which had been published twenty years earlier. In Sanctuary, Temple Drake was a young college girl who was taken to a bootlegger's hideout and abandoned there by her weak, drunken cavalier, Gowan Stevens. Temple witnessed a murder committed by the gangster, Popeye, who kidnapped her, took her to a Memphis brothel for six weeks, and supplied her with a lover, a man called Red. Temple not only stayed at the brothel, but she loved staying there. Later, at the trial in which Lee Goodwin had been accused of the murder which Popeye had committed, Temple falsely testified to Goodwin's guilt. In her appearance throughout the novel, Temple was weak and without conscience or sense of responsibility.

Requiem for a Nun--which is not a novel in the accepted sense of the word, but a three-act drama with each act

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<sup>81</sup>Vickery, Novels, p. 123.

preceded by a long narrative section--begins eight years after the events which occurred in Sanctuary. Gowan Stevens, trying to atone for his drunken conduct and irresponsibility in abandoning Temple, has married her and settled in Jefferson. They have two children.

The drama opens in the Jefferson courthouse where Nancy Mannigoe, "a Negress, quite black, about thirty . . . a drunkard, a casual prostitute . . .,"<sup>82</sup> has just been sentenced to hang for the murder of Temple and Gowan's infant daughter. Her lawyer has been Gavin Stevens:

about fifty. He looks more like a poet than a lawyer and actually is: a bachelor, descendant of one of the pioneer Yoknapatawpha County families, Harvard and Heidelberg educated, and returned to his native soil to be a sort of bucolic Cincinnatus, champion not so much of truth as of justice, or of justice as he sees it, constantly involving himself, often for no pay, in affairs of equity and passion and even crime too among his people, white and Negro both, sometimes directly contrary to his office of County Attorney which he has held for years, as is the present business.<sup>83</sup>

Faulkner's 1951 description of Stevens, here, epitomizes the picture of Gavin Stevens which had emerged by the end of the early forties, before his overtly "vocal period." In the early detective stories he was, truly, a man "involving himself, often for no pay" in the affairs of his people, seeking justice, and, in the process, gaining knowledge about

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<sup>82</sup>William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York, 1951), p. 50.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

human nature. Faulkner's description here, however accurate it may be, simply does not seem to "fit" the Gavin Stevens of Requiem for a Nun. His efforts to help Nancy, which have apparently occurred before the drama begins, are completely overshadowed by his unmitigated determination to force Temple into moral awareness. His characterization, to recall Hoffman's statement, has been sacrificed to conviction.

After the courtroom scene in which Nancy accepted her sentence with serenity and placid resignation, Stevens, in the home of Temple and Gowan, begins the process of prodding the young, socially prominent couple into moral self-awareness. Temple is evasive, adopting first the role of bereaved mother, which she quickly drops. Temple knows how deeply she is involved in the crime, how deep her guilt goes; but she cannot face or accept the responsibility for it, as Nancy accepted the responsibility for her act. Gowan is unaware of the full extent of his guilt in the murder. He feels that his daughter's death is the result of his sin in drunkenly abandoning Temple years earlier at the bootlegger's hideout. He says "'I got a bargain. . . . Half-price: a child, and a dopefiend nigger whore on a public gallows: that's all I had to pay for immunity.'"<sup>84</sup> Stevens tells Gowan that there is no such thing as immunity, and that there is no such thing as past either. Throughout the drama, Stevens is saying, essentially, that the

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

past and the present are inseparable, and that it is necessary to recognize and accept the actions of the past and live with their consequences in the present. There are no such things as immunity or escape. By accepting responsibility for past actions, the individual can change, even if only slightly, the course of the future. This is the same idea with which Stevens counseled Chick in Intruder in the Dust when he said, "'you escape nothing, you flee nothing; the pursuer is what is doing the running and tomorrow is nothing but one long sleepless wrestle with yesterday's omissions and regrets.'"<sup>85</sup>

But Temple does flee, to California, until she is summoned back to Jefferson by Stevens. Together they drive to Jackson, the capital, where they meet with the Governor, who "might be someone's idea not of God but of Gabriel perhaps, the Gabriel not before the Crucifixion but after it."<sup>86</sup> By relating her story to the Governor, Temple, in effect, is facing her own conscience. Stevens knew that an appeal to the Governor would not help Nancy, for her sentence is beyond repeal, but a meeting with the Governor would help Temple. Unwittingly, Temple confesses her story not only to the Governor and Stevens, but to her husband who is also present, but not seen. Gowan is present by Stevens' prearrangements.

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<sup>85</sup>Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 195.

<sup>86</sup>Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 113.

Temple acknowledges that she is responsible for the consequences of the events which had occurred eight years earlier; she could have escaped from Popeye at any time, but she did not "because Temple Drake liked evil."<sup>87</sup> She relates that she "'hired a whore and a tramp and a dopefiend to nurse . . . [her] children,"<sup>88</sup> because she "'couldn't find anybody except a nigger dopefiend whore that could speak her language."<sup>89</sup>

While in the Memphis brothel, Temple had written letters to her lover, Red. After Red's death, the letters had passed into the hands of Red's brother, Pete, who was trying to blackmail her with them. She confesses that she could have paid him for them, but had chosen, instead, to leave her husband and go with Pete. She had planned to take her infant daughter with her and leave her son with Gowan. She relates that it had become increasingly difficult to satisfy Gowan's growing need of gratitude for his "gentlemanly" act of marrying her. Nancy had intervened, sacrificed herself and Temple's daughter, in order to prevent Temple from ruining her home and the life of her other child. Nancy's act was a desperate one, but she acted in full knowledge and acceptance of its consequences and the price she would pay, for when asked of her guilt, she quietly answered, "'Guilty, Lord."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

The next day Temple and Stevens visit Nancy in jail, and Temple hears from Nancy the way to find the peace which she seeks.

Temple: "Nancy. What about me? Even if there is one [a Heaven] and somebody waiting in it to forgive me, there's still tomorrow and tomorrow. And suppose tomorrow and tomorrow, and then nobody there, nobody waiting to forgive me--"  
 Nancy: "Believe."  
 Temple: "Believe what, Nancy? Tell me."  
 Nancy: "Believe."<sup>91</sup>

Nancy's simple, inarticulate faith does not arise from within the narrow limits of doctrine, it arises from her soul, her spirit. Volpe has noted that ". . . Nancy does not know rationally what she believes in. She is not saved by an acceptance of the doctrines of Christianity. . . . Her belief in Jesus is symbolic of the mystical submission of her spirit."<sup>92</sup>

Nancy knows that the individual doesn't have to sin, but "you cant help it. And He knows that. But you can suffer. . . . And He dont tell you to suffer. But He gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you are capable of doing. And He will save you."<sup>93</sup> Man, then, has a choice, a chance, to act morally on his own. Only from a full awareness and realization of guilt, and acceptance of the responsibility inherent in that guilt, can Man find Nancy's peace and serenity. To reject responsibility for one's actions

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>92</sup>Volpe, A Reader's Guide, p. 280.

<sup>93</sup>Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, p. 278.

and deny the guilt is to reject the peace and salvation which is within the individual's grasp.

But Temple is too rational, too much governed by her intellect, to believe as Nancy does. She is unsure if there is a God or a Heaven. However, she reaches a realization, "'If there is none, [God] I'm sunk. We all are. Doomed. Damned.'"<sup>94</sup> And Stevens concludes, "'Of course we are. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?'"<sup>95</sup>

As noted, Stevens' function in Requiem for a Nun is to force Temple and Gowan into an awareness and acceptance of their own guilt. Thus his role is not that of an actual participant in the drama; he serves as an instrument or a catalyst which incites the action and brings about the conclusion. Stevens presents a relentless force in accomplishing his purpose. He constantly interjects Temple's dialogue with such remarks as "'Tell him, then,'"<sup>96</sup> or "'You are drowning in an orgasm of abjectness and moderation when all you need is truth,'"<sup>97</sup> or "'Yes, that's all. But you've got to tell him why it's all.'"<sup>98</sup> He elicits such replies from Temple as, "'Gavin! No, I tell you!'"<sup>99</sup> or "'I expected our main obstacle in this would be the bereaved plaintiff. Apparently though

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

it's the defendant's lawyer,'"<sup>100</sup> or, with sarcasm, "'Dear Uncle Gavin.'"<sup>101</sup> The Governor, it appears, felt a need to check Stevens' pressuring, when he made such comments as "'Gavin. No more, I said. Call that an order,'"<sup>102</sup> or "'Be quiet, Gavin,'"<sup>103</sup> or "'No more, Gavin.'"<sup>104</sup>

Vickery has commented on this overt determination demonstrated by Stevens when she noted that, compared to earlier appearances, "he is no longer content with words as an end product. . . . Now . . . [he] serves as a spur goading Temple and Gowan. . . ." <sup>105</sup> William Doster voiced a similar opinion when he noted that ". . . Faulkner shows that Gavin was capable of overt action at one period of his life. . . ." <sup>106</sup> Requiem for a Nun does present Stevens at his most "active." In earlier appearances, he was generally engaged in the processes of analyzing, theorizing, speculating, and arriving at a "pronouncement." In Requiem for a Nun, however, he has apparently analyzed and speculated before the drama begins, for his whole manner during the drama is one of relentless determination to achieve his purpose, which he ultimately does.

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>105</sup>Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," p. 4.

<sup>106</sup>Doster, "The Several Faces of Gavin Stevens," p. 193.

As noted, Requiem for a Nun appears to be Stevens' most important role as moral spokesman, or as Hoffman has phrased it, his "most generous opportunity to 'make good' as a latter-day Faulkner hero."<sup>107</sup> It is unfortunate that in this role Stevens' determination clouds the human qualities of the man. At least in Intruder in the Dust he was guilty of an initial negative reaction to Lucas' innocence, and of letting his nephew and an old woman take up his search for truth and justice. In Requiem for a Nun he is totally and completely the spokesman.

With his appearance in Requiem for a Nun, Stevens ends his career as an overt moral spokesman. Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun--the novels of commitment--have generally not presented Stevens in a kind light. His over-abundant rhetoric and his speech-making tendency have overpowered almost all of the likable qualities in the man. In short, Stevens has gained in voice, but lost in personal substance. To demonstrate this point, in Faulkner's next novel, A Fable--in which Stevens does not appear--the protagonist and the characters in general have moved so close to moral abstraction that the novel is almost a morality play, an allegory. Stevens has apparently, however, served Faulkner well, or at least, Faulkner's need to "speak out." Had it not been for Stevens' appearance in the short story "Knight's Gambit," the late

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<sup>107</sup>Hoffman, William Faulkner, p. 108.

forties and early fifties would be a very unfavorable and disappointing period in Stevens' development. "Knight's Gambit," however, brought forth the wonderfully genteel and chivalrous side of Stevens--the facet of Stevens' personality which will dominate his next two appearances in Yoknapatawpha fiction.

## CHAPTER V

### GAVIN STEVENS: THE LATE FIFTIES

In the short story "Tomorrow," Stevens was quoted as saying that he was talking about

human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice, trying to do the best we can with them or despite them. . . .<sup>1</sup>

These words were spoken earlier in defense of Homer Bookwright, but they have a special relevance for Stevens himself and his situation in The Town and The Mansion, his last two appearances in Faulkner's mythical world.

In his previous appearances, Stevens had focused, without direct involvement, on "the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs" in relation to other people; he was a detached observer. Now, in The Town and The Mansion, Faulkner turns the focus on Stevens and his passions, feelings, and beliefs, and his struggle to do the best he can "with them or despite them."

At the University of Virginia, commenting on Stevens' appearance in The Town, Faulkner said,

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York, 1949), p. 87.

Well, he had got out of his depth. He had got into the real world. While he was--could be--a county attorney, an amateur Sherlock Holmes, then he was at home, but he got out of that. He got into a real world in which people anguished and suffered, not simply did things which they shouldn't do. And he wasn't as prepared to cope with people who were following their own bent, not for a profit but simply because they had to.<sup>2</sup>

The Town and The Mansion, then, take Stevens out of his detachment, place him in the "real" world, and present him in situations of personal involvement where he too anguishes and suffers. As a result of this, Stevens no longer appears to be an infallible, rational man as he was in Knights Gambit or a man of unquestioned wisdom as he was in Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun. He appears now as a more complex human individual who is possessed with strengths and weaknesses, and in whom the capacity both for right and wrong resides. Thus, he appears, many times, to be foolish, romantic, idealistic, and ineffectual, blind to the reality of events or to the reality of human nature. He appears to be, as well, a man of heart, and a magnanimous nature. It is precisely this co-existence in Stevens, this contrast between his foolishness and blind idealism on one hand, and his basic goodness and magnanimity on the other, that suggests some ambivalence in Faulkner's attitude toward him. Heretofore, such a situation had not

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, editors, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 140.

existed. Stevens' earlier appearances during his "build-up" in the thirties and early forties to his major position as a spokesman in Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun gave the impression, an accurate one, that he was an instrument or prop for Faulkner's use in making moral, political, or social pronouncements. Stevens, then, had an important responsibility and position to fulfill for Faulkner, and it can only be concluded that it was Faulkner's intention for Stevens to be accepted at a positive valuation, despite critical grumbling at his prolonged ranting and boring repetitions.

In The Town and The Mansion, however, ambivalence arises in that Stevens does not appear to be so overtly directed and, though still garrulous and given to analysis and speculation, these characteristics do not appear to be quite so armed with didactic purpose. He is more "on his own," engaged in a "real" world where he too suffers and becomes foolish and ineffectual in his attempts. Thus it is difficult to determine not only Faulkner's attitude toward Stevens, but what attitude Faulkner intended the reader to have toward Stevens.

Critics have been quick to label Stevens as "a countrified descendant of Sir Tristan,"<sup>3</sup> or as quixotic, comical, and unrealistic. It must be remembered, however, that Don Quixote, a man possessed with similar characteristics, was a favorite of

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<sup>3</sup>Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, 1st paperback edition (New Haven and London, 1966), p. 196.

Faulkner's. When asked to list his favorite books, Faulkner's first answer was "Don Quixote,"<sup>4</sup> and on another occasion said, "I read Don Quixote every year."<sup>5</sup> Faulkner, then, knew that Stevens' quixotism would look foolish and comical. This apparently was his intention. But it must not be concluded that it was Faulkner's intention to hold Stevens' weaknesses and his ineffectuality up to scorn, disparagement, or worse, contempt. This conclusion is drawn from numerous statements which Faulkner made over the years--statements which partially reflect his over-all vision of life.

When asked why he rated Wolfe first among contemporary writers, Faulkner answered, ". . . I made my estimate on the gallantry of the failure, not on the success or the validity of the work. It's on the gallantry of the effort which failed."<sup>6</sup> Again, in answer to the same question, Faulkner said,

so I will have to rate us [writers] on what I consider the splendor of our failure. . . . That was what I meant by the failure. That he [Wolfe] failed the best because he had tried the hardest, he had taken the longest gambles, taken the longest shots.<sup>7</sup>

Faulkner's interview with Cynthia Grenier carries the same message.

<sup>4</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

INT. Still, so many more people go down than survive.

WF That's all right. That they go down doesn't matter. It's how they go down.

INT. And what is the way to go under?

WF It's to go under when trying to do more than you know how to do. It's to defy defeat even if it's inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

Only within this frame of reference, Faulkner's own, can Stevens be judged fairly and accurately. Stevens' experiences in The Town and The Mansion deal him a shattering blow. By the end of The Town, he is a crushed and broken man, not even hiding the tears that flow down his cheeks as he talks of Eula's death. By the end of The Mansion, he is crushed still further; his illusions about himself and about human nature are shattered. He had lost in his battle against the encroaching Snopeses and had lost in his battle to protect the two women for whom he cared. He "went under" trying to do more than he knew how to do. Of all the characters in The Town and The Mansion, he "failed the best because he tried the hardest, he had taken the longest gambles, taken the longest shots." While not denying that Stevens is, at times, quixotic, extravagant, and lacks insight, it seems more important to gage him by what he tried to do, on the gallantry of his effort, his sincere striving to do the best he knew how to do. This seems to be the only way in which Faulkner intended for Stevens to be viewed; of Stevens' quixotic nature itself, Faulkner

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<sup>8</sup>Cynthia Grenier, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview with William Faulkner--September, 1955," Accent, XVI (Summer, 1956), 172.

commented at the University of Virginia, "that's a constant sad and funny picture. . . . But it's a very fine quality in human nature. I hope it will always endure."<sup>9</sup>

The Town and The Mansion were published, respectively, in 1957 and 1959, and, as noted, contain Stevens' last two appearances in the Yoknapatawpha world. It is ironic that in all of Stevens' previous appearances--he had appeared in Yoknapatawpha fiction since 1931--Faulkner had not presented a fully developed history of Stevens' life and career. The events which Stevens experiences in The Town and The Mansion make a great deal more credible the knowledge he possessed and many of the statements he made in the earlier novels. As Faulkner said, ". . . The Town began in 1909 and went to 1927. Probably Stevens learned something from The Town to carry into Intruder in the Dust."<sup>10</sup> The Town provides Stevens with an education, a learning experience, in living with "the human heart in conflict with itself. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

The Town and The Mansion are the second and third volumes of a trilogy which had its beginnings in 1940 with the publication of The Hamlet. The major theme of the trilogy is the encroachment by the greedy, rapacious Snopes clan, led by the reptilian Flem Snopes, upon Frenchman's Bend and then Jefferson.

<sup>9</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph L. Fant, III and Robert Ashley, editors, Faulkner at West Point (New York, 1964), p. 64.

Although Stevens does not appear in The Hamlet, his close friend, V. K. Ratliff, does. Fresh from his defeat in The Hamlet at the hands of Flem Snopes, Ratliff, at the beginning of The Town, enlists Stevens' aid in the battle against Snopesism because " . . . Snopeses had to be watched constantly like an invasion of snakes or wildcats. . . ."12

Ratliff is another of Faulkner's candidates for "good strong man." Ratliff is the uncommon common man, and he has a great deal more practical sense than Stevens. He is clever, shrewd, possessed with folk wisdom, a good humor, and compassion for his fellow man. Faulkner said that he was "a man who practiced virtue from simple instinct, from--well, more than that, because--for a practical reason, because it was better."13 Stevens and Ratliff are two of the narrators. The third narrator and a third candidate for "good strong man" is Stevens' nephew, Chick Mallison. By the end of The Town Chick is old enough to have taken up the gauntlet against Snopesism, too. Faulkner said that he thought Chick might "grow up to be a better man than his uncle."14 Chick, it may be remembered from Intruder in the Dust, is under the direct tutorage of Stevens. He possesses and believes in the same virtues as his uncle, but

<sup>12</sup>William Faulkner, The Town, Vintage Books (New York, 1961), p. 106.

<sup>13</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup>Grenier, "An Interview with William Faulkner," p. 175.

he is much more flexible than Stevens. He is not hampered by Stevens' quixotic nature. These three--Stevens, Ratliff, and Chick--relate the history of Snopesism as it occurs in The Town.

Essentially, The Town recounts the events between Flem's arrival in Jefferson as the part-owner of a small, backstreet restaurant to his advancement to the presidency of the Sartoris Bank. Flem, after quickly eliminating his partner from the restaurant, moves into the position of superintendent of the power plant--a position which Mayor De Spain had created for him. Flem's wife, Eula Varner Snopes, whose beauty has affected the entire male population of Jefferson, has become the mistress of De Spain. Also smitten by Eula's beauty is the young city attorney, Gavin Stevens. Stevens and De Spain engage in an absurd and childish rivalry over Eula, which begins with De Spain racing his red E. M. F. sportster in front of the Mallisons' house where Stevens lives. In retaliation, Stevens prompts his cousin to scatter tacks on the street in front of the house. When the tacks fail, Stevens' cousin sharpens a rake head, places it in the street, and accomplishes their purpose--a flat tire on De Spain's car. De Spain's next move is to send Stevens a corsage composed of the rake head and a few flowers, all tied together with a condom. The rivalry culminates with Stevens' chivalrous attack on De Spain for the manner in which he is dancing with Eula at the Christmas Cotillion.

Soon after, Stevens leaves for Europe, mainly to get away from Jefferson and his frustrated love. Before he returns, De Spain becomes president of the Sartoris Bank, and Flem moves into the vice-presidency.

When Stevens returns, he undertakes to champion Linda Snopes as he had her mother, Eula. His primary objective is to encourage Linda to leave Jefferson for an out-of-state college. Flem refuses, but does consent to let her go to the state college. Linda, overcome with gratitude, signs her inheritance over to Flem. Flem uses Linda's will, plus his knowledge of Eula's affair with De Spain, to force his father-in-law into ejecting De Spain from the Bank. Eula, unwilling to leave town with De Spain and leave Linda in the midst of the scandal, commits suicide. Flem moves into the presidency of the Bank and takes over De Spain's mansion. Linda departs for New York's Greenwich Village.

As noted earlier, the events which Stevens experiences in The Town deal him a devastating blow. The events of both The Town and The Mansion exert an eroding force on his idealism, which is central to his nature. He suffers anguish and defeat in his attempt to champion the woman he loves, Eula, and later her daughter, Linda. His idealism also blinds him to the real motives of the rapacious Flem Snopes. Ratliff says over and over, "he missed it. He missed it completely."<sup>15</sup> Stevens is

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<sup>15</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 153.

dedicated in his fight against Snopesism, but he is a man of principle. His war against Snopesism is, then, conducted by a gentleman's rules, but for Flem Snopes there are no rules. The outcome is inevitable.

Stevens' idealism, or at least his idealistic concept of women and his chivalrous attitude toward them, was significantly brought forward in the short story "Knight's Gambit." Stevens is a Southern aristocratic gentleman living by a specific code of conduct--a code which in part requires chivalrous and virtuous behavior toward women.

Thus when Stevens comes in contact with the incredibly beautiful Eula Snopes, whose appearance alone "suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysic times,"<sup>16</sup> his idealistic attitude, plus his propensity for abstraction, turns her into something more than a mortal woman. To Stevens, Eula is that "incredible woman, that Frenchman's Bend Helen, Semiramis--no: not Helen nor Semiramis: Lilith. . . ."<sup>17</sup> She becomes an ideal, an abstract goddess. He is attracted to her in the same way that all the men in Jefferson are attracted to her--sexually. But to a man of Stevens' sensitivity, she must be more than an embodiment of sex. For the romantic Stevens, the physical emotion must be cloaked in the purity of eternal love and

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<sup>16</sup>William Faulkner, The Hamlet, Vintage Books (New York, 1940), p. 95.

<sup>17</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 44.

devotion, and Eula, the beloved, must be a paragon of chastity and virtue.

Stevens knows that Eula is De Spain's mistress, as everyone in town knows, but his dedication to the belief of decency in women, together with his idealized picture of Eula, allows him to impose the ideal over the real. Stevens demonstrates this when his sister asks, "'Just what is it about this that you can't stand? That Mrs. Snopes may not be chaste, or that it looks like she picked Manfred de Spain out to be unchaste with?'"<sup>18</sup> Stevens, too quickly, answers, "'Yes . . . I mean no! It's all lies--gossip. It's all--'"<sup>19</sup>

At the Christmas Cotillion, however, when Stevens sees the "shameful" way in which Eula and De Spain are dancing, his attempt to deny the reality of the situation becomes dramatic. James Farnham has commented that "as a male, Stevens can hardly be more frustrated by De Spain's success . . . but as Eula's knight, he is outraged by De Spain's open disregard for the Southern gentleman's concern for the reputation of his lady."<sup>20</sup>

Stevens views De Spain's action as aggressive and improper. In his attempt to defend "forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not,"<sup>21</sup> Stevens forces De Spain into a fight.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>James R. Farnham, "Faulkner's Unsung Hero: Gavin Stevens," Arizona Quarterly, XXI (Summer, 1965), 119.

<sup>21</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 76.

Stevens is defeated, but perhaps that is not a significant point. He couldn't fight, he didn't know how. The point is that, in the name of decency and honor, he made the effort when defeat was inevitable, foolish and ridiculous though he looked. And Stevens is aware of how he looked, of his foolish and ridiculous posture. While waiting in his office for the meeting which Eula requested, Stevens shows perception of his situation:

If she had ever even seen me yet while I was too busy playing the fool because of her to notice, buffoon for her, playing with tacks in the street like a vicious boy, using not even honest bribery but my own delayed vicious juvenility to play on the natural and normal savagery . . . of an authentic juvenile--to gain what? for what?<sup>22</sup>

Even though Stevens shows some insight into the cause of his anguish, and, at least, knows how foolish he looks, he still chooses to persist in his actions. As Chick says "he didn't stop because he couldn't."<sup>23</sup> His chivalry, his dedication to the ideals of love, honor, and womanhood are fundamental to his nature. Warren Beck has commented,

Gavin Stevens' chivalry, then, is fundamental, in that he is protagonist of the ethic which is most explicit in putting women and children first but which applies in defense of all common human rights and of any decency, civility, and gentility conservative of such rights. Gavin's quixotism is not an aberration but simply an extravagance, a generous expenditure in the direction of the humane, setting the perhaps possible above the probable, and if it is cavalier, it is gallantly so, sensing honor vitally

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

as something beyond position and assumption, to be lived up to in progressive conduct.<sup>24</sup>

Stevens suffers the first real attack on his idealism in his first meeting with Eula. He is forced into facing the truth about his Lilith. Eula's sexual offer is quite blunt. After entering his office, almost immediately she says, "'Do it here. In your office. You can lock the door and I don't imagine there'll be anybody high enough up this late at night to see in the window.'"<sup>25</sup> Stevens is shocked, justifiably so, at her bluntness. When he questions Eula to find out why she came, she tells him that she knows he is unhappy, and that unhappy people are a nuisance. Not only Stevens' idealism, but his pride as a man is crushed, as he says, "'Just compassion. Just pity. . . . Not just to prove to me that having what I think I want wont make me happy, but to show me that what I thought I wanted is not even worth being unhappy over. Does it mean that little to you?'"<sup>26</sup> Stevens has partially perceived the situation correctly, for when Faulkner was asked if Eula came to Stevens out of sheer sympathy, he answered,

Yes . . . to see someone that anguished over the need for a particular woman seemed foolish. . . . That wasn't important enough to be frustrated about, and if that was going to make him feel any better she was perfectly willing to help him.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Warren Beck, Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison, 1961), p. 136.

<sup>25</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 91.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>27</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 118.

Stevens' rejection of Eula's offer is really the only course of action he could take. A number of critics have felt that Stevens showed himself to be less than a man when he rejected Eula. In truth, Stevens himself felt that way. In comparing McCarron, Eula's first lover, De Spain, and himself, Stevens' said, "'All three gentleman but only two were men.'"<sup>28</sup> But if he had submitted to Eula's offer, knowing that she only pitied him and that it meant so little to her, he would have indeed presented a pathetic picture. There was really only one decision he could make, as a gentleman and as a man, and he made it correctly.

Stevens' decision, however, involves more than just refusing to be pitied. Stevens is a highly moral man. In Beck's words, he is a "man of feeling and aristocrat of the moral world. . . ."<sup>29</sup> Stevens' background and the society in which he lives have been based on moral restraint, particularly in relation to another man's wife, rather than on Eula's philosophy that "'you just are, and you need, and you must, and so you do.'"<sup>30</sup>

Stevens' interview with Eula is fraught with conflicting values. Stevens has made the correct decision as a man, as a

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<sup>28</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 95.

<sup>29</sup>Warren Beck, "Faulkner in The Mansion," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (Spring, 1960), 275.

<sup>30</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 94.

gentleman, and as a moral human being. But he has missed something, as Ratliff warns him continually throughout the novel. Eula not only pities Stevens because of his frustrated love for her, but she wants to protect her daughter from the scandal which will ensue if Stevens continues his suit against De Spain for Flem's misuse of public material. Eula does not say this to Stevens, of course, and Stevens lacks what Michael Millgate calls "that capacity for sympathetic imaginative identification. . . ." <sup>31</sup> The nobility of Stevens' principles is not in question, but his knowledge of human nature is. Throughout The Town and The Mansion Stevens is in a constant process of learning to recognize the real motivations of his fellow human beings. But even if Stevens had recognized Eula's desire to avoid scandal, it was still his duty as city attorney to investigate any misuse of public property.

Millgate has noted that in many of the situations in which Stevens finds himself, there are no completely satisfactory solutions to be found. <sup>32</sup> He is continually placed in situations where the human heart comes into conflict with itself, and he must simply try to find the solution which would involve the least anguish and wrong.

Stevens' interview with Eula and his involvement with the suit against De Spain have brought him somewhat closer to a

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<sup>31</sup>Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York, 1965), p. 243.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

realist's point of view. He does realize that absolutes are not applicable to flesh-and-blood people. As Ratliff said, "he had done been disenchanted for good at last of Helen. . . ." <sup>33</sup>

Though Stevens no longer thinks of Eula as an abstract goddess, he does continue quietly to love her, and he extends that love to her daughter, Linda. He considers himself spiritually Linda's father. In his fantasy identification, he thinks, "So that girl-child was not Flem Snopes's at all, but mine; my child and my grandchild both, since the McCarron boy who begot her . . . in that lost time, was Gavin Stevens in that lost time. . . ." <sup>34</sup> It is Stevens' design to get Linda out of Jefferson and away from the baseness of her father and the shame of her mother. He wants Linda to have "not her mother's fierce awkward surrender in a roadside thicket at night . . . but love . . . the realisation of hope and at last the contentment of one mutual peace and one mutual conjoined old age." <sup>35</sup> He plies her with ice-cream sodas after school and sends her catalogues on Northern and Eastern colleges, even though his middle-aged bachelor's attention to a sixteen-year-old girl looks both silly and suspicious. Stevens has dedicated his humane and chivalrous nature to seeing that Linda

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<sup>33</sup>William Faulkner, The Mansion, Vintage Books (New York, 1959), p. 130.

<sup>34</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 288-289.

gets the best that life has to offer. John L. Longley has commented that "in Linda, Gavin at last finds the appropriate field for his quixotic and heroic impulses. . . ." <sup>36</sup> Linda does need Stevens' protective help.

Flem has carefully been watching Linda to make sure that she didn't marry, for if she did he knows that Eula would leave him. He would then lose his chance at his father-in-law's money and have his chance at becoming president of the bank delayed. When Flem shrewdly relents enough to allow Linda to attend the state college, she is so overcome with gratitude that she signs a will leaving anything she might inherit from her mother to him. Flem has used the basest of all tricks; he has used an innocent girl's natural need for love, affection, and a father to get the money. With Linda's will and the knowledge of Eula's affair, he plans to force Varner into making him president of the bank.

Eula is desperate and she seeks help from Stevens. When Stevens receives Eula's note requesting a meeting, he wonders, "What more can you want of me than I have already failed to do." <sup>37</sup> Stevens has failed to perceive many things. Eula had told him in his first meeting with her many years earlier that he spent too much time expecting. She was referring to his habit of theorizing and speculating which leads him to spend

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<sup>36</sup>John L. Longley, Jr., Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill, 1963), p. 45.

<sup>37</sup>Faulkner, The Town, p. 313.

so much time in contemplating what might have happened or what could be happening that he is blind to the reality of what actually is happening around him.

It is Ratliff, less educated than Stevens but more practical, who helps Stevens to see the things his abstraction allows him to miss. Ratliff knew that Flem was interested in becoming "respectible," when Stevens could only sit and wonder why Flem was helping him to convict the pornography purveyor Montgomery Ward Snopes, or rid Jefferson of the insurance swindler, I. O. Snopes. Ratliff knew, also, that it was Flem who was preventing Linda from leaving Jefferson, while Stevens thought, at first, that it was Eula. Ratliff knew that Flem was saving the information about his wife's adultery to use it in his last bid for Varner's money and the presidency of the bank. Ratliff truly perceives more than Stevens and shows a greater depth in understanding human motivation, but it must be remembered that it is Stevens who takes the risks, the gambles, and suffers the anguish in order to help Linda and Eula.

In Eula's last meeting with Stevens, she is facing impossible choices. De Spain will not let Flem have the bank unless she leaves with him, which would bring out into the open the fact of her adultery and possibly the fact that Flem is not Linda's father. This would destroy Linda's name and social position. Whether she goes with De Spain or stays with Flem, which would prompt De Spain to fight for the bank,

Linda will be lost in the scandal. Eula asks Stevens to save Linda by marrying her. Stevens refuses, but he does promise that he will marry Linda if circumstances warrant it, and providing that is what Linda wants. Many critics feel that Stevens should have been able to see that Eula was contemplating suicide, and that by his refusal to marry Linda he failed Eula for the last time and should thus bear "a portion of the responsibility for her death."<sup>38</sup> It is true that by marrying Linda, he would have enabled Eula to leave with De Spain, thus preventing her death. However, he could not have prevented the scandal which would ensue. Marriage would have simply meant that Linda would not have had to face the scandal alone. The question arises whether marriage would have been the correct solution at any rate. Marriage to Linda would not have been right for Stevens, nor would marriage have been right for Linda. Stevens is old enough to be Linda's father, and, indeed, he thinks of her in that way. Linda is very young, energetic, and has the right to seek her own experience in life. Undoubtedly, marriage between the two, at that time, would not have been a happy solution. As many times in The Town, Stevens is again faced with a situation where there is no right answer.

After Eula's death, Stevens is an anguished, broken man. He considers that he failed Eula, and although Linda is leaving

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<sup>38</sup>Millgate, Achievement of Faulkner, p. 240.

Jefferson for Greenwich Village, she has had to suffer the unhappiness of her mother's death. Though Stevens is committed to fighting Flem, his actions at times served Flem perfectly. In relation to his defeat by Snopesism, Longley said that "Gavin is defeated because he is human, committed to fighting humanely against inhumanity."<sup>39</sup>

The Town attests to the many admirable qualities of Stevens--his humanity, his capacity to love deeply, his kindness and compassion, and his devotion and dedication. But it also points out what Stevens seems to lack--a realistic perception and insight. Brooks feels that ". . . The Town outlines Gavin's education in the nature of women and reality."<sup>40</sup> But by the end of The Town, though Stevens has suffered much and learned much, he has not yet achieved a realistic point of view. The Mansion, which continues his education in reality, will bring him to that point of view. As Edmond Volpe says, "Gavin will be nearly sixty before he is ready to share Faulkner's vision of moral complexity."<sup>41</sup>

In The Mansion, Linda returns to Jefferson after an absence of almost ten years. During that time Linda had found the passionate love which Stevens had wished for her. She had also

<sup>39</sup>John L. Longley, Jr., "Galahad Gavin and a Garland of Snopeses," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Autumn, 1957), 627.

<sup>40</sup>Brooks, Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 217.

<sup>41</sup>Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner, 6th printing (New York, 1969), p. 326.

suffered bereavement, widowhood, and injury while fighting for a lost cause in the Spanish Civil War. She returns to Jefferson as a deaf widow, with a quacking duck's voice, and lives again in the same house with Flem Snopes.

Stevens' relationship with Linda is now much more complex than it was earlier in The Town, for Linda is now not only a mature, experienced woman, but apparently a troubled and insecure person. Stevens has great compassion for Linda because of her injury and because the death of her husband had taken her great love from her. As in The Town, Stevens continues to protect Linda with the matchless fidelity he has in defending and helping someone for whom he cares.

Linda has returned from Europe as a crusader for causes. She carries a Communist card, associates with the two socialists in town, and undertakes to uplift Negro education. When her Communist affiliation comes under investigation by a federal officer, Stevens gallantly upholds and defends her. He idealizes her Communist affiliation:

She was like her mother in one thing at least: needing, fated to need, to find something competent enough, strong enough (in her case, this case, not tough enough because Kohl was tough enough: he happened to be mere flesh and bones and so wasn't durable enough) to take what she had to give: and at the same time doomed to fail, in this, her case, not because Barton failed her but because he also had doom in his horoscope. So . . . the Communist party, having already proved itself immune to bullets and therefore immortal, had replaced him, not again to bereave her. . . .<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Faulkner, The Mansion, p. 233.

Stevens continually idealizes and underestimates Linda's nature and motivation. He does not question her right to belong to the Communist Party, but he does feel that it is not safe for her to stay in Jefferson. Linda's crusades have been met by great anger among the white people of Jefferson, and by great dismay among the Negro leaders. She has angered too many people, and there have been too many unpleasant words scrawled on the sidewalk in front of her house. He knows also that Flem has her Communist card and would use it against her. He encourages her to leave Jefferson.

Linda and Stevens have been very close and have spent many hours together during this first part of her stay in Jefferson, and there have been sexual overtones in their relationship. Indeed, Chick seems not to be able to understand any other basis for their relationship. The sexual overtones become most explicit when Stevens writes on Linda's writing pad that he wants her to leave town, to go "anywhere New York Back to Europe of course but in New York some of the people still you & Barton knew the friends your own age."<sup>43</sup> She replies that she is afraid, "'Yes. I dont want to be helpless. I wont be helpless.'"<sup>44</sup> She tells Stevens that she wants to be where he is, because he is all she has now. She suggests marriage, and then offers herself to him, using the blunt four-letter word. In Stevens' refusal, he shows, not terror of a

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

physical relationship as some critics have suggested, but perception of Linda's situation and of his own feelings about Linda.

Linda is still suffering from the shock and sorrow of losing her husband, and she still has not adjusted to the difficulty of living in a soundless world. She wants the security which Stevens can provide. He is the only constant person with enduring devotion that she has ever known. He has always been there to help her, to do anything for her, to protect her, and never flinch or waver for even an instant in his devotion to her well-being. Gavin Stevens has that capacity to care as deeply as it is possible for one human being to care for another. In his relationship with Linda, Stevens demonstrates a rare and unusual love; it is the purest of all emotions, forever and endlessly giving. Ratliff has perceived Stevens' true nature, and he knows that the kind of relationship which Stevens has with Linda is the basis of Stevens' "life and if he ever lost it he wouldn't have nothing left. I mean . . . the privilege and opportunity to dedicate forever his capacity for responsibility to something that wouldn't have no end to its appetite. . . ."45

It is only natural that a consciousness of sex would enter into the close relationship which Stevens and Linda have. But this is by far the least dominant emotion in their closeness.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

It is also only natural for Linda to respond to Stevens' devotion, for he represents the only constancy her life has ever known. Linda is dependent on Stevens. He, however, wants her to be independent and to regain a happy and fulfilled life for herself. He has never thought of Linda in physical terms, nor does he feel that marriage between himself and Linda would be right. He loves Linda, has loved her all her life, but it is the protective love of a man for a very special and precious child who has simply now grown up. He does not think of Linda in terms of a wife. Indeed, one of the things he loves in Linda is her devotion to the memory of her husband. She represents, to him, a realization of his ideal love. He sees in Linda's eyes "the fidelity and the enduring which must be so at least once in your lifetime, no matter who suffers."<sup>46</sup> Beck comments on the nature of Linda's and Stevens' relationship:

Linda's dependence is the greater because she is caught in a situation she cannot wholly understand, and there is constantly a greater demand upon Gavin for disinterestedness. It becomes his primary concern to establish her on firmer ground, from which she can and does proceed. If naturally, he feels Linda's feminine appeal, as he had felt her mother's, under his code in this situation passion must be subordinated to what he conceives of as his duty, not only to Linda, but to the principles upon which he bases his defense of her.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>47</sup>Beck, Man in Motion, p. 109.

At Stevens' prompting, Linda leaves Jefferson for Pascagoula to work in the wartime shipyards. During this time she does regain her self-confidence and independence, and when Stevens visits her, she makes him promise to marry someone. With tears in her eyes, she tells him that she wants him to have the kind of love, the love in marriage, which she had with Barton Kohl. Stevens keeps his promise and does marry Melisandre Harriss. Although The Mansion provides no information about the marriage, it may be remembered from "Knight's Gambit" the qualities which Melisandre has--the essence about her of oldtime things, the essence which makes the glitter of the world seem inconstant and fading. As Beck says,

It is here, to something enduring thus symbolized, that Gavin's private life as lover and husband is attached, the center from which his chivalrous assistance to Linda and others can be extended, with presumably no violation of his deepest personal loyalty to that center, in a fixed passion of which nothing more needs to be told.<sup>48</sup>

Stevens is capable of marrying and of having a physical relationship with a woman, as his previous refusals of both Linda and Eula might have denied. And he can continue his devotion and protection of Linda, without any conflict with his marriage, for the simple reason that he feels that Linda needs him and he is ready to give.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

When Linda returns from Pascagoula, it becomes clear what Ratliff meant when he said that Stevens wasn't going to marry Linda, it was going to "be worse than that."<sup>49</sup> Stevens underestimates and completely misunderstands Linda's motive when she has him arrange for Mink Snopes's release from prison, two years before the end of his sentence. He realizes the danger, for he knows that Mink has spent thirty-eight years in prison feeling that Flem had betrayed him. Flem had refused to help Mink at his trial many years earlier when he had called for Flem's help. The danger becomes even more real when Stevens discovers that Mink left the prison without accepting the money which he had left for him. Mink was to have taken the money with the provision that he leave Mississippi and never return. Stevens tries to warn Flem that Mink is coming to Jefferson to kill him, but he refuses to believe Linda's involvement. He tells Ratliff, "' . . . it's a fact: the fact that not you nor anybody else that wears hair is going to tell her that her act of pity and compassion and simple generosity murdered the man who passes as her father. . . .'"<sup>50</sup>

But Linda's involvement is deep, and she has also involved Stevens in the murder. Not only did Linda plan for Mink to kill Flem, but she helped to get Mink out of her house after he

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<sup>49</sup>Faulkner, The Mansion, p. 232.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

had killed him. It is not until Stevens sees Linda's new car, which had been ordered when Mink left prison and in which she is to leave Jefferson, that he realizes her premeditation of Flem's death.

As Ratliff and Stevens drive out of town to give Mink the money which Linda had wanted him to have, Stevens is completely shaken. He has undergone a traumatic moral experience. Perhaps it was the most rending experience of his life to discover that Linda was capable of abetting a murder, and that he was capable of it too. All his life he had been a man committed to upholding the law and the positive values of man. As Volpe says, "A sinner among sinners, a man driven into wrong by his own idealism and love, Gavin knows at last the full burden of the human dilemma."<sup>51</sup>

Throughout The Town and The Mansion, Stevens has been slowly, sometimes faltering, but eventually reaching the understanding of man which becomes thematically explicit at the end of The Mansion. Stevens once again steps into the role of spokesman, this time with bitterly-won knowledge, when he says, "'The poor sons of bitches that have to cause all the grief and anguish they have to cause,'"<sup>52</sup> and, "'People just do the best they can.'"<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Volpe, A Reader's Guide, p. 339.

<sup>52</sup>Faulkner, The Mansion, p. 430.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 429.

Stevens' role in The Town and The Mansion seems fitting for his final appearance in the Yoknapatawpha world. In these novels he epitomizes the dilemma of all human beings. His strengths and weaknesses, his goodness, his aspirations, his commitment, as well as, his confusion, his inadequacy, and his ineffectuality belong to mankind. Stevens represents a strong positive force, but, as Millgate says, "his tragedy lies in his inability to make these elements effective in action."<sup>54</sup> That tragedy, too, belongs to mankind. Stevens' experience in life, in The Town and The Mansion, gave him pain, anguish, suffering, and disillusionment, but he had always striven to do the best that he could. He gains a special dignity from his effort to uphold some of the oldest and most positive values and ideals belonging to man. It is simply human that he must falter and fail. He has reached a great understanding of the human dilemma, people simply do the best that they can. As Farnham says, "This is a small statement, but by it man prevails."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Millgate, Achievement of Faulkner, p. 249.

<sup>55</sup>Farnham, "Faulkner's Unsung Hero," p. 132.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

For his twenty-eight years in Yoknapatawpha fiction, Gavin Stevens stands as a representative of Faulkner's positive, affirmative hero. He is an unusual man in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County, not only because of his vast education and poetic sensitivity, but because of his lifelong dedication and commitment to upholding the positive ideals and values of man. He remains consistently, throughout his appearances in Faulkner's fiction, a man of integrity and principle, a crusader for justice and right, an upholder of humanistic values, and a splendid knight. He remains consistent, too, in his sincere and unselfish interest in his fellow man. He is forever dedicated to helping people, simply because they are his fellow men.

Prompted by an inquisitive nature and a congenial and garrulous personality, Stevens' interest in human nature generally involves him, either directly or as an observer, in most of the events happening in his county. Whether he is involved in helping people such as Monk Odlethrop or the pitiful Hineses--people who neither seek nor want his help--or whether he is engaged in a quixotic attempt to save a woman and her daughter from the rapacious Snopeses, Stevens'

resoluteness and dedication reveal him to be the most compassionate and magnanimous man in Faulkner's fiction. But Stevens' resoluteness, his readiness to dedicate himself with all his emotion and energy to some purpose or cause, reveals him to be, also, a man with a romantic, idealistic view of life. He constantly invests people with better qualities than they possess, and he constantly fails to detect the baser motivations of the mind and heart. Stevens' failure to maintain a realistic perception often causes him to suffer anguish and disillusionment. But his chivalry and his ability to transpose his idealistic view over reality are reflections of his own goodness of heart and his belief in the fundamental goodness and decency of others.

Stevens gains status in Faulkner's fiction because of the admirable man that he is, but his personality and his appearances are marred by two major faults. He spends too much time in contemplation and speculation, and he talks excessively. It is ironical that Stevens' least attractive or admirable characteristics are the same characteristics that made him so important to Faulkner and allowed him to fill one of the most important positions in Faulkner's later fiction. During his last major phase as a writer, Faulkner required a protagonist who could articulate the truths which he discovered in his observation of human nature. Thus, it is Stevens' propensity for observing, analyzing, and commenting that allowed him to function for Faulkner in the major capacity of spokesman.

However, his prolonged ranting, his repetitiousness, and his ambiguity during his "vocal period" of the late forties and early fifties completely overshadowed his finer qualities as a man. At the height of his career as a spokesman, in such novels as Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun, he may have fulfilled Faulkner's purpose by making overt statements and "pronouncements," but he remained unfulfilled as an interesting and complex human individual. Stevens' appearances in these two novels are perhaps the two most damaging ones to his image.

Stevens' success as a character and his ultimate importance to Faulkner lies, not in his appearances where his preaching and platform-pounding carry an overt message, but in his appearances in the Knight's Gambit short stories, The Town, and The Mansion where his abiding fidelity to help and uphold mankind carries a self-evident message. It is Stevens' humanity, his ethical commitment, his boundless aspiration, and his sensitivity, compassion, and pity that reveal the positive aspects of life which Faulkner sought to emphasize in his later fiction. It is Stevens' dedication to persist in his actions, to continue to do the best that he knows how to do, in the face of defeat, disillusionment, and pain, that makes a reality out of Faulkner's Stockholm Address. Stevens achieves an important and lasting place in Faulkner's fiction because he stands as a representative of the positive nature of man. He gains a small share of immortality because of his

continual striving, his ability to endure defeat, and because he has a soul capable of compassion, pity, and sacrifice. He is Faulkner's knight, his paladin, his representation of the fundamental goodness in man which strives to maintain justice and truth and right as living realities.

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