

THE STRUCTURE AND MEANING OF
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S **A Fable**

By
PHILIP EDWARD PASTORE

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For my son Philip
who in a sense wrote this

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INTRODUCTION

A Fable¹ occupies a curious position among Faulkner's works. Written during the period of his greatest acclaim, the first major novel he produced after receiving the Nobel Prize in 1950, it appeared at a time when critics were undoubtedly most disposed to heap praise upon him for the slimmest of reasons. A Fable was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1955, but was considered a failure by practically all the reviewers and many of the influential critics; few commentators have since found reasons to alter their opinions. Not only did some reject it as art; they were actually angered by much of what they saw in it. The near unanimity of opinion regarding it is not curious in itself; the reluctance with which many critics reject it, aside from Faulkner's reputation and their obvious disappointment, points up one of the novel's peculiarities. If one were able to relegate it to the scrap heap of trivia, and if the negative critical opinion were widespread and

¹William Faulkner, A Fable (New York, 1954). Further references to this work will be by page numbers incorporated in the text.

consistent that it is trivial, A Fable would present few problems. But many who rejected it, regardless of the extent of their rejection, have noted the novel's vast scope, its wide compass in the process of their analysis. It is readily admitted that the novel was among Faulkner's most ambitious undertakings, as one dissenting critic called it, "a heroically ambitious failure."² No one has hinted that Faulkner wrote it to capitalize upon the wider recognition his Nobel Prize afforded him. A Fable was certainly not hastily conceived or written; it took nearly nine years for Faulkner to complete it. It was perhaps the most carefully planned of all his books; an examination of the wall of his study at Rowan Oaks corroborates this opinion.

That a great writer may write an occasional bad novel is hardly news; the contention that A Fable is an aberration gets support from another widely held view regarding the total Faulkner canon. One tendency, to see Faulkner as the chronicler of Yoknapatawpha County, whether his work is viewed in general as all part of the loose "saga" of Yoknapatawpha or not, is bolstered by the interlocking of events and characters throughout many of the major novels and stories.

²Charles Rolo, "Reader's Choice," The Atlantic, CXCIV (September, 1954), 79.

Concomitant with this general attitude is the opinion that his best works have all been contained within the complex imaginary Yoknapatawpha world, a world grown out of close observation, introspection, and lived experience concerning the region and people he knew and loved best. This paper will not dispute any claims made for the greatness of the novels and stories which appeared in that creative span between The Sound and the Fury and Intruder in the Dust (1929-1948).

Questioned will be the other side of this attitude, one which states that somehow his powers diminished when he attempted to write about events or characters outside the Mississippi country, that his intellectual grasp was inadequate to express complexities demanding statement in substance or form to which the Yoknapatawpha setting was not amenable. Although A Fable is among this less currently approved group of novels, it is not to be degraded merely for this reason.

Opinion varies widely concerning the "form" of A Fable, whether it is an allegory or a thesis-novel or an attempt to construct a mythology. The functions of the characters are seen in multitudinous relations, and thematic interpretations transcribe an arc that is majestic in its scope. Although the variety of opinion in this regard may serve as testament to the novel's richness, the general opinion is that it attests to the confused form and substance of A Fable. The

most pervasive attitude regarding the novel is that it is primarily an intellectual failure, ill-conceived and ill-made.

Faulkner has been accused of many offenses against taste and tradition--the less-than-illustrious history of early Faulkner criticism in America bears eloquent testimony to this fact--but only very rarely has he ever been accused of carelessness in handling his materials. That Faulkner, whose proved ability to exercise exquisite control over extremely complex literary structures (Absalom, Absalom! or The Sound and the Fury to name only two) could be so blind, could commit so many obvious blunders in one novel without being sublimely careless, simply seemed absurd. The "agony and sweat" he admittedly poured into writing A Fable rules out carelessness as a cause. Also, the very enormity of its apparent failures, the grand inconsistencies it seems to trumpet, according to critics, seemed somehow to demand a reexamination. The novel simply could not be as bad as some opinions would have it--its very power to evoke such strong reactions as late as 1962 seemed to work perversely against the very criticism which railed against it. Witness the opening sentence of Irving Howe's critical appraisal.

Only a writer of very great talent, and a writer with a sublime deafness to the cautions of his craft, could have brought

together so striking an ensemble of mistakes as Faulkner has in A Fable.³

Howe's adjectives almost seem to belie the very claims he makes.

A Fable has aroused many unfavorable comments and only three searching attempts at an interpretation. None of the commentators saw a totally unified structure and consequently the meaning of the book has not been clarified by them. The title and the decorative symbol of the Cross have led most critics to stray into paths which Faulkner really did not enter. The novel is not a fable in the technical sense of that narrative form; rather it is a story, probably meant by the author to be as meaningful as any of Aesop's writings, but equally probably not to be as simple in outline or depth. The search for meaning on the level of structure, therefore, requires another pattern. The reoccurrence of the symbol of the Cross likewise does not necessarily relate the events of the novel to the Christian story. One of the chronological frames through which the story progresses is indeed Holy week, but only in a limited degree does the sequence of events relate to the final events in the earthly life of Jesus.

One of the reasons I began my study was owing to the

³Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York, 1962), p. 268.

fact that no critic had offered what seemed to me a unified explanation of the entire action itself, one which put the many seemingly disconnected episodes into a whole frame whereby some consistent meaning could be extracted without noticeably distorting the novel. No one had adequately explained A Fable's structure or the rationale behind the structure. Two little-known critics have come very close, and will be considered in Chapter I, but they, too, in some ways have only added to the complexity instead of reducing it.

Faulkner wanted to say something about man's condition, and only partially could governmental forms, religious creeds, or military organization supply a plot outline adequate to his purpose. It is quite possible that he found in the philosopher Henri Bergson, whose influence in America during Faulkner's young manhood was immense, a pattern of thought which harmonized with the novelist's idealism. In the concept of the elan vital, with its associated concepts of the opposition of intellect and intuition, of the closed society and the open society, and static and dynamic religion, as set forth in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, may lie the basis for the unifying structure. The following study analyzes the shape and content of Faulkner's novel to demonstrate the parallels with Bergson's thought. The result, it is hoped, will clarify the structure and the meaning of

the book. With a better understanding of the novelist's art and thought, possibly critics will re-evaluate the book and find it worthy of a place with his acknowledged masterpieces.

This study will proceed as follows:

Chapter I will deal with the criticism of A Fable to date, treating in some detail the three critics who are important to an understanding of the novel as I read it.

Chapter II will define some of Bergson's basic ideas regarding the elan vital, and proceed from there to relate them to the conflicts in A Fable, ending with an examination of how the two major projections of the intellect, the closed society and static religion, are symbolically extended in the novel.

Chapter III will deal primarily with the role of the Corporal, his representative function as the intuitive man and radical mystic, in relation to the analogical correspondences of the Christian Passion.

Chapter IV will examine the overall structure of A Fable, and attempt to demonstrate Faulkner's use of internal parallels and external contrasts to integrate the seemingly disparate episodes into one larger unity, which ultimately serves as a definition of the fable of A Fable: man.

CHAPTER I

A REVIEW OF THE CRITICISM

When William Faulkner's A Fable appeared on the literary scene in 1954, the immediate response from the book reviewers was intense and various, both in temper and interpretation of its meaning and worth. This variety in itself is not unique, but what is striking about the early criticism is the utter confusion engendered in minds that were presumably attuned to the many complexities of literary nuance. Nonetheless, the early reviewers were for the most part either disappointed or downright hostile, according to their commitment to their various literary or religious creeds. Whether hostile or merely disappointed, the early criticism actually posed more questions than it answered. Just what was the story about? Obviously there was a connection between A Fable and the Holy Week of Christ's Passion. Was this novel simply Faulkner's retelling of the Passion story in modern dress, or was it his version of the Second Coming? If so, why all of the extraneous material concerning the war, the long digression into the backgrounds of the characters without offering nearly so much on the main character--the

Corporal. Why all the trivia, the seemingly endless argumentation in language hardly understandable? Why the brutality and scatological incidents? What was he writing? A novel? An allegory? A pacifist thesis-novel on war? How could he believe that all of the disparate episodes which took place could be fused into a consistent whole? And why the long story about the stealing of the racehorse? Why insert a story published four years earlier¹ into this work? A Fable was for the most part condemned from both literary and religious viewpoints.

The frustration which A Fable caused to certain book reviewers is perhaps best summed up by the reaction of one H.C.G. in America.

. . . it is clearly a symbolic novel; it is just as clearly, save to those who dare not say boo to geese, a mystery, a riddle, an enigma, for which a key is sadly needed. Indeed, after a careful and laborious reading of 437 pages, I have begun to suspect that there is no key, or that if there is one lying around somewhere, it is hardly worth the search, for it would at best open only an empty box.²

¹William Faulkner, Notes on a Horsethief (Greenville, Mississippi, 1950).

²H[arold] C. G[ardiner], "William Faulkner's 'A Fable,'" America, XCI (August, 1954), 102.

It will be the purpose of the rest of this paper to supply one key, with the further hope that the box it will unlock will yield a somewhat richer store than H.C.G. suspects is there. But this early review contained more than a rather fretful admission of confusion. H.C.G. went on to complain about particulars, the remoteness from "our Lord" of the Corporal, the Marshall's apparent identification with both God and Satan, and the "torrent of words." From these observations H.C.G. went on to speculate darkly on those critics who had praised it, noting that they must have wished down deep in their hearts that they really understood it, although obviously no one possibly could. H.C.G. is perhaps extreme in his naivete, but his reaction is not remote from many of the early critical reviews. A Fable seemed to serve for many reviewers as an opportunity for their private literary ideologies to burst forth. Brendan Gill saw it essentially as a preachy version of the Passion. Faulkner was a "southern evangelist" who tried to "do over" the New Testament in "Gothic Revival." Gill ended his review by warning all authors that the wisest course was to leave the Gospel stories alone.³ Vivian Mercier noted that

³Brendan Gill, "Fifth Gospel," The New Yorker, XXX (August 28, 1954), 70.

"aside from implying that the Christ of today is the Unknown Soldier, the book seems to offer us a hodge podge of cliches."⁴ He then went on to speculate on Faulkner's social instincts. The delay in completion was owing to an instinct not to, because Faulkner was "an introvert trying to write an extrovert's novel."⁵ Geoffrey Wagner began by listing a long catalogue of "sick" incidents in Faulkner's earlier novels and noted that "perhaps it is to be expected that the narrator of these predicaments should turn in his old age to religious subject matter."⁶ Norman Podhoretz criticized A Fable for what it did not contain as well as what it did.⁷ Raymund Bernard, who also felt that Faulkner had written A Fable to repent for his earlier books, found it "remarkably uncomplicated," with its argument "specifically stated on page 68," and then proceeded to confuse the characters in his analysis.⁸

⁴Vivian Mercier, "A Search for Universality that Led too Far from Home," Commonweal, LX (August 6, 1954), 443.

⁵Ibid., p. 444.

⁶Geoffrey Wagner, "Faulkner's Contemporary Passion Play," The Twentieth Century, CLVI (December, 1954), 528.

⁷Norman Podhoretz, "William Faulkner and the Problem of War," Commentary, XVIII (September, 1954), 228.

⁸Raymund Bernard, "Book Reviews," Arizona Quarterly, X (Winter, 1954), 361. Mr. Bernard describes the funeral scene as "The Groom reappears (or does he?) horribly burned and crippled," and then admits he is baffled as to the identity of the character who comforts him. It is the Runner, not the Groom, who reappears, and it is the Quartermaster who comforts him.

Some sympathetic critics, such as Maxwell Geismar, saw A Fable as an important example of a shift in Faulkner's method. Although the book failed, it was an example of a shift "from realism to religious symbolism and mysticism."⁹ J. Robert Barth read A Fable as an indication of Faulkner's shift forward from the "negative critique" of the Yoknapatawpha cycle to a more positive attitude toward man. Barth also offered some excellent insights, such as noting the necessity to see the novel's dynamism in terms of a "tension of opposites." He also maintained that meaning emerged, not from the novel's resemblance to the Passion, but from the attitudes the two major characters represented.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Barth did not carry these insights as far as he might have, but he is nonetheless almost unique as an early reviewer in his reading. V. S. Pritchett also saw A Fable as an indication that Faulkner was emerging from "destructive despair to conscious affirmation." Pritchett then dubbed A Fable a "fantasy to a past dispensation," with Faulkner a poet-historian whose purpose in writing it was to "isolate and freeze each moment of

⁹ Maxwell Geismar, "Latter-Day Christ Story," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVII (July 31, 1954), 11.

¹⁰ J. Robert Barth, "A Rereading of Faulkner's Fable," America, XCII (October 9, 1954), 45.

the past." A Fable at the last was "a blast at the impersonality of modern life."¹¹

Carvel Collins¹² saw A Fable as no marked departure at all, noting that Faulkner had used the Passion as early as 1929 to inform the structure of The Sound and the Fury. Collins saw the essential conflict as a clash between Old Testament and New Testament values. He offers some pertinent observations about Faulkner's works as a whole and A Fable in particular. Faulkner's works have always suffered from summaries of them, he noted, and A Fable would suffer most of all owing to the Biblical parallels. Time has proved Mr. Collins right in this observation, but his own review, though sympathetic and helpful in some respects, is actually an oversimplification of the complex structure of A Fable.

The reviewer for Newsweek offered some helpful observations about the structure of A Fable, noting that the novel was structured around a series of conflicts between opposing ideas and characters. But the review is actually more misleading than helpful at the last, since the reviewer sees no

¹¹V. S. Pritchett, "Time Frozen," Partisan Review, XXI (September-October, 1954), 558.

¹²Carvel Collins, "War and Peace and Mr. Faulkner," New York Times Book Review (August 1, 1954), VII, 13.

"intellectual center" in the novel. It is "a complicated allegory . . . in a complicated private idiom," and the reviewer surrenders up some of his confusion when he notes that "The reader sometimes has the disconcerting feeling of standing in the middle of a tragic fun house with all the trick mirrors focusing on him at once."¹³ Carlos Baker saw a cosmic irony lying at the center of A Fable, since it states that man can refuse to fight, can "cry enough," but that by constantly refusing to exercise his power, he periodically rejects the very means toward his redemption.¹⁴ Paul Pickerel saw no powerful ironies at all in A Fable. The novel had "too many indicators of meaning" and as a result was "a bland book." Pickerel's reading may strike the reader as ironic, however, since he maintains that it says man must refuse paradise. "Man dare not will his own peace or he is turned out to stud."¹⁵ Pickerel offers another startling view. A Fable is about God, he states. God needs the incarnation and crucifixion to maintain His values, just as man needs to sacrifice for his values.

¹³William Faulkner, "After Ten Years A Fable," Newsweek, XLIV (August 2, 1954), 49.

¹⁴Carlos Baker, "Cry Enough!" The Nation, CLXXIX (August 7, 1954), 117.

¹⁵Paul Pickerel, "Outstanding Novels," Yale Review, XLIV (Autumn, 1954), x.

Gouverneur Paulding believed the focus of A Fable was man, not God, and the central problem of the novel was war. Faulkner asked pacifist questions, but with "unlimited understanding of those to whom they were put."¹⁶ Paulding ends by noting that ultimately all the characters in the novel "and all of us are Christ."¹⁷ He does not explain how this fusion comes about. Malcolm Cowley saw a dichotomy between feeling and logic operating structurally in the novel, but did not elaborate sufficiently upon this excellent insight to make it truly helpful as an aid in determining the novel's meaning. Instead his observation led him to see a contradiction in the novel concerning the Corporal's character.¹⁸

Certain critics approached A Fable from the standpoint of myth. Dayton Kohler noted that the novel presented Faulkner's private tragic vision of man, but it was not offered through a historical or theological interpretation. The total effect of A Fable was to create its own myth and offer

¹⁶Gouverneur Paulding, "A Note in Rejoinder," The Reporter, XI (September, 1954), 45.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁸Malcolm Cowley, "Faulkner's Powerful New Novel," New York Herald Tribune Books (August 1, 1954), 8. Cowley states, "War is wrong and men who refuse it are Christlike, but logic says that some wars are right or necessary, and men who refuse to fight them are fools. If the Corporal is a fool, he cannot be truly Christlike."

his view through a moral symbolism which described man's capacity for faith in a world of violence.¹⁹ Andrew Lytle linked A Fable to the Arthurian myths of Chrétien de Troyes, but ultimately felt it to be a failure because it was "a morality" and therefore out of place in the twentieth century. Lytle objected to the characterization; the characters were "too symbolic," and although he offered some observations on structure, seeing certain "trinitities" of character and action operating, Lytle actually was objecting to Faulkner's use of symbols.²⁰ Hugh Kenner used myth to roundly damn A Fable, the rest of Faulkner's works, and the use of myth in general. A Fable was the "reductio ad absurdam" of the "right" way to write a profound novel, owing to its "borrowed effects" from the Christian myth. Kenner was apparently most angry about Faulkner's "trashy rhetoric" and his ambivalent attitude toward Christianity as it displayed itself in A Fable.²¹

¹⁹Dayton Kohler, "'A Fable': The Novel as Myth," College English, XVI (May, 1955). Delmore Schwartz, William Faulkner's 'A Fable'," Perspectives U.S.A., X, (Winter, 1955), 126-136, comes to a similar view, that the novel is saying "hope." But Schwartz does not use myth as his approach--he compares the novel's method to opera.

²⁰Andrew Lytle, "The Son of Man: He Will Prevail," The Sewanee Review, LXIII (Winter, 1955), 126.

²¹Hugh Kenner, "Book Reviews," Shenandoah, VI (Spring, 1955), 44 ff.

Even three years after its publication A Fable was still able to evoke a moral outrage that frequently overrode critical objectivity. W. F. Taylor noted that A Fable cast a retrospective light over all of Faulkner's works. The central question it asks is "What is man?" and the answer is that he is most foul. Taylor saw the theme of A Fable as the "helpless bestiality of man," one ending where real Christianity begins, and ended by chastising Faulkner. Referring obliquely to the Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he noted that "You do not lift the heart of man by grinding his face in the dirt."²² Amos Wilder, a year after Taylor's article, wrote that A Fable provided an example of an earlier "uncorrupted" Christianity."²³

Certain critics focused primarily upon structural features in A Fable. As a result their findings are generally more pertinent than those who reacted personally to the more obvious features of the novel. James Hafley noted the basic antagonism of the Corporal and the Marshall, but immediately reduced this antagonism to a conflict between the

²²Walter F. Taylor, "William Faulkner: The Faulkner Fable," American Scholar, XXVI (Autumn, 1957), 473-477.

²³Amos Wilder, Theology and Modern Literature (Cambridge, 1958), p. 130.

man of faith and the man of reason. A Fable presented the failure of democracy, the "rational end of the Western tradition," and illustrated the necessity to "escape the crowd" either through martyrdom or the military.²⁴ A sounder critic, Ursula Brumm, noted that A Fable was constructed around slightly different anti-theses. The division between the meek of the earth and the rapacious but creative ones "who participate in the works of civilization" forms the essential conflict in the novel. Miss Brumm cites the long apostrophe to rapacity by the Quartermaster (pp. 259-260) as the focal point of A Fable, and maintains that this passage, which is a parody of Paul's message on "charity" in I Corinthians 13:8 ("Charity never faileth"), may be seen as the final indictment of civilization and all its works.²⁵ Faulkner, by equating Christianity with Civilization, has written a novel that is absolute heresy in Christian terms. The Corporal is

. . . not the son of God or the founder of Christianity, but Christ the archetype of man suffering, and of those who expiate the guilt of civilization by renunciation of the power and the privilege.²⁶

²⁴James Hafley, "Faulkner's 'Fable': Dream and Transfiguration," Accent, XVI (Winter, 1956), 13.

²⁵Ursula Brumm, "Wilderness and Civilization: A Note on William Faulkner," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, 1963, p. 125. Reprinted from Partisan Review, XXII (Summer, 1950), 340-350.

²⁶Ibid., p. 134.

According to Miss Brumm A Fable represents, not just the failure of Western rationalism, but the whole of civilization. Rapacity, to Miss Brumm, is the inevitable sin man commits in his civilizing efforts. Tradition carries the sin forward and history becomes a working out of the original guilt. Her analysis is interesting and important, since she attempts to place A Fable securely in the Faulkner canon, linking it to earlier expressions of the same theme such as "The Bear," Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, and others.

Although the passage she cites is an important one, it is not necessarily the key to the meaning in A Fable. Actually, it is only one of several apostrophes delivered by different characters in the novel. This passage is also delivered by the Quartermaster, who is not necessarily Faulkner's spokesman. In fact, the Quartermaster at the last is a character much chastened by his disillusion. The passage itself is ironic in tone, directed more at explaining the error in the Marshall's brother officers' reasoning than in explaining the total involvement of man. They had simply reasoned that the Marshall (then a Captain) had fled to his desert outpost to atone for a breach of family trust. The similarity to I Corinthians 13:8 is rather thin, being limited to a parallel to the opening sentence of verse 8. The remainder of the verse, devoted to false prophesy, is a much

more telling parallel with the Quartermaster's position in the novel, since he ends his apostrophe to rapacity by claiming that the Marshall is to be the saviour of man (p. 264). The idea that the "meek" are uncreative will be challenged in Chapter III when the nature of action is discussed in relation to the Corporal. Miss Brumm's analysis, sensitive and admirable though it is, presents a partial rather than a whole truth about A Fable.

Another thoughtful early criticism is Philip Blair Rice's review. Rice offers provocative and penetrating insights into the novel which unfortunately lead to the usual cul de sac rather than to a unified vision, because he seeks that vision using the wrong index to meaning. Rice, seeing A Fable as the most monumental task Faulkner had yet assumed, responded to it in like manner. It demands he states "a comparison with such awesomely mentionable names as Melville, Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and Mann."²⁷ A Fable does not live up to expectations for Rice, and fails to even render its explicit message, which to him is that message contained in the Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Rice believes, as do most of the critics cited above, that Faulkner's failure is essentially

²⁷Philip Blair Rice, "Faulkner's Crucifixion," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, 1963), p. 375. Reprinted from Kenyon Review, XVI (Autumn, 1954), 661-670.

an intellectual failure. He has failed to offer a coherent theology which to Rice is the implicit message of A Fable. Rice's real problem with A Fable is the apparent ambiguity of the "theological" elements. This basic ambiguity is what engenders his criticism of the novel, and he directs his criticism toward theological rather than artistic considerations. For Rice, Faulkner's religious commitment is vague, not orthodox, most likely "a non supernaturalistic rendering of the Christian symbolism" which offers "no theodicy and no other-worldly beatitude."²⁸ What shocks Rice is that the words of the Nobel Prize acceptance speech "Man will prevail" are uttered by the Marshall instead of the Corporal. To Rice this assignment is a "breathhtaking reversal," since the Marshall must be a figure of evil (Caesar or Satan) according to the reading Rice imposes on the novel. He notes also that the Corporal's entombment in the monument of the unknown soldier, although a sort of victory, is too heavily ironic to constitute a real victory for primitive Christianity, since the monument also glorifies nationalism. These and other inconsistencies lead Rice to the conclusion that three thematic resolutions of the implicit message of A Fable lie open to the reader.

²⁸Ibid., p. 377.

1. The ending is simply a monstrous irony which posits a defeat and possibly repudiates the Christian ethic.
2. The New Covenant has actually inverted the old, thereby calling for a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, exemplified by the duality of the Marshall's nature, being both God and Satan.
3. A statement of Barthian neo-orthodoxy which holds that the victory of Christ over Caesar is strictly out of space-time, is otherworldly, and therefore is not historical.²⁹

Rice sadly concludes that none of these solutions fits the novel well. One is inclined to agree with him.

Rice is not insensitive as a critic. His assessment is an intelligent, thoughtful, sympathetic attempt to wring clarity out of a difficult literary work. His failure to do justice to it results from his demand that the work accomplish more than it can on the terms he says it should function; he wants a neatly defined, unilinear expression of a rational theological credo of some sort, couched in the traditionally recognizable forms. Further, Rice would do away with one of the elements which makes A Fable unique in some respects--its attempt to express experience as ambiguous, multileveled, and unplanned rather than exhibiting any ontology to the intellect,

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 379-380.

whether of a theological, philosophical, or historical nature. This is not to say that the novel lacks any kind of "logic," but one will not find it by reference to theories of history or to Christian elements outside the novel itself, even though there are obvious referential counters connecting various incidents to recognizable elements of the Passion and historical incidents of World War I.

Olga Vickery,³⁰ a thoroughgoing, incisive, perceptive critic of Faulkner's works, in discussing A Fable is stimulating, concise, and comprehensive. Her commentary yields many valuable insights which are especially helpful in comprehending certain internal relationships. Her total view of the novel is unfortunately too limited. She sees the conflict drawn essentially in social-political terms, the primary opposition being the individual versus the state, each demanding what the other refuses to give. The Corporal is the individual who seeks freedom; the Marshall represents the state, which seeks to preserve the status quo, thus restricting freedom through its most massive weapon, war. Miss Vickery sees the conflict occurring on three levels. The Corporal represents two of them. First he is a secular

³⁰Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge, 1959).

Christ-figure who represents faith in God and man rather than in Church and tradition. The second level presents him as social man rebelling against paternal authority, as the human-moral agent rebelling against society's legalistic structures. The third level is demonstrated by the Groom in the "horsethief episode. Here the conflict is on the level of the natural man in his quest for physical freedom.

Miss Vickery maintains that Faulkner is squarely on the side of the Corporal and the Groom in A Fable. No basic flaw exists in society or man; the flaw exists in the institution that seeks to perpetuate itself through denying freedom and change. The Marshall is a mock savior who argues falsely in the climactic temptation scene with the Corporal,³¹ since to maintain that his conception of man is "real" does not necessarily mean that the Corporal's conception is false. The Marshall's denial of freedom removes the moral necessity of choice and human values become perverted. The Corporal's rebellion is a moral act. Rebellion becomes a moral necessity if human values are to be upheld. Miss Vickery maintains that Faulkner offers the message of the moral necessity of protest

³¹This scene (pp. 340-356), since it occurs on the Thursday night before the Corporal's "crucifixion," and resembles the temptation of Christ, shall hereafter for convenience be referred to as the "Maundy Thursday" scene.

on the three levels noted above.

These are excellent insights, and the three divisions she cites work neatly if one is willing to ignore certain elements of character and extract from each "level" only what one wishes to extract. For instance, if the Corporal is to function as the son rebelling against parental authority on the social level, is he not, as a secular Christ figure, rebelling against God also in his allegorical capacity? Do not the internal relationships of the characters remain intact on all levels? If the Marshall argues falsely in the temptation scene, if he is a mock-savior, is he not then fraudulent as God also? Or if he is Satan, then is not Satan the father of the Corporal-Christ?

Also, to maintain that the episode of the horse thievery is simply the attempt to maintain freedom through rebellion on the natural, physical level is an oversimplification. The Groom may utter profanities, but certainly the insights of Sutterfield relate to a concern with more than mere physical freedom. The obviously elevated language of this episode also must function as antithetic to the merely physical aspirations of the characters.

The Runner also does not fit into the neat schema Miss Vickery has drawn, and he is certainly a prominent rebel. He seems to be an amalgam of both the institutionalized

and individualized aspects of existence. Certain claims that Miss Vickery makes for particular characters are also not borne out in the total work. For instance, to bolster her contention that Faulkner is clearly on the side of the Corporal she notes that the Marshall is associated with the desert, the Corporal with the fruitful land. Actually, the Marshall is associated with the city more than the desert, and the Corporal more with the mountains than the plains. In fact, his "mountain peasant's face" is one of the points of contrast to the men around him. He is not associated with the fruitful earth until after his death, and then the ambiguous resurrection occurs.

Nonetheless, Miss Vickery's reading works well if one limits it to a purely social-political level. Certainly the war is a social evil and does not foster individual freedom, but if one does limit oneself to this level, one must allow the charges of those critics who maintain that Faulkner's knowledge of history and war is incredibly naive. On the natural (personal) level and the allegorical (religious) level, her analysis suffers. A Fable, in short, is more than a protest novel. Its ambiguities cannot be resolved as neatly as Miss Vickery would have it, nor can one ignore pertinent relationships on one level while stressing them on another and maintain that the total action as it relates to them is accounted

for. Even on the purely social level certain elements remain self-defeating, especially in determining the meaning of the last scene. The irony of the Corporal's being buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, within the context that she offers, is too profound, cuts too deep to be explained away as simply another irony in the novel. How does the Corporal function in this last, very important scene? One can only read the novel as a testament to despair if one limits the theme to the necessity of protest.

A most excellent, detailed, and coherent review is Henrich Straumann's. His analysis appeared as early as 1955.³² Published in Anglia magazine, it was not translated from the German until 1960, else many confused critics might have been spared much of their anguish and confusion. Straumann, approaching A Fable from a rather unusual viewpoint, maintains that one cannot get to the heart of the novel either by a clear-cut structural approach or by a radically symbolic interpretation. A Fable, he says, offers problems of mimesis, allegory, tone, and level of style, and, most of all, of a certain world view which must be analyzed and

³²Henrich Straumann, "An American Interpretation of Existence: Faulkner's 'A Fable'," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, trans. Grace A. Goodman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, 1963), 349-372. Reprinted from "Eine Amerikanische Seinsdeutung, Faulkner's Roman 'A Fable,'" Anglia, LXXIII, Number 4 (1955), 484-515.

understood in order to get to the essential meaning.

Straumann maintains that Faulkner's world view, which sees everything in the universe and man's nature in terms of a duality, is the primary ordering principle of A Fable.

All of the elements of the novel, owing to this essential duality, exist in diametric opposition. Each action has its opposite; the whole novel is structured around a complex of antagonisms existing in tension. War against peace, rapacity against passivity, the spiritual against the material, and the desire for freedom against the need for order are examples of the many tensions existing in opposition. Characters also express the inherent dualism in Faulkner's world view. The Corporal and the Marshall, the Sentry (Groom) and the Runner, and the individual character against the crowd in the group scenes are examples. The many arguments the characters engage in express the dualism on the dialectical level.

Faulkner's universe is a Manichean one, says Straumann, although good and evil are not clearly defined. In the inherent dualism lies the necessity for Faulkner's ironic view which "rests squarely on the knowledge of the inevitability of suffering and the conviction that mankind has the power to endure it."³³

³³Straumann, p. 355.

A Fable, says Straumann, combines the symbolic and the real, merging them on various levels and through different means. Among these are the "direct symbols" of the Passion and World War I, and lesser motifs such as food and drink and the medals, which take on symbolic significance through repetition in various contexts. A Fable is more than merely a fusion of the symbolic and the real; it is a masterwork, an example of a new form, what Straumann terms "symbolic mimesis." He maintains that this merger of the symbolic and concrete is an advance over the "unalloyed realism" of the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's. A Fable has its "intellectual magnetic field" suspended between Manicheanism, Stoicism, and Christianity, the irresolution again pointing to the inherent, irreconcilable duality in man and nature. Although this irreconcilable duality is what informs the tragic world view of the novel, this view does not allow for real despair because of the fact of "endurance." Upon "endurance" Straumann hangs his whole idea that A Fable does not posit despair.

Endurance is precisely the one single highest value that Faulkner does not question by a contrast to its own category. Endurance is hard but it is the solution of sensitive men in the incessant strife between opposing forces.³⁴

³⁴Ibid., p. 371.

But this is not exactly the case in A Fable. The Marshall does posit an alternative in the "Maundy Thursday" scene when he replies to the Corporal's statement that man and his folly will endure.

"They will do more," the old general said proudly.
 "They will prevail." (p. 354)

Although endurance and prevailing are not exactly in the same category, within the context of the work they are seen in a relationship of opposition, at least in the sense of the passive and active nature of each. This point, not of major importance, points toward a larger view which I think Faulkner posits and which Straumann does not quite come up to in his analysis. I will discuss this larger view in Chapter II. Straumann skirts one of the knottier problems in the novel for such critics as Rice, who saw the "prevail" in the mouth of the Marshall as a repudiation of Christian values.

Besides having to sidestep this matter, Straumann at times offers qualitative judgments about the nature of certain scenes, which he does not demonstrate. An example is when he equates the tempting of the Federal deputy by the owner of the racehorse in the "horsethief" episode with the temptation of the Corporal in the "Maundy Thursday" scene. The parallel is a superficial one and to draw it is not important in itself, but in his comparison Straumann notes that "because of the

triviality of the object of the dispute everything has a level of style which keeps the reader amused." The object of the dispute in this case is the possible freeing of the "thieves" through the deputy's intervention, which the owner is trying to obliterate with money. The scene may have comic elements in it, as does the whole "horsethief" episode; but these do not render the episode trivial. The Federal deputy is actually closer to the Runner in his function than he is to the Corporal. Each character undergoes a conversion, the Runner's actually as a result of hearing the "horsethief" episode and reacting to the "thieves" in the same manner as the Federal deputy in the scene noted above. Straumann reads the whole "horsethief" episode as an example of the main theme in a lighter, humorous vein as against the spiritual, tragic mode of the main action. Straumann's concentrating on the elements he sees as the proper indicators of meaning instead of structure leads him to this conclusion, one I believe to be in error. There is little that is trivial in the "horsethief" episode if we consider it related structurally to the main action, which I shall do in Chapter IV when the larger structural pattern will be discussed.

Straumann's assessment of certain characters and incidents is in error. He sees the young pilot Levine as an example of a good man, who, while enlisting "out of deepest

conviction," fails owing to the duality of experience. Levine does not exhibit this depth, and to read his suicide as "evil emerging from good" is stretching the case to fit the contention. Straumann also sees the priest in this light, but one must own that there is more than a shade of duplicity about the priest. The Runner, who should be fertile ground for exploration within the terms Straumann sets, is strangely ignored.

Finally, although Straumann's analysis is a most excellent one, I do not agree with his conclusions. His insight into the antagonistic forces existing in a tension as a central structuring element is most helpful in seeing a complex structure in terms of internal relationships, but his interpretations of the final meanings of A Fable are in error owing to what I believe is a misconception of Faulkner's world view. The idea of a clear opposition of forces, always joined and pointing up an inherent duality in both nature and man, is not necessarily the case in A Fable, as the Marshall explicitly points out to the Corporal in the "Maundy Thursday" scene, when he refers to himself and the Corporal as "two articulations" of inimical conditions. He goes on to say,

No, they are not inimical really, there is no contest actually; they can even exist side by side together in this one restricted arena, and could and would, had yours not interfered with mine. (p. 348)

Nothing in the novel demands that the Marshall's statement be

interpreted as a lie. That A Fable's action regarding the conflicts posits a duality is true up to a point, but that one may posit what amounts practically to an eschatology on the basis of what occurs in the novel is questionable. Nothing in its structure demands that the contestants be joined always and for all time. Straumann's analysis does not work when he attempts to define what the "world view" of Faulkner is. But although I disagree with Straumann's definition of Faulkner's "world view," I find his analysis to be most valuable at this point since I believe that one must assess and attempt to define Faulkner's "world view" in order to see the true structural dynamics operating in A Fable. What his "world view" is, though, can be pinpointed more precisely than Straumann's definition, and will constitute the major portion of the following chapter. Straumann's analysis has been valuable in other ways. His seeing the novel in broader terms than a strict morality based on Christian-humanist virtues offers a freedom to the reader that allows for broader speculation and frees the novel from some of the strictures certain critics have placed upon it. He is also correct in seeing the novel structured around particular elements existing in opposition and parallel, although I do not believe that the cited oppositions and parallels are necessarily the correct ones. Nevertheless, Straumann's

early reading is far above any other criticism offered at that time. His example of freedom of inquiry, unrestricted by preconceived traditional rationales of a historical, moral, or theological nature, has allowed my own inquiry a wider range.

Finally, we may consider an analysis that is undoubtedly the most comprehensive, and, I believe, authoritative reading of A Fable to date, that offered by Sylvan Schendler.³⁵ He exhibits a knowledge of the work that no critic has equaled, and his sensitive appraisal is an admirable addition to Faulkner criticism. Schendler sees the novel as a morality, directly concerned with salvation. The novel is structured essentially around the larger myth of the Passion, but the ultimate focus becomes centered on the Runner, who, Schendler maintains, represents man at his highest moral capabilities. He maintains that Faulkner has used the myth of the Passion ironically to point up the action taking place, but that Faulkner ultimately pushes past his description of the moral condition of man to posit an ethical absolute that transcends all of the action presented in A Fable. Schendler links Faulkner's attitude to the ideas of Karl Jaspers, placing Faulkner generally

³⁵ Sylvan Schendler, "William Faulkner's 'A Fable,'" Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1956.

in the company of "existentialist" approaches to existence. The ironic use of the Passion story serves to point up the fact that man must redeem himself; Faulkner disallows any supernatural redemption, and man must act in the face of a universe without hope, must act despite inevitable defeat, and often must act against the will of the crowd. Schendler, like Straumann, believes that there is an inherent duality in man and nature, and no moral act can do anything to change this intrinsic condition. The absolute ethic is one that is directly linked to the necessity of freedom. Man must act to ensure freedom; choice is the sine qua non of humanity.³⁶ This allows Schendler to posit clear-cut delineations of good and evil, even though a duality exists in man and nature. The military and all connected with it are evil because they, denying human freedom, thus deny the possibility of moral responsibility in their denial of choice. Schendler comes very close to Olga Vickery's interpretation here, when he maintains that within this context, and it is the inevitable context, the only moral act is rebellion. Rebellion becomes a moral necessity. Schendler, describing Faulkner's vision as ultimately transcending the ironies presented in the book, sees that Faulkner's tragic vision is presented in dialectical

³⁶Ibid., p. 13.

context. Schendler's description becomes a bit confusing at this point since there is apparently no resolution to the dialectic. A cycle of recognition of evil, revolt, defeat, and renewed revolt creates a tragic context in the implied synthesis of the warring factions, a synthesis which may be seen as a possible moral resolution of a higher order. Yet the impossibility of attaining the transcendent resolution is what apparently gives the conflict tragic dimensions.

Schendler divides the novel into four major sections. Chapters 1-5 offer opposing themes in terms of the Christian myth in opposition to the war. Chapter 6, which is mainly concerned with the "horsethief" episode, is an allegorical treatment of the ideas contained in Chapters 1-5. Chapter 7 (the Marshall's background, the meeting with the women) and the first three parts of Chapter 8 (the second mutiny and barrage, Levine's suicide, and the Quartermaster's confrontation with the Marshall when he offers his resignation) complete the theme of the opposing forces and posit the basis for the last section. The remainder of Chapter 8 (the "last supper" scene, the "Maundy Thursday" scene, Gragnon's murder) and Chapters 9 (the Corporal's "crucifixion" and "resurrection") and 10 (the final "Tomorrow" section) are an ironic treatment of the Christian myth which posits the ethic Schendler sees contained in the transcendence of these very ironies.

Schendler uses mainly the "existentialism" of Karl Jaspers to explain the ethic, the insights of John Arthos on the use of the comic in myth and ritual to explain the juxtaposition of the comic with the "sacred" in the last section, and the archetypal symbolism of Maud Bodkin to explain the function of characters, since all, to Schendler, are mainly "moral counters" in the morality. A Fable, Schendler says, at the very last denies orthodox Christian ideas of a supernatural redeemer, opens the reader to new possibilities of salvation through its use of the comic and sacred, and through its elements of ritual, myth, humor, and irony offers a total tragic vision of man which posits an ethic of action in the face of inevitable defeat, and which transcends the very ironies the novel spends so many pages describing as part of the definition of existence.

Noting again that his work is by far the best, most careful, and comprehensive that has been done, and again acknowledging its excellence, I must disagree on some basic points with Schendler's interpretation. First, I believe his division of the conflicting elements into a clearly delineated demarcation of good and evil is unsatisfactory. There are too many contexts within the novel where actions have more than one possible "moral" interpretation. His cumbersome handling of the thief LaPin as both collaborator

with and active opponent of evil within the same context is a good example of this. Action itself is not as simple in nature as Schendler would have it. Relegating the Corporal's act to one of lesser magnitude simply because the Runner has the men move out of the trenches does not seem to be a true assessment of these two characters' actions in relation to each other. The nature of action is more complex than mere passivity or activity; thus the Corporal remains, for me, the center of the whole complex of attitudes he represents rather than the Runner; the latter I see more in relation with the Quartermaster, with whom he is joined at the end. The other characters also--the Quartermaster, the Groom (whom I definitely do not see as an Anti-Christ), Levine--all function differently for me, owing mainly to a further ramification I find in the nature of action, an explanation of which will form part of Chapter III, which is devoted to defining what the Corporal represents and how he functions in the novel.

Schendler's division of the novel into the four major sections is generally insightful, but is posited upon different premises than mine. The total structure which emerges from his divisions is less coherent than mine, since his is formed on considerations less structurally concrete than mine. To see the whole last portion of the novel as subsumed under an ironic treatment of the Christian myth functions well

enough, but is less specific than to see the various episodes linked together through a structuring criterion based on parallels and contrasts of a particular cycle of action.

I disagree also with his interpretation of the function of the "horsethief" episode. He sees it as an allegory of the main allegory. This reading is rather remote from the very quality the "horsethief" episode seems to display in contrast to the main action. The "horsethief" episode appears, at least on the surface, to be closer to "reality" than the main action rather than two removes from it, even though it contains certain elements which are far from "real" in the sense of a naturalistic rendering of experience.

In pushing the action of A Fable beyond a description of the human condition and into the ethic of action leading to salvation, Schendler develops a strained interpretation in order to maintain its consistency. For this reason he claims that the ethic "transcends" the very ironies which all of the action describes, a transcendence which is nowhere apparent in the action of the novel itself, but which must be inferred by the reader from the work as a whole.

Other points of departure between Schendler's reading and mine will be noted later. Overall his analysis has been helpful in two ways. His work displays a working standard of scholarship toward which to aim, and his differing views

have aided me in clarifying my own. My view is perhaps best described as different in relation to his. His treatment is coherent and meaningful in its totality, and enriches and clarifies much of what was deemed obscure, inadequately conceptualized, and meaningless in a novel which deserved better treatment. His view posits a truth; mine will, I hope, simply posit another, different truth which may also be contained within the covers of A Fable.

CHAPTER II

THE "DEEP STRUCTURAL DIALECTIC"

The order of intellect and the order of morality do not exist at all, in art, except as they are organized in the order of art.

Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery, The World We Imagine (New York, 1968), p. 10.

Those critics who see A Fable as an allegory of the Passion or as a humanist-pacifist novel may point easily to many seeming inconsistencies and failures of structure and meaning. The very ambiguities that exist in the novel attest to "failure" if one is attempting a clean-cut definition of a philosophical or theological position. In the sense of structure these critics demand, regardless of their differing viewpoints (the war or the Passion), A Fable is, to both factions, essentially a conceptual failure, an intellectual failure. To them Faulkner's book seems flawed, or at best incomplete; he has attempted a novel outside his bailiwick, one which, obviously, by its very subject matter invites comparison with other "epic" novels, and has come a

cropper because he has attempted to deal with problems outside the limits of his powers. Faulkner, most maintain, is a consummate craftsman within the limits of the Yoknapatawpha experience, one which he understands, but he should deal only with this concrete fictional world. He should remain outside the heady abstract areas where only theologians, philosophers, historians, and critics should tread without fear.

I disagree with these critics. I believe, along with Mr. Schendler and Mr. Straumann, that A Fable is not a conceptual failure. My conclusion, derived from quite different evidence than theirs, points to further considerations that are quite different from theirs, especially in terms of thematic resolution. The intellectual grounding of A Fable can be restricted to a much more precise and coherent area than the eclectic existential gleanings of Schendler's ethic (attractive and well-presented though it be), or the Manichean-Stoic-Christian suspension of Straumann. I believe the basis for the oppositions which form the "dialectical" structure of A Fable may be found for the most part in the writings of Henri Bergson, specifically in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,¹ a title which itself suggests a dialectic.

¹Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (New York, 1935).

The two sources are, quite simply, the intellect and the intuition--two basic approaches to existence which form the substructure of all the warring oppositions in A Fable. This very basic opposition, which is the outcome of two views emanating from the same source, Bergson's elan vital, undergirds every conflict which forms the surface texture of A Fable. For the purposes of clarity I shall term it the "deep structural dialectic" to differentiate it from many of the more apparent conflicts which occur in the novel.

I wish to stress at this point that I believe A Fable is a fable without a strict moral--it is more descriptive than prescriptive. It is essentially a description of two opposing sets of moralities shown in their complex interactions both ideally and historically. Failure to realize this point is what causes much of the confusion of many of the critics who demand a much more cogent argument by Faulkner to support their ethical view, whether it focuses on Christianity or pacifism. While this conclusion may seem less palatable for those requiring poetic justice or established morality in fiction, it is nonetheless testament to the high degree of sophistication of Faulkner's world view, a world view shaped considerably, I believe, by the sophistication of Bergson's ideas on morality and religion, especially as they appear in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion.

To state that all the conflicts emanate from this basic opposition of intellect and intuition may seem overly simple as an explanation of the complex action of A Fable, but further inquiry will demonstrate that it is simple in some respects yet complex in others. It is simple in that it admits a resolution or "synthesis" which is less complex than Schendler's, since it merely describes a condition instead of forcing through to an ethic which must "transcend" (i.e., "deny") the very ironies the novel spends so much time describing. It is less complex yet more dynamic than Straumann's eclectic, suspended, tripartite stasis. Its focus is also more precise than either of these two admirable critics allow. The ultimate resolution of theme in A Fable rests upon a great complexity which is contained within Bergson's view of the essential opposition of the intellect and intuition as sources for morality and religion, because from this view Bergson draws his conceptual categories of forces: the intellect, with its concomitant focus upon the closed society, embraces static religion, abstraction, civilization, and mechanism; in opposition is the intuition with its open society, dynamic religion, concrete experience, human society, and mysticism. Bergson's conception of the "dialectic" and Faulkner's dramatization of it lie below the "wars" in A Fable, and the essential conflict is not New Testament Christianity

against Old Testament orthodoxy, nor Christ against Caesar, nor the apostolic church against the institutionalized church, nor war against peace, nor a projected humanism against a traditional transcendent super-being. It is a more simple yet more profound opposition which may manifest itself in any of these more apparent conflicts. Indeed, most of the above-mentioned "conflicts" are not real conflicts at all, but would fall within one of these two basic oppositions, the intellect, since most would be subsumed under static religion.

The essential opposition² of intuition and intellect as a means of ordering and giving meaning to the human condition penetrates to the heart of A Fable and encompasses every ramification of the conflicts which appear upon the surface.

Some clues to the broad intellectual basis and, in a larger sense, to the whole intellectual environment within which A Fable may be read, occur in a conversation between Faulkner and a young Frenchman, Loic Bouvard, at the Princeton

²The opposition in one supreme sense is fused in the concept of the elan vital, Bergson's closest approximation of God, since both forces emanate from the elan vital.

Inn on November 30, 1952. Faulkner happened to be passing through the city, and a mutual friend arranged the interview for Bouvard, who was studying for his Ph.D. in Political Science at Princeton. The atmosphere was informal and conducive to candor, but Bouvard noted that Faulkner was always careful, in fact deliberate, in answering his questions. The conversation finally became centered upon Camus and Sartre, when Bouvard informed Faulkner that many of the young people in France were supplanting a faith in God with a faith in man, obviously a reference to the atheistic existentialism of these two writers. Faulkner's reply is more pertinent than is apparent at first.

"Probably you are wrong in doing away with God in that fashion. God is. It is He who created man. If you don't reckon with God, you won't wind up anywhere. You question God and then you begin to doubt, and you begin to ask Why? Why? Why?--and God fades away by the very act of your doubting him."³

But he immediately qualified his statement.

"Naturally, I'm not talking about a personified or a mechanical God, but a God who is the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests in the eternity and in the now."⁴

Bouvard, apparently reacting to the last clause, asked him if he were thinking of the God of Bergson. "Yes, a deity very close to Bergson's," Faulkner replied, then added,

³Loic Bouvard, "Conversation with William Faulkner," Modern Fiction Studies, V (Winter, 1959-1960), 362.

⁴Ibid., p. 362.

"Listen, neither God nor morality
can be destroyed."⁵

Oddly enough, Bouvard immediately relegated this somewhat complex affirmation to what he termed "Faulkner's deism," and went on to Faulkner's ideas on art. The date of Faulkner's conversation with Bouvard is perhaps more important than the total content, since Faulkner was undoubtedly engrossed in writing A Fable at the time, and some questions which bear directly upon elements which are part of A Fable will certainly reflect those ideas which he incorporated into the work. Also, since he was not being questioned directly about A Fable (it would not be published for nearly two years), Faulkner's answers were less likely to be defensive, as he undoubtedly was later to questions directly put about A Fable, and therefore, more candid. The mention of Bergson in relation to his ideas on deity, given freely while being questioned on broader topics than the novel itself, becomes very important in regard to A Fable.

One is perhaps not surprised that Bouvard was more interested in hearing Faulkner's ideas on man and art, since the interview did take place shortly after the Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and that speech's apparent humanism, plus the vogue at that time of "existentialism," would certainly

⁵Ibid., p. 362.

have exercised their influence upon a young French intellectual. What is surprising is the ease with which Bouvard reduced Faulkner's statements about God to "Faulkner's deism," especially since Faulkner had immediately made it clear that he meant neither "a personified or a mechanical God." I shall attempt here to rectify an error in reaction to which Bouvard, as well as many later critics mentioned above, fell victim. For what Bouvard thought were separate and distinct categories were much more closely joined than he realized, were in fact in some ways practically fused. I mean the categories "man" and "god." It is my belief that Faulkner, like Bergson, is often speaking about one in terms of the other ("a god who is the most complete expression of mankind"), but only within the necessary limits of how they define each category. Faulkner is not so precise in A Fable as is Bergson in his Two Sources of Morality and Religion, but the resemblances are there.

Faulkner's library does not yield a much-thumbed copy of The Two Sources of Morality and Religion; nevertheless the hypothesis that Bergson's work forms the intellectual basis of A Fable remains valid, since no other works of Bergson are recorded there either, and their availability to him need not be restricted to Faulkner's personal library. Simply noting that Faulkner has never been reticent in acknowledging Bergson's influence upon him, I shall proceed upon the assumption that he

was aware of Bergson's ideas on the "vital impetus" ("Yes, a deity very close to Bergson's"), and all the ramifications thereof, even though he may not have come across them neatly compressed within the covers of the work to which I shall refer. A comparison of Bergson's The Two Sources of Morality and Religion with A Fable will show parallels both in subject matter and language which suggest more than mere coincidence.

We can begin with a brief overview of Bergson's work. Bergson's ideas on morality are grounded in his concept of "creative evolution," an idea associated with the action emanating from his essential conception of the elan vital. He believes that life is "a certain effort to obtain certain things from raw matter"⁶, and that "life" propels itself through matter and attempts to wrest form from it. Starting with the "fact" of life as experience, Bergson disallows that science can offer a physico-chemical explanation of life itself, let alone its evolution. He rejects Darwin's natural selection as an explanation of the ascension of organisms into higher forms, because this notion necessitates accident by "invoking a combination of chance with chance, of attributing to no special cause the direction taken by

⁶Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 108.

life."⁷ Life has occurred in certain definite directions, he asserts. Lamarck is also rejected because to assume that evolution is all matter of adjustment to environmental pressure would force a conclusion that embodies the transmission of learned characteristics, a situation that evidence disallows. Bergson explains evolution, and ultimately morality, as a result of an "inward impulse that passes from germ to germ through individuals, that carries life in a given direction towards an ever higher complexity."⁸ Since evolution is not explainable by mechanical action of causes, no scientific explanation is possible, and thus exists the "mysterious character of the operation of life." One's knowledge of evolution actually depends upon whether one views it from the standpoint of intelligence or intuition.⁹ Viewed from the "outside," the intelligence, evolution appears to be a marvelously coordinated complexity of innumerable adjustments of innumerable elements, and thus a preconceived plan is implied. Viewed from the "inside," the intuitive focus, evolution would appear as simply a reaction to a particular

⁷Ibid., p. 102.

⁸Ibid., p. 103.

⁹This point becomes important when one considers the "resolution" of the action in A Fable.

obstacle to be overcome, an action complete and entire of itself. In retrospect there appears to be plan (the intellect can only posit from what has occurred, noting countless disparate acts), but the intuition sees only the immediate obstacle to be overcome as a simple undivided act.

Bergson uses the example, among others, of the simple movement of one's hand swinging in an arc; from the outside it appears to be a series of infinite points adjacent to one another along a finite curve; felt from the inside it is simply an indivisible act. In order to see evolution completely, one must employ both the outer and inner perspectives. This double vision is what one must employ at the last in viewing A Fable in order to see its total meaning as a unified expression of the human condition. Bergson's "elan vital" allows this two-fold approach to conceptualizing evolution, for when one allows that an impetus toward a complete creation occurred at each instance of creation (the indivisible act as seen through the intuition), and then perceives through intelligence each particular creation in the light of the complexity of all forms, one may view evolution as a "series of sudden leaps, and the variation constituting the new species as made up of a multitude of differences complementing one another."¹⁰ Thus, while the

¹⁰Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 105.

vital impulse does not exhibit a great overall plan¹¹ there is yet a "will" present in each individual creation, since each individual creation is the end result of a particular problem to be overcome. This action causes variety among the species, allows the sudden leaps which make special, exceptional individuals who will open new avenues toward the realization of existence, and who will constitute another and larger "morality" than that offered by nature and society up to that point. In A Fable the Corporal is the result of a "sudden leap" in the species' development.

This knowledge allows us to posit the Corporal's view of existence in A Fable in opposition to the view offered by the Marshall. The latter represents the historical, intellectual view which has its basis in the morality the world has known up to the date of their confrontation. Furthermore, this knowledge allows us to reconcile the apparent ambiguity and irresolution of the final scenes in A Fable, in determining the efficacy of the Corporal's mission and the condition of mankind.

The ramifications of Bergson's ideas on evolution penetrate even further into the structure of A Fable. For

¹¹ Neither Bergson nor Faulkner offer either a theology or an eschatology, although satirical projections of the war's supposed end are offered by the Runner, Gragnon, and the Marshall in A Fable.

Bergson the social order is biologically bound up in evolution, and thus morality has a biological basis, but biology for Bergson includes much more than the merely physical.

"Natural morality," here equated with instinct, is directed toward the social to the complete subservience of the individual. In fact, each individually created object exhibits by its very cellular structure the natural bent of life toward a social form.

Things take place in higher organisms as if the cells are joined together to share the work between them, the bent is toward social form.¹²

Nature tends in its very essence toward the restriction of the individual in favor of the group. Bergson expands upon this idea in his consideration of the results of the two primary lines of animal evolution: the instinct and intelligence. Instinct terminated in the insect ant hill and hive, which are perfect examples of the closed society, a purely instinctive order in which the members are welded to their tasks by their very biological structure. Man, the other terminus, exhibits a more complex attitude, for he is both intelligent and social. Intelligence, which began in the "simple reality" of the elan vital as another view of instinct (which was the other view of intelligence, as residual

¹²Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 107.

aspects of each in all species demonstrate), had within it the inventive and the individuated--in short, the possibility of choice.

At this point one might assume that since instinct ended in the completely closed insect society, the intelligence, manifesting itself in man and implying choice, should naturally lead man in the opposite direction of polar evolution, namely toward the completely open society and the autonomous individual. This however, is not the case. A gigantic paradox occurs in the possibility of an antagonism between the elan vital, which is life in its most basic aspect, and the intelligence which is one of its expressions. Intelligence allows reflection and the consciousness of an ego instead of the automatic response of the insect. Herein lies the danger, because the intelligence might seek an egoistic path inimical to the group through its very inventiveness and ability to choose. Nature which always tends toward the retention of life in Bergson's terms, the social order, had to devise some way of maintaining each individual within the social framework. Nature managed this by a "mechanism" which seems abstract and particular, but which is actually biological and general at its base. This mechanism is the sense of moral obligation. Bergson, in describing how this condition occurred, also

described how this sense of obligation is felt within the closed society--society as we know of it to date, society as produced by the intelligence: civilization.

Nature, setting down the human species along the line of evolution, intended it to be sociable, in the same way as it did the communities of ants and bees; but since intelligence was there, the maintenance of Social life had to be entrusted to an all but intelligent mechanism: intelligent in that each piece could be remodeled by human intelligence, yet instinctive in that man could not, without ceasing to be man, reject all the pieces together and cease to accept a mechanism of preservation. Instinct gave place temporarily to a system of habits, each one of which became contingent, their convergence toward the preservation of society being alone necessary, and this necessity bringing back instinct with it. The necessity of the whole, felt behind the contingency of the parts, is what we call moral obligation in general.¹³

In a creature partly free, morality or obligation is the "virtual instinct," the biological compulsion behind every particular choice the intelligent individual must make. The deeper one delves beneath individual choices, the more general the ideal of obligation behind the choice becomes. Obligation, then, is the form necessity (instinct) assumes in the intelligent society, in order for the society to preserve itself. A Fable reflects the biological basis

¹³ibid., p. 47

for morality and presents the gigantic paradoxes which emerge in the interrelationship between the two opposing forces. It is worthwhile to note at this point that the opposition registered by the Corporal, who is the mystical, intuitive man, and who is biologically linked to the Marshall, represents the refinement of instinct--the other side of the biological basis for morality. Thus, instinct, before it can become intuition, must undergo a process of "refinement," actually a reversion to what it was before it became instinct. This point is important, I believe, because it contradicts some of the earlier conceptions of Faulkner's use of "primitives" as opposed to "puritans" in his novels. To see both essentially opposing "types" as emanating from the same source, both "evolving" along different lines, offers a more feasible framework within which to explain certain complexities of character and action which occur in Faulkner's novels. The intuitive approach to experience better explains the actions of certain characters like Ike McCaslin and the Corporal, rather than reducing them to "primitives" who operate without anything but a rather crude sense of "feeling." Many seeming antagonists in A Fable are not really antagonists at all when viewed under the concept of the closed society formed by the intelligence. The triumph of the Marshall at the end of A Fable, the reasoning and syntax of the

priest in his argument with the Corporal, the long apostrophe by the Quartermaster General, the relation of the crowd to the chief characters in the whole action surrounding the mutiny, are best explained by the fact that they are not really antagonistic to the war at all, but are bound by a sense of moral obligation to the group. The intelligent society counters what drives may be egotistical in the individual by this sense of moral obligation which manifests itself in particular choices, but the general obligation is fostered by the elan vital's "will" to preserve itself in the group. Intelligence is not completely at war with instinct; the civilized societies which emerge, while not insect-like, since man is not riveted to his position by his mental structure, remain for the most part closed societies through the biological necessity of a sense of moral obligation that instinct produces upon and behind intelligence. Bergson offers a concise summation of the closed society's biological origins.

Life is a certain effort to obtain certain things from raw matter . . . Instinct and intelligence, taken in their finished state, are two distinct means of utilizing a tool for this object; in the first case, the tool is part of the living creature, in the other, it is an inorganic instrument which man has had to invent, make and learn to handle.¹⁴

¹⁴ibid., p. 108.

Civilized societies are simply infinitely more complex tool-using groups than the insect societies, but the instinctive draw behind the individuals who compose them is still directed toward the group.

A closed society is the "natural" extension of the intelligence, and it is the world as we perceive it through our intelligence. All of the action of A Fable takes place within the context of a world which has been, and will more than likely continue to be, one vast closed society. Of course, not all segments of a closed society are equally stringent in their restrictions, as we shall see later when we break it down into its three major segments, the military, religious, and civil--which operate in A Fable.

Bergson noted that the intellect is a practical capacity in man. Although it loves abstractions, it nonetheless is directed toward the utilization of tools. Formal logic undergirds the technological triumph of civilized closed societies. But the intellect is static; it seeks unchanging structures such as logic and mathematics; it requires symbols, measurements, analysis, and here is the very reason why the intellect cannot conceive of the completely new and creative. Their radically different approaches to knowledge is one of the essential points of conflict between the Corporal and the Marshall, each functioning in

his representative role. Neither can possibly move the other in a particular direction, although the Corporal does not try.¹⁵ To achieve the completely new and creative, man must reimmerse himself in the elan vital. This is something few men have ever done, of course, since man's primary perception of the world as he knows it is his intelligence and

not through intelligence, at least not through intelligence alone could he do so; intelligence would be more likely to proceed in the opposite direction; it was provided for a definite object; and when it attempts speculation on a higher plane, it enables us, at the most, to conceive possibilities, it does not attain any reality.¹⁶

This is why the Marshall must see the Corporal's inclinations as other-worldly, "that heaven of man's delusion" (p. 354), rather than the concrete reality it is for the privates who gather around him. The intelligence is not equipped to incorporate the Corporal's "reality." The Corporal is actually closest to Faulkner's "most complete manifestation of mankind," but his is an intuitive, experimental condition that cannot

¹⁵This apparent passivity of the Corporal further links him to Bergson's conception of the mystic man, and will be discussed further in Chapter III.

¹⁶Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 201.

be neatly described in the terms of what we admire, because much of our admiration is conditioned by the symbolic projection of the closed society. The closed society is delineated in the three major segments noted above in A Fable, but the open society--the extension of the reality of the Corporal, is all embodied within him--it cannot be demonstrated neatly because it must ultimately push against the closed society, and must do so wearing the mask of the closed society. Herein lies the explanation for the use of the Christian symbols of the Passion.

The Marshall, who is also the Corporal's father, is the highest expression of the intelligence and all that it encompasses within the social sphere. He acts as focus for this role in several ways. The most obvious focus is his role as supreme general of all the forces, his less obvious status is as a parent, his least obvious position is as representative of the compelling force in what Bergson terms "static religion." The Marshall is authoritarian--he is man as both intelligent and social. The Marshall, almost pure intelligence, is passionless, disenchanted, rational always. The first description of him offers little physical detail; intelligence is emphasized.

. . . the slight grey man with a face wise, intelligent and unbelieving who no longer believed in anything but his disillusion and intelligence and his limitless power. (p. 13.)

One need merely compare this passage with the description of the Corporal which follows shortly to see the embryo of the later confrontation scene, and the differences which will emerge from that confrontation. The Corporal's description parallels that of the Marshall's. Both are riding in vehicles, both are flanked by subordinates, both run a gauntlet of noise, both are described in terms of facial characteristics which point, not to physical details, but internal character. Where the Marshall's description emphasized intelligence, the essential characteristic of the Corporal is his "understanding," his intuition. He had

a mountain peasant's face . . . a face merely interested attentive and calm, with something else in it which none of the others had; a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of compassion as if he had already anticipated without censure or pity the uproar which rose and paced and followed the lorry as it sped on. (p. 17)

One might also immediately note attributes here which would not normally fit the Christ figure were one attempting to read the scene as the representation of Christ being mocked. A Christ without compassion, without pity, is an inconsistency, but if one follows Bergson's definitions of the intuitive man acting at his best level, the inconsistencies dissolve.

A soul strong enough to make this effort would not stop to ask whether the principle with which it is now in touch is the transcendent cause

of all things or merely its earthly delegate. It would be content to feel itself pervaded, though retaining its own personality, by a being immeasurably mightier than itself. . . . it would give itself to society, but to a society comprising all humanity, loved in the love of the principle underlying it. The confidence which static religion brought to man would thus be transfigured, no more thought for the morrow, no more anxious heart searching; materially the object would no longer be worthwhile, and morally would take on too high a significance. Now detachment from each particular thing would become attachment to life in general.¹⁷

The "effort" referred to above is what Bergson terms an intensification of the intuition which consummates itself in action, for intuition "has become pure contemplation only through a weakening in its principle."¹⁸

One need only remember that A Fable begins in medias res. The essential action, the mutiny, has already taken place as the result of the Corporal's actions, actions involving a human society idea above and beyond any nationalistic considerations which are fostered by the war-making instinct. The Corporal's detachment is a part of the character of the progenitor of dynamic religion--not, let me stress, the codified gospels of Christianity. The "transfiguration of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 201, italics mine.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

static religion" is what occurs in the person of the Corporal. This and the Corporal's open society will be discussed later in the context of the large structure of A Fable; for the present we will continue to enlarge upon the many manifestations of the closed society in A Fable.

Closed societies seeking preservation are definitely self-centered and hierarchical, concerned with preserving the status quo. They inculcate and perpetuate morality by standardization, discipline, teaching and enforcing laws, codes, and by emphasizing ritual, duty, and obligation in connection with the symbols of respect which are legion in the closed society. All of these considerations emanate primarily from the intelligence, which loves abstraction, and the best laws and codes are those which are most abstract and general. One need only consider the "rhetoric" of war in this context to note how the military segment of the closed society are concerned with their code, and the ubiquitous application of "glory."

Faulkner presents the closed society in A Fable in three segments, the military, the religious, and the civil. Two of these segments he presents explicitly, offering example and detail, and one he treats implicitly by suggestion. The military, the most extreme example of the closed society, are treated in the most exaggerated terms. The citizenry,

the second segment, are treated with less exaggeration, but are nonetheless explicitly delineated in their role. The third level, the religious, causes most confusion among readers. In the case of the closed society, this religious segment is static religion. It is owing to the implicit rather than explicit treatment of this level that confuses many readers. Rather than augment a definition, Faulkner uses image structure and the implication of action played against an implied background (the "allegory" of the Passion) to demonstrate static religion. We must not forget that the Biblical counterparts to the action described in A Fable are not the opposite to the action portrayed--the gospels, in our context, are a part of organized, institutionalized, static religion--not the dynamic religion embodied in the person of the Corporal.

These three segments of the closed society have their focus and apex in the Marshall. In his person reside the highest gifts of power that the various segments of the closed society can offer. As military man he is the supreme generalissimo of all the forces.

. . . the lone grey man supreme, omnipotent and inaccessible behind the carved stone door and the sentries and the three symbolical flags of the hotel de ville, who dealt wholesale in death and who could condemn the whole regiment and miss its three thousand men no more from the

myriads he dealt in than he would miss the nod of his head or the reverse of the uplifted hand that would save them. (p. 124)

As civilian he is recipient of all that wealth and position and politics can offer. He was

. . . not even a golden youth: he was the golden youth. . . . He was not even a Parisian, but the Parisian, . . . a millionaire and an aristocrat from birth, an orphan and an only child, not merely heir in his own right to more francs than anyone knew save the lawyers and bankers who guarded and nursed and incremented them, but to the incalculable weight and influence of the uncle who was the nation's first Cabinet member, . . . and of the god-father whose name opened doors which . . . even that of a Cabinet Minister could not. (p. 247)

On the religious level his role becomes more ambiguous, owing mainly to the method Faulkner employs in presenting this level of the closed society. Many direct references are made in describing the Marshall in religious terms, which tend to fuse aspects of the other segments of the closed society, as when he is described at the military academy of St. Cyr as "a figure out of a stained-glass cathedral window set by incomprehensible chance into the breached wall of a fort " (p. 247). The locket he wears, which contains the pictures of his wealthy step-father and uncle, is referred to as his "crucifix " (p. 245). He is described in the passage cited above (p. 13) in terms resembling the awesome and

omnipotent powers of God. But in his "allegorical" role in reference to the resemblance of the action to the Passion, his position becomes ambiguous (is he God, Satan, or Caesar?) only if one demands that the allegory conform to traditional ideas of the Christian story. If one sees the whole idea of the Christian Passion as part of the institutionalized, codified, static religion, as opposed to the implied dynamic religion represented by the Corporal, much of the ambiguity dissolves, or at least becomes irrelevant in determining theme; because whether God or Satan, both of these aspects of traditional Christianity are equally opposed to what the Corporal represents in his person. The codified Judeo-Christian historical tradition, which is part of the closed society, has become intellectualized and made part of the vast complex of structures which perpetuates the society through the myth-making function.

A more relevant point for us to consider is that the closed society makes use of the codified "static religion" in maintaining its morality and preserving its institutions; and in a fixed religion, whether the Marshall is either pole, he is the extreme embodiment of that aspect, is the epitome of a "morality" engendered by a static religion which attempts to keep the group coherent through the sense of obligation it imposes. In this way the Marshall can act out of a sense of

duty, of morality, if you will, even though the action may appear to outrage our moral sense at times.

The military segment of the closed society are the most rigidly closed, and their sentiments best echo the extreme "morality" of the closed society. Their primary qualities are rigidity, a condition analogous to stasis, and their obsession with abstractions. They are constantly talking of glory, honor, and rules. In practice their actions may belie their words, but their belief in their moral commitment is unshakeable. They are wedded to their ultra-closed society.

All of the Marshall's subordinates are minor carbon copies of him, although none is as wise and farsighted as he is. From the Sergeant in the opening scene who

had looked at the anonymous denizens of the civilian world from the isolation, insulation, of that unchallengeable immunity, . . . himself and his interknit and interlocked kind in the impregnable fraternity of valor. (p. 10)

to the German general who is a monstrously vicious parody, a comically exaggerated grotesquerie of the military cliché, the military "fraternity" display the traits of rigidity, mechanical response, and concern with their own abstract concepts of what constitutes the highest order of action for man. But nowhere are they portrayed as stupid. Nowhere do they merely blunder about unknowing.

The lower orders of the military often outwardly exhibit insect-like traits in their mechanical reactions, but they still reflect, cogitate. They are creatures both intelligent and social in the Bergsonian sense; they strive for personal glory, always within the rigid, strict framework which they have accepted as their code. No one can think of himself beyond his group. When their thoughts verge upon Bergson's concept of a human society, as opposed to a social society, these thoughts are tinged with fear and a vague feeling of sinfulness, as the reaction of the sergeant illustrates.

Looking about at the waiting faces . . . it seemed to him with a kind of terror that it was himself who was the alien, and not just alien, but obsolete; that on that day twenty years ago, in return for the right and the chance to wear on the battle-soiled breast of his coat the battle-grimed symbolical candy-stripes of valour and endurance and fidelity and physical anguish and sacrifice he had sold his birthright in the race of man. (p. 10)

The gamut of the military society is run; at one end are the lower orders, who are civilians recruited into and dehumanized by the military and the ward so that they are like sleepwalkers looking back across nightmares " (p. 18). In the middle are the lower ranks of noncommissioned officers, who all react much the same as the sergeant above. At the other end the commissioned officers, who each espouses practically

identical ideas about man as Man, but who never approach in stature the cosmic ultra-humanness (as opposed to the Corporal's broad human-ness) of the Marshall. Gragnon, the division commander whose regiment mutinied, is a good case in point. Many critics find Gragnon an attractive figure owing to his honesty, his dedication to his code, and his inflexible courage, but I find him an extremely ludicrous figure also for these very reasons. Gragnon is the perfect embodiment of a creature "created" by the society for its needs. He is an orphan and "it seemed to him that he had been intended by fate itself to be the perfect soldier; pastless, unhampered, and complete " (p. 23). His rigidity, his unswerving demand that his and the division's "record" be vindicated, while it is admirable in one sense, becomes downright ridiculous at the last. His conversation with his aide, upon learning of the quietus the mutiny has caused in the war, attests to his inverted egotism.

"Is it possible?" the aide said. "Do you really contend that they are stopping the war just to deprive you of your right, as commander of the division, to execute that regiment?" (p. 41)

His outrage upon learning that the attack had been destined to fail is certainly justified, even within the military code, but he accepts his sacrificial role as long as the rules are kept. It is only when the result will be falsified

that he rebels against his execution. His insistence upon what punishment should be meted out to the men exceeds all expectations. By demanding that the entire regiment be shot he has not measured adequately the necessary means of vindicating his record, even according to military standards, nor has he gauged the extent of the mutinous act's consequences. Nor does he care. His mind runs in linear fashion, simply repeating his request to the Marshall, regardless of the futility of expediency of the act.

"The whole regiment," the old marshall said . . . not just this ringleader and his twelve disciples. By all means, the nine of them who are Frenchmen, yet who still permitted themselves to be corrupted." "There was no ringleader" the division commander said, harsh and rigid. "The regiment mutinied."

"The regiment mutinied," the old marshall repeated again. "And suppose we do. What of the other regiments in your division, when they learn of it?"

"Shoot them," the division commander said.

"And the other divisions in your corps, and the other corps on either side of you."

"Shoot them," the division commander said, and stood again inflexible and composed. . . . (pp. 233, 234)

But Gragnon is not stupid. His inflexibility is simply part of his makeup as a military man. His intelligence is acute. His mistakes occur owing to his incomplete knowledge of the total situation, but his sharp, precise

assessments of the situations about which he has complete knowledge never diminish. He assessed the inevitability of the attack's failure almost immediately upon reviewing its chances. He sees through much of the maneuvering of the military men. His perception never diminishes, although it gets distorted at times by his emotions. Even in the grotesque execution scene, Faulkner emphasizes Gragnon's conscious, calculating awareness of his situation.

the eyes open, looking up at Buchwald then watching the pistol as Buchwald raised it and snapped the safety off again, the eyes not afraid, not even despaired: just incorrigibly alert and rational, so alert in fact as apparently to have seen the squeeze of Buchwald's hand as it started. . . .
(p. 380)

The military, though they may act mechanically, do not act instinctively; they are ultimately rational. Bergson noted that the closed society, being the extension of the intelligence, loved abstractions, and its morality was taught, and the more abstract the rule the better it served the purpose of preserving the society. The military men's love of ab-
/
 stractions is their highest concern. They constantly worry about their honor, their glory, their record; all of this molds their view of mankind. Various levels of insight are offered by the various officers. All of these in some sense prefigure the Marshall's climatic scene with the Corporal,

but they also present the traits that intelligence would display, according to Bergson. An example would be the corps commander (Lallemont), who rides with Gragnon to Chaulnesmont for the latter's court martial. Gragnon is bitterly but hopefully contemplating the possibility of the defeat turning into a major disaster, thereby negating Bidet's getting his marshall's baton (the reason for the attack in the first place). Lallemont, in refuting Gragnon's contention, admonishes Gragnon's incapacity to understand the nature of man or failure. He tells Gragnon that he didn't really fail, and it didn't matter whether the attack failed either, because

"The Boche doesn't want to destroy us, any more than we would want or could afford, to destroy him. Can't you understand: either of us, without the other, couldn't exist? That even if nobody was left in France to confer Bidet's baton, some Boche would be selected, even if there remained only one private. . . . (p. 28)

And from this standpoint, the corps commander offers his view of man.

It is man who is our enemy, the vast seething moiling spiritless mass of him. Once to each period of his inglorious history, one of us appears with the stature of a giant, suddenly and without warning in the middle of a nation as a dairymaid enters a buttery, and with his sword for paddle he heaps and pounds and stiffens the

malleable mass and even holds it
cohered and purposeful for a time.
But never for always, nor even for
very long. . . . (p. 30)

The moral standpoint contained within this statement aside from its simplistic Carlylean attitude and its odd simile for the great man, echoes very closely the attitudes which Bergson claims the intelligence fosters. Almost none of the statements made by the military men expresses coherently a concern for particular persons. Their talk is of "Man" in general terms. All are concerned with history as "record"; all extract and symbolize experience as though it were something which could be dissected and examined, made coherent, pounded, and shaped with tools so that purpose could emerge from it. In A Fable, one must accept the "simple reality" of the Corporal's presence in opposition to all of this.

The most extreme case of the application of intelligence to the manipulation of men at the expense of their humanity is represented by "Mama Bidet," the group commander who had ordered the doomed attack. Bidet, earlier in his career,

had brought into the field life of that regiment of desert cavalry something of the monastery, something of the cold fierce, blinkless intolerant glare which burns at midnight in the dedicated asepsis of clinical or research laboratories: that pitiless preoccupation with man, not as an imperial implement, . . . not even in fact as a functioning animal, but as a functioning machine in the same sense that the earthworm is. (p. 51)

The whole focus of Bidet's suprahuman intelligence is actually a fusion of three aspects of the intelligence according to Bergson. In his view of man as a sort of biological machine, Bidet focuses on Bergson's insistence on biology as the basis for all psychology. In the fusion of the machine with this view, Bidet echoes the overview of the world which the intelligence fosters, the mechanistic as against the mystic. In abstracting experience he represents the essentially symbolic nature of intelligence. Bidet, in the last scene between him and Gragnon in the ludicrous setting of the boudoir, is still unabashedly unaware of the military abstractions as he practically assigns Gragnon to certain death by forcing him to undergo court martial at Chaulnesmont. In explaining away Gragnon's "failure," he feels no compunction in assessing Gragnon's position in the eternal scheme of things as viewed by the military society.

"The three stars which Sergeant Gragnon won by his own strength, with help from man nor God neither, have damned you, General. Call yours martyrdom for the world; you will have saved it. . . ." (p. 54)

When Gragnon asks what will happen to him, Bidet answers, "I don't know. It will be glorious " (p. 54).

The outcome of Gragnon's trip, actually far from glorious, is "glorious" in the way it will be recorded in the annals of military history, since the execution was

designed to make him a hero.

Residual instinct, intelligence, and mechanism come together in Bidet's view of man. It would be an error to conclude that Bidet acts out of a commitment to evil. His view is not so brutal as it is a-human. Bidet, aside from his personal ambition (the mark of the intelligent being, also), is still primarily interested in how to maintain control of men; his reduction of man to the "various vents and orifices" of which he is composed, is an attempt at reduction to the most basic necessities upon which to rest power. By declaring that an army--a group, not individual men--is "no better than its anus," Bidet is merely symbolizing experience as it occurs among men en masse. It would be erroneous to assign to Bidet an active love of evil; he is merely acting out of a moral commitment to a society whose obligations he has accepted. His explanation of the origins of war to Gagnon is couched in moral-sounding truisms.

it wasn't we who invented war, . . . it was war which created us. From the loins of man's furious ineradicable greed sprang the captains and the colonels to his necessity; we are his responsibility; he shall not shirk it.
(p. 54, italics mine)

Bergson's explanation of the origins of war closely resembles Bidet's.

Now we have pointed to certain features of natural society. Taken together, they

compose a countenance whose expression can be easily interpreted. Self-centeredness, cohesion, hierarchy, absolute authority of the chief, all this means discipline, the war spirit. Did nature will war? . . . It is in this sense that she willed war. She endowed man with a tool-making intelligence. . . . Since they are things apart from him it is easier to take them ready-made than to make them. . . . the origin of war is ownership, individual or collective, and since humanity is predestined to ownership by its structure, war is natural.¹⁹

"Natural" for Bergson is almost always synonymous with instinctive; therefore, the biological basis for the responsibility of war and the biological basis for the morality of the military position. They are created by the war, and define themselves in relation to it. Although this biological basis of the "morality" of war does not exclude them from responsibility, it nonetheless makes more complex the problem of evil in A Fable. The war may be an evil, as a disease is evil, but as a moral evil it becomes a more complex matter, especially in determining the "morality" of the motives of the various characters. Good and evil are simply not so neatly delineated in A Fable as some critics would have, and most would like.

The most obvious representative of the "ethical" basis of the military position is the Norman, the Quartermaster

¹⁹Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 273, italics mine.

General, another character whom many critics found admirable. ✓
 The Quartermaster is placed within the military hierarchy specifically second to the Marshall. He graduated second to the Marshall's first from St. Cyr, followed him to the desert outpost many years later to relieve him, and much later was made Quartermaster General of the French Army by the Marshall after the latter achieved rank high enough to be able to confer it. It is the Quartermaster General's long address to the "spirit" of the Marshall which comes closest to the Marshall's own attitude. The Quartermaster is able to conceptualize a long perspective, whereby the fusion of civilized society, the military, and institutionalized religion is made concrete. In short, he is able to coalesce the three main segments of the closed society into one compact historical view. His apostrophe is lengthy, but I shall quote a good part of it, since it is a focal point for much of what we have been describing as the closed society.

Rapacity does not fail, else man must deny he breathes. Not rapacity: its whole vast glorious history repudiates that. It does not, cannot, must not fail. Not just one family in one nation privileged to soar comet like into splendid zenith through and because of it, not just one nation among all the nations selected as heir to that vast splendid heritage; not just France, but all governments and nations which ever rose and endured long enough to leave their mark as such, had sprung from it and in and upon and by means of it became forever fixed in the amazement of man's

present and the glory of his past; civilization itself is its password and Christianity its masterpiece, Chartres and the Sistine Chapel, the pyramids and the rock wombed powder-magazines under the Gates of Hercules its altars and monuments, Michelangelo and Phidas and Newton and Ericsson and Archimedes and Krupp its priests and popes and bishops; the long deathless roster of its glory. . . . The chairmen of boards and the presidents of federations, the doctors lawyers and educators and churchmen after nineteen centuries have rescued the son of heaven from oblivion and translated him from mere meek heir to earth to chairman of its board of trade. Not rapacity, which, like poverty, takes care of its own. Because it endures, not even because it is rapacity, but because man is man, enduring and immortal; enduring not because he is immortal but immortal because he endures. . . . (pp. 259, 260)

It is not surprising that Miss Brumm, using this sally as the moral center of A Fable, would consider the novel heretical; but her chief error, as was pointed out above, was in failing to note that this argument is offered by the Quartermaster who simply represents one of the ethical positions inescapably a part of the human condition. Also, this long sally, having taken place many years before the immediate events of the novel, is offered mainly to justify the Marshall's long overdue rise to power destined for him. Nonetheless it is an apt description of the historical linkage of civilization, the war-instinct, and of institutionalized religion. One must note also that if one is to consider intention as a

basis for moral action, the Quartermaster is definitely not evil. He is a completely sympathetic, dedicated character, whose "disease" is hope for the condition of man. Schendler notes that this thought is precisely the Quartermaster's flaw, a reliance upon passivity and hope, but I do not quite agree with this. The Quartermaster's failure is more an intellectual failure than one of character. Within the limits of his knowledge he acts within his full capacity to act. Even in his confrontation with the Marshall after the bombardment, when he attempts to resign, his action is linked to his intellect. He should have known what would have occurred, he states, and therefore, by not knowing and signing orders for the blank ammunition, etc., he is responsible also for the deaths. All of his actions are done with the intention of elevating the condition of mankind. He also stands resolute at the last, supporting the Runner's battered body, even though the Marshall has shown him the necessity of his position in regard to the Corporal's execution. The Quartermaster's chief failure is not that he hopes, or fails to act, but that he acts more often than not upon the basis of a misconception. His view of man is overly intellectualized, what Bergson would call a purely intellectual psychology. Correct enough within a limited context, it is only partially true. The Quartermaster addresses all situations completely within

terms of the closed society, as his long apostrophe indicates. But his view is only one part of a condition which embraces a two-fold truth. The Runner realizes the double nature of truth in the passage where he muses on the war's sudden cessation, and the possibilities its unexpected end offers.

In Christ is death at end in Adam that began:--
 true, but the wrong one: not the wrong
 truth but the wrong moment for it, the
 wrong one needed and desired. (p. 83, italics Faulkner's)

Yet the Quartermaster does believe that the positive advance of man can come about through the very conditions he ironically outlines in his long address to the Marshall. The passage is, as Miss Brumm noted, an ironical version in some respects of Paul's epistle (I Corinthians 13:8) in which "rapacity" is substituted for "charity," but the essential reasoning behind both passages is parallel. Love of man has become love of things in the Quartermaster's vision, but a more telling point emerges from consideration of why the Quartermaster used it at all. He was explaining the Marshall's seeming defection from his family. And in this passage the Quartermaster indicated that he knew family ties were not this easily dissolved. The Marshall had not been disowned, as many of their brother officers had believed; he had merely gone to the desert to await his full flowering (a correct assessment by the Quartermaster so far, as the Marshall's

own words to the Corporal in the later "Maundy Thursday" scene indicate). The final words of their desert parting, immediately following the long apostrophe, point up the mistaken notion the Quartermaster has about the way one may extend the condition of man through the expansion of love to include all humanity. He tells the Marshall, who is relinquishing command of the outpost to him,

"I know that you are going wherever it is you are going in order to return from it when the time, the moment comes, in the shape of man's living hope. . . ."

.
 "So I'm to save France," the other said.
 "France," he said, not even brusquely, not even contemptuously, "you will save man." (pp. 263, 264)

The Marshall's response is significant. He immediately reduces "man's" hope to "France's" hope. The Quartermaster immediately expands it again into "Man's hope." The reduction of the larger abstraction to the national entity is a true statement the Marshall is offering as knowledge to the Quartermaster, who ignores it and expands it to include an area the Marshall is not really equipped to cover. The simple expansion in the Quartermaster's mind, from family, to country, to mankind fails to account for an essential qualitative difference in kind between the first two types of love and the last. Bergson notes this popular misconception about love, specifically in a passage preparatory

to a discussion of the intuition as the basis for a human society as distinct from a social one. Note that Bergson emphasized the inability of the intelligence, of which the Marshall is an embodiment in A Fable, to conceive properly this expansion.

Between the nation, however big, and humanity there lies the whole distance from the finite to the indefinite, from the closed to the open. We are fond of saying that the apprenticeship to civic virtue is served in the family, and that in the same way, from holding our country dear, we learn to love mankind. Our sympathies are supposed to broaden out in an unbroken progression to expand while remaining identical and to end by embracing all humanity. This is a priori reasoning, the result of a purely intellectualist conception of the soul. . . . The difference between the two objects is one of kind and not simply one of degree. . . . even today we still love naturally and directly our parents and fellow countrymen, whereas love of mankind is indirect and acquired.²⁰

The Quartermaster eventually compounds his misconceptions when he rationalizes away the Marshall's actions regarding the soldier he sacrificed to the Riffs in the desert. Thus it is the Quartermaster's intellect which actually betrays him, not his simple hope in the future of man. His faith in the Marshall emanated basically from a faith in him as social man, not as an individual simply capable of love. Bergson

²⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

also noted that "it is not by expanding our narrower feelings that we can embrace humanity. However much our intelligence may convince itself that this is the line of advance, things behave differently."²¹ The Quartermaster errs on this matter, and although his exclamations may seem emotional, his is an emotion born of contemplation, grounded in an abstract and historical conception of what man is, and although he does not share the corps commander's or Bidet's denigrating view of man, the Quartermaster nonetheless sees man's destiny in social, abstract terms, never allowing the simple fact of experience to intrude upon his preconceptions. His attraction to the Marshall resembles the Runner's attraction to the Corporal, but although they parallel each other in this respect, they are very different in another important respect. The Quartermaster intellectualizes his feelings into universal terms; the Runner feels an abstraction that acts like a compulsion, and he follows it in his relation with the Corporal and the Groom. This method of parallels and contrasts is a primary structuring element in A Fable in linking the various episodes together, and also directly corresponds to Bergson's descriptions of how the two sources of morality and religion operate to affect the human condition.

²¹ Ibid., p. 44.

Bergson terms the total action the "law of dichotomy and the law of two-fold frenzy," which will be discussed in detail later in Chapter IV which is devoted specifically to the overall structure of A Fable.

The various arguments noted above, though offering the military point of view, have encased within them the liaison between the ultra-closed military society and the other two segments, the civil and religious, which have generated and fostered the military.

The many allusions by the Quartermaster to the bankers, politicians, Christ, and Caesar, etc., point up the close collusion among the three segments of the closed society. The linkage is important between the civilian and military because it serves to stress the greater degree of complicity between "man" and the militarists than most critics have noted. The civilian populace is very much the closed society also. The whole governmental structure works best in close communication with the military.

"all that vast powerful terror-inspiring representation which running all democracy's affairs in peace, comes indeed into its own in war." (p. 232)

The "representation" is composed of bankers, politicians, newspaper publishers and the like. Their methods, while not so stringently applied, have the same ends, to maintain the

status quo. And not only are the mighty cooperating members of the closed society, but the lowly also. According to Bergson, habit is the primary means by which the civil segment of the closed society perpetuates the static morality of the closed society. Habit lies at the base of much of the "obligation" we feel toward the group. In the closed society

obligation stands for the pressure exerted by the elements of society on one another in order to maintain the shape of the whole; a pressure whose effect is prefigured in each of us by a system of habits which, so to speak, go to meet it.²²

The crowd which has gathered in the opening scene to view the mutinied regiment as it is being driven to the stockade is composed primarily of peasants, but

the original regiment had been raised in this district . . . and most of its subsequent replacements had been drawn from this same district, so that most of these old men were not only veterans of it in their time, and these male children already dedicated to it when their time should come. . . . (p. 14)

The implication is that custom has practically become institutionalized as far as the liaison between the people and

²²Ibid., p. 47.

the army goes. That the crowd and the military are actually more intimately joined than the surface action would indicate is suggested in the description of the sergeant also. Faulkner, using "evolution" in a purely metaphoric sense in describing the sergeant's physical stature, goes on to relate him to the civilian populace in terms of a theatre metaphor which seems to imply that underneath they are actually similar. The Sergeant was

a thick man of forty . . . whose racial stature Napoleon had shortened two or three inches a hundred years ago as Caesar had shortened that of the Italians and Hannibal that of the nameless pediment pieces of his glory--a husband and father who should (perhaps even could and would) have been a custodian of winecasks in the Paris Halles if he and the Paris Halles had been cast on some other stage than this. (p. 7)

The crowd also vents its early fury upon the Corporal rather than upon the military. They have a greater kinship with the very forces that are about to destroy their loved ones than they do with the Corporal who led the regiment to mutiny. As to the war, Faulkner draws a link between the war and "natural" laws.

They had got used to the war now, after four years. In four years, they had even learned how to live with it, beside it; or rather, beneath it as beneath a fact or condition of nature, of physical laws. . . . (p. 125)

Although there is no outright approval of the war, the crowd still is not ready to denounce it. When the crowd confronts Gragnon, the division commander, who is mounting the steps of the hotel to demand the death of the regiment and be court martialed himself, it feels more a sense of kinship with him than rage at him.

even before they learned about the foreign corporal they had never really blamed him [Gragnon], and even with the corporal, although they could still dread the division commander as the postulate of their fear and the instrument of their anguish, they had not blamed him: not only a French soldier, but a brave and faithful one . . . who, to gain the high privilege of being a brave and faithful Frenchman and soldier, had had to forfeit and abdicate his right in the estate of man--where theirs would be only to suffer and grieve, his would be to decree it; he could share only in the bereaving, never in the grief; victim, like they, of his own rank and high estate. (pp. 134, 135).

Both the crowd and Gragnon are seen as victims in this scene, and although Gragnon has at this point become so estranged that he is portrayed as the completely alienated man, "pariah and orphan both from them whose decree of orphanage he would carry out, and from them whom he would orphan " (p. 135), the crowd senses his predicament and is sympathetic. Never does the crowd openly repudiate the war. Although they grieve for the loss of their loved ones, nowhere in the novel does Faulkner present a scene of man in the mass in the city

repudiating the war. The "vast tongueless brotherhood of grief," which the crowd is in the opening scene, is the counterpart of the grieving crowd lining the Champs-Elysees in the last scene of the Marshall's funeral. Collective man is not so much at the mercy of the military as he is actually in league with it. Both groups are extensions of the intelligence operating to preserve each society. From the politicians, bankers, and industrialists--mentioned in the Quartermaster's apostrophe--down to the peasant who finds his focal point of action in the city crowd, man in society seeks to preserve an identity outside himself, whether it be the military, the church, or the city itself.

Even the Corporal, after the confrontation scene with the Marshall, uses the impetus of the closed society's discipline to restrain Pierre Bouc, who resembles the disciple Peter (he had deserted the Corporal earlier). The Corporal speaks to him in Zettlani, the language of his fictional nationality, but the Marshall understands the language and recapitulates what happened, and what was said.

"'Forgive me, I didn't know what I was doing.' And you said 'Be a man,' but he didn't move. Then you said 'Be a Zettlani' and still no move. Then you said 'Be a soldier' and he became one."
(p. 356)

The lessons of the rigorous military discipline are not completely lost even on the Corporal, whose very disciples are

✓ soldiers. The military, grudgingly or otherwise, still observe and shoulder willingly the responsibility for the preservation of society, and one of the great paradoxes in A Fable is the necessity of the war to preserve society, as ✓ they see it. This is the moral basis for the Marshall's acts. ✓ Were one merely to assess the Marshall's statements as convenient lies offered to aid expediency, one would miss this vital point. He does not hesitate to accept responsibility for the bombardment when the Quartermaster confronts him. And the Quartermaster is forced to agree that the Marshall's acts are in the interest ultimately of both aspects of man's nature--his intelligence and his feelings. The Marshall is the apex of the collective morality of the citizenry at large. ✓ For this reason the crowd is antagonistic toward the Corporal and ✓ grieves at the end for the Marshall. ★

Those critics who wished to see A Fable strictly as a polemic against war made an essential error in their failure to see that the distinction in the "warring" factions does not lie in the citizenry at large versus the military, but between both of them and the Corporal and what he represents in his person. Habit is the substratum of the obligation they feel toward the military. Faulkner damns the war, but his ★ failure to completely damn those who wage it is not an inconsistency on his part, since there is the specific ethical ✓

consideration they offer. Although their actions sometimes render their behavior ludicrous, they nonetheless act out of a consideration which is beyond the merely selfish--their concerns are certainly social. I doubt that a definite ethic is involved in A Fable in the sense of the author offering us the way to salvation. I believe we are presented with a description of a condition, a world view which sees the total condition of man as encompassing both the condition which history has imposed upon us, and the implied condition which always exists in potential and is made manifest in the presence of the Corporal. But these are presented to us without a demand that we emulate either one. The dramatic rendering of the two forces, the closed and open society, or more basically, intelligent and intuitive man, and what they imply upon coming together is done in a way that heightens their essential features; Faulkner's "aloofness" maintains a degree of austerity throughout the novel in spite of the often employed much-heightened language. If this resolution is not neat and satisfying to one's sense of poetic justice, it nonetheless is far from a sentimentalized version of man's condition.

The third level of the closed society is most difficult to place in the context of a unified vision of man's condition on earth. Again this indefiniteness is not owing to confusion of Faulkner's part, but to the method he

must employ in presenting it. Except for the Quartermaster's statement that the men of power have translated Christ from "mere meek heir to earth to chairman of its board of trade " (p. 260), and the priest's argument about how religion is perpetuated, little argument is offered concerning religion and its role in society. If one considers Bergson's explanation of the role of static religion in the closed society, perhaps the function of the allegorical trappings which serve to frame much of the action can be made to appear more consistent and within a coherent, though complex, point of view. Religion, says Bergson, "is a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent powers of the intelligence " (p. 194). The "myth-making function" is actually a "virtual instinct," the natural reaction which has been transmitted through intelligence because the intelligence likes representations. In short, religion, through the myth-making faculty, manufactures "counterfeit experiences" which serve to inhibit the bent of intelligence when intelligence may seek to wander down a path whose choice is inimical to the group.

If intelligence now threatens to break up social cohesion at certain points assuming that society is to go on--there must be counterpoise, at these points, to intelligence. If this counterpoise cannot be instinct itself, for the very reason that its place has been taken by intelligence, the same effect must be produced by a virtuality of instinct, or if you prefer it, by the residue of instinct which

survives on the fringe of intelligence; it cannot exercise direct action, but, since intelligence works on representations, it will call up "imaginary" ones, which will hold their own against the representation of reality and will succeed through the agency of intelligence itself, in counteracting the work of intelligence. This would be the explanation of the myth-making faculty.²³

This myth-making faculty among the more sophisticated civilizations parallels superstition among the more primitive societies. Both are products of the intelligence and serve primarily to reinforce the social order and to allay the fear of death and the unforeseeable future. Religion, then, performs a social function. In fact, religion is entirely social for Bergson.

It has always played a social role. This part, indeed is a complex one; it varies with time and place, but in societies such as our own the first effect of religion is to sustain and reinforce the claims of society.²⁴

Thus, religion is a response, a necessary one, which the intelligence uses to thwart itself.

A new species coming on to the scene brings with it, in the indivisibility of the act creating it, all the elements that impart life to it. The very check of the creative impetus which has expressed itself in the creation of our species has provided, along with intelligence, within human intelligence, the myth-making function

²³ibid., p. 109.

²⁴ibid., p. 5.

that contrives the pattern of religions. That then is the office, that is the significance of religion we have called static or natural. Religion is that element which in beings endowed with reason, is called upon to make good any deficiency of attachment to life.²⁵

Again, it is important to remember that for Bergson, the "natural" is essentially the same as the social, so that the "natural attachment to life" means the attachment to the group. Therefore, the natural function of religion, such as we know it, is to serve as a containment, to bolster the established habits and customs, to impose obligation in the form of discipline. Thus religion extends and enforces the communal morality, and thus it is that religion has often merged with the secular seats of power. While the natural involves both instinct and intelligence, both being different views originally of the elan vital, the religious experience, although it springs from the instinctive, is an intellectual representation of that instinctive tendency.

We must always remember that the sphere of life is essentially that of instinct, that along a certain line of evolution instinct has to some extent made room for intelligence; that this may lead to a disturbance of life; that nature in such circumstance has no other resource than to set up intelligence against intelligence. The intellectual

²⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

representation which thus restores the balance to nature's advantage is of a religious order.²⁶

Static religion finally becomes fused in Bergson's thinking with a special type of morality, a morality which becomes more significant in historical terms, since it is through the historical perspective that custom, the basis for morality, becomes ingrained in the members of the community. Static religion, being "coextensive with custom," reinforces the common morality, but goes even further than this, owing to the instinctive push toward the social in the species.

What binds together the members of a given society is the need and determination to defend the group against other groups and to set it above everything. To preserve, to tighten this bond is incontestably the aim of the religion we have found to be natural. It is common to the members of a group, it associates them intimately with each other in rites and ceremonies, it distinguishes the group from other groups. . . . The fact that religion such as it issued from the hands of nature, has simultaneously fulfilled, to use the language of the day, the two functions, moral and national, appears to us unquestionable.²⁷

Practically all of the abundant religious imagery in A Fable is Christian, and in this context historic Christianity becomes associated with nationalism. Fused images abound in

²⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 195, 196.

which elements of the Christian religion are described in military and nationalistic terms, thus making of historical Christianity a static religion. The effect of this presentation, placing the whole "history" of the Passion under the category of static religion, colors the relationship of the Corporal of this story to the Christ of the Passion; such occasional resemblances are more often offset by other considerations which must be taken into account when we consider the Corporal's role, as we will in the next chapter.

The fusion of national and religious imagery occurs constantly and in different ways in A Fable. Similes which describe the military in terms of the clergy are numerous. The American colonel at Gragnon's court martial wears a "jacket rising unblemished by any brass to the high-boned throat with its prim piping of linen collar backside foremost like the dog-collar of a priest " (p. 32). Bidet was described as bringing something of the monastery to the desert with him. The high command of the allied forces is described as "a council where trained military experts [were] dedicated as irrevocably to war as nuns are married to God " (p. 232). The Runner, after he has forced the military to rescind his commission, is described as having still the aura of the officer about him, and "even though he repudiated it, something ineradicable of it still remained, as the unfrocked priest or

the repentant murderer" (p. 68). The Marshall's aged batman in the funeral scene is pictured as "carrying before him on a black velvet cushion the sheathed sabre, his head bowed a little over it like an aged acolyte with a fragment of the cross or the ashes of a saint" (p. 434). The young glory-worshipping pilot, Levine, is displeased at the uniform of the new Royal Air Force "with its cloth belt and no shoulder straps like the coat of the adult leader of a neo-Christian boys club" (p. 88). The guard changing below the Marshall's window is described as "like a tribal ritual for religious immolation" (p. 238).

Sometimes parallels are drawn, as when Gragnon, musing on the necessity and inevitability of his failure, draws a parallel between the military high command and the civilian manufacturers of goods who are the "priests of simple money." Sometimes similarities are pointed up by simply juxtaposing elements from each category in describing a broader condition. Thus the commanders of the allied forces are described at the court martial as sitting "behind a tremendous oblong table as bare and flat and richly austere as the top of a knight's or a bishop's sarcophagus" (p. 228). In the more complex passages a historical perspective is added which merges not only the military and static religion, but the whole idea of civilized society also. The Quartermaster's

apostrophe is an example of Faulkner merging, not just religion, but Christianity specifically with the military and the city. "Civilization itself is its password and Christianity its masterpiece; . . . Michaelangelo and Phidias and Newton and Ericsson and Archimedes and Krupp its priests and popes and bishops " (pp. 259,260). Although many of these passages are fraught with irony, the irony cuts both ways, and even though the Quartermaster may have been ultimately in error in assessing the Marshall's role, or at least his methods, the fusion of the Christian, military, and civilian images nonetheless serves to bolster the idea of a static religion as described by Bergson.

Even within the "horsethief" episode, a long passage by the lawyer, who is also undone by his intelligence, describes man in purely historical terms which juxtapose military and religious elements.

Caesar and Christ, Bonaparte and Peter and Mazarin and Alexander, Genghis and Talleyrand and Warwick, Marlborough and Bryan, Bill Sunday, General Booth and Prester John, prince and bishop, Norman, dervish, plotter and kahn, not for the power and glory nor even the aggrandisement; these were merely secondarily concomitant and even accidental; but for man: by putting some of him in one motion in one direction. (p. 181)

The main purpose of this passage was not to discourse on religion. The lawyer was preparing to manipulate the crowd,

and the result, being far from his expectations, is testament that this view is only half right. The error of practically all of those persons who represent the intelligence in A Fable is almost always that they assume total knowledge of a situation when they only have partial knowledge. Just as the Quartermaster was in error about the Marshall, so is the lawyer in error about the actions of the crowd. The lawyer's reasoning is adequate in the closed, static context of a purely intellectual appraisal but is inadequate when dynamic action is being undertaken, as is the case here. His essential error, thinking in the wrong context, becomes evident when he suddenly realizes that the crowd is ignoring his eloquence and his presence. "He thought my first mistake was moving" (p. 185, italics Faulkner's). Again, it is the dynamic opposed to the static that is causing the action, and this conflict is the main concern of the passage; however, religion is fused with the other elements of the closed society throughout the passage.

Static religion is most clearly depicted in the meeting between the Corporal and the chaplain, whom the Marshall has sent in an attempt to persuade the Corporal to forego his "martyrdom." In the exchange which takes place are contained all the facets of the function and method of static religion, in this case Christianity, in its cohesive role in society and

its historically fused connection with the military. The scene is immediately set in terms of this fusion by the opening lines.

"Come in, my son," the priest said.

"Good evening, Sergeant," the corporal said.

"Can't you say Father?" the priest said.

"Of course," the corporal said.

"Then say it," the priest said.

"Of course, Father," the corporal said. (pp. 361,362)

The ambiguity of whether the priest's statement is a request or a command is intentional, I believe, and serves to reinforce the dual role of the spokesman for static religion.

The priest invokes duty, not love, as the compulsion which forced the meeting, and begins by stating that the Corporal if he does not forego his martyrdom is responsible for the impending death of Gragnon. The priest offers a complex argument, maintaining that Christ's crucifixion forever absolved man of the moral responsibility "for suzerainty over human fate and destiny " (p. 363). The argument is aimed at refuting human freedom, and, anticipating an argument the Corporal never offers, the priest decides to play advocate for both sides, after he learns that the Corporal cannot read. The priest cites history as the determinant for Christianity but denigrates the role of Christ. It was not Christ who converted the world, anyway, it was "pagan and bloody Rome which did it with His martyrdom " (p. 363).

Christ and Peter were "intractable and furious dreamers" who never read the dream correctly, and the priest attributes the success of Christianity as a world religion to Paul, who was "a Roman first and then a man and then a dreamer,"²⁸ who rendering unto Caesar, conquered Rome. Paul, by realizing that the dream, Christianity,

to endure, could not be a nebulous and airy faith but instead it must be a church an establishment, a morality of behavior inside which man could exercise his right and duty for free will and decision, not for a reward resembling the bedtime tale which soothes the child into darkness, but the reward of being able to cope peacefully, hold his own, with hard durable world in which . . . he found himself. (p. 327, italics Faulkner's)

The irony of the confrontation lies in the Corporal's never really offering an argument except to state that he does not want to die, merely repeating the sentence "Tell him that" ("him" meaning the Marshall) each time the priest admonishes him with "Thou shalt not kill." The sudden collapse of the priest's intellectual facade is owing to the simple fact of

²⁸Note the similarity of the priest's words when he cites the necessity of a church, an establishment, instead of relying on faith alone. "not for reward resembling the bedtime tale which soothes the child into darkness." (327) with the words of Bergson when he describes the necessity and method of the static religion. "Static religion, such as we find it when it stands alone, attaches man to life, and consequently the individual with society, by telling him tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep" (p. 200).

experience. The return of Pierre Bouc, who had denied the Corporal, by itself was more than all the weight of the casuist's arguments the priest offered in his attempt to convince the Corporal to give up his martyrdom. The subsequent suicide of the priest is the result of his sudden realization, in the simple presence of the Corporal, that he has been serving the wrong cause. I wish to stress that it is the actual simple fact of the Corporal's presence which outweighs the workings of the intellect.

Even if there were only one, only he, would be enough, more than enough thinking just that one to stand between me and safety, me and security, between me and peace. (p. 369, italics Faulkner's)

The priest had based his argument on the necessity of limits in which to allow man to exercise his free will; the very necessity of the limits, however, is an abstraction, an intellectual and symbolic rendering of experience. True experience, an immersion in the elan vital, what Bergson terms "duree," does not need limits in order to define itself, and thus static religion, when it confronts the dynamic, the mystical, cannot overcome it through force of argument. The mystic does not even recognize an argument.

The priest's argument is a valid one within the historical-intellectual context. It is not a false argument, just as the Marshall's later argument in the "Maundy Thursday"

scene is not false, as some critics aver. It simply does not have relevance in a context that transcends those qualities the intellect demands in order to make experience comprehensible. The priest, rather than committing actual evil, seems, like the Quartermaster and the lawyer, to have become the victim of an error in judgment. His failure is not so much a moral failure as an intellectual one. He made the error of believing that man must "reject that frail web of hopes and fears and aspirations which man calls his heart" for the fixed, established ritual of the church, and he had based his life upon it. The mere presence of the Corporal and his men, whom the priest had observed over a period of two years, never hearing anything they said, finally serves to point up his errors to him. The mystic does not preach; he merely is a presence. This attitude is the essence of the appeal of dynamic religion.

So far this study has treated the "deep structural dialectic" mainly in terms of some of the characters who represent the various categories and levels of one antagonist--the closed society, the extension of the intelligence. And while most of the theme of A Fable is embodied in the characters acting within either context, Faulkner also employed some rather complex symbols which are intellectual extensions of the three main categories of the closed society. Each

symbol is an extension of that element which is most directly concerned with it; thus the war is the symbolic extension of the military, the city is the symbolic extension of the civil, and the "allegorical" resemblances to the Passion are the intellectual extension of static religion, more particularly in this case, historical Christianity, of which the "history" is the intellectualization of experience.

These symbols are more concrete representations of the function each segment serves in its attempt at cohesiveness within the society than the arguments offered by the representatives of the categories. As symbols, though, they are both fictional and "historical." The war, for instance, is a "real" war, although the events are not. Chaulnesmont is a fictional city, but Paris and Verdun are not. And, of course, the record of the Passion, as record, as history, is "real" even though the Corporal is not. The total effect, then, is one which in a sense both affirms and denies history. It allows history as mere record, but not as a means of determining what might be. A Fable posits no plan, nor is order necessitated from the concern with "events" out of the past, whether they are of a purely "historical" or of a "religious" nature. Faulkner as artist is free to merge the fictional with the historical on all levels.

War is seen from many angles, through the eyes of

various characters and the narrator himself. One of the curious qualities the war possesses in A Fable is that it presents a violently kinetic appearance; yet it has an essentially static nature, a condition that also reinforces its role as a product of the closed society. The military men are constantly using words like "valor" and "glory" in connection with war, but there is practically no description of heroics. In fact, there is little description of actual combat in the whole novel. Aside from the original mutiny of Gragnon's regiment, which had occurred prior to the opening scene, only two incidents involving actual combat, one major and one minor, are all that are treated with any detail, and both of these have to do with "action" inimical to true combat. The major incident is the bombardment of the British and German troops, who are being led unarmed across no-man's land by the Runner, the Groom, and Sutterfield, an action by the military hierarchy which can hardly be deemed heroic. The minor incident occurs when Levine, not knowing his guns are loaded with blank ammunition, attacks the German general who is being flown to the meeting with the heads of the Allied forces in order to recommence the war. No other scenes of action directly related to combat are described.

War as a concept is seen in many ways. It is aloof and god-like, as in the temporary armistice caused by the mutiny;

It had merely arrested itself; not the men engaged in it, but the war itself. War, impervious and even inattentive to the anguish, the torn flesh, the whole petty surge and resurge of victories and defeats like the ephemeral repetitive swarm and swirl of insects on a dung heap. (pp. 124, 125)

The sudden reduction from the lofty to the lowly evident in this description is a pattern Faulkner uses often in describing the war. It is seen as a "rich carnival" (p. 242) and as "a minstrel troupe" (p. 204). One passage ironically describes it as a mindless machine-like action whose purpose is directed only toward its own linear, absolute completion.

So does war ignore its own recessment until it has ground also to dust the last cold and worthless cinder of its satiety and the tag ends of its unfinished business. The regiment would surely have to die as a unit, by the old obsolete methods of war, if for no other reason than to enable its executioners to check their rifles back into the quartermaster's stores in order to be disbanded and demolished. (p. 125)

Although the passage is heavily ironic, it still stresses method and ritual, both parts of the workings of the closed society.

Bidet had stated that the origins of war lay in the "loins of man's furious ineradicable greed" (p. 54) a view which echoes the Marshall's, who sees it as part of man's

inexhaustible folly, "the most expensive and fatal vice which man has invented yet " (p. 344). This "natural" aspect of war's origins is expanded and continued in the passage which is apparently from Gragnon's point of view, although the language is obviously geared to a point beyond his vision, since one would not expect Gragnon to use the subtle and ironic near-pun on the immaculate conception which serves to fuse its origins with the origins of Christ.

Half Europe went to war with the other half and finally succeeded in dragging half the Western Hemisphere along: a plan, a design vast in scope, exalted in conception, in implication (and hope) terrifying, not even conceived here at Grand Headquarters by the three old generals and their trained experts and advisors in orderly conference, but conceived out of the mutual rage and fear of the three ocean-dividing nations themselves, simultaneously at Washington and London and Paris by some immaculate pollenization like earth's simultaneous leafage. . . . (p. 232, italics mine)

Although the fusion of the religious and the military here is heavily ironic, the overall image is a natural one. Nothing in the above passage is directed toward indicating that war is irrational. In fact, nowhere in A Fable is war described as irrational behavior. The German general who worships war ("our national destiny is for glory and war") is outraged at the British, not because Germany is losing the war, but because of the way the British wage war.

"You will wait until an enemy is actually beating at your front gate. Then you will turn out to repel him exactly like a village being turned out cursing and swearing on a winter night to salvage a burning hayrick . . . we have to hate you. There is an immorality, an outrageous immorality; you are not even contemptuous of glory; you are simply not interested in it. (p. 305)

The German general is a caricature of the hyper-military, and his ultra rigid ways are ludicrous though menacing. But, as was pointed out above, he is not stupid, nor is he irrational. For him, as for all the military personnel who are in positions of power, war is another ritual, one of the many rituals in the closed society. For the military it is the ultimate, defining ritual, transcending even the national states they represent. As the German says, "I am a soldier first, then a German . . ." and what outrages the military more than a defeat is the Corporal's act of stopping the war the way he did, since the regiment

declined to perform that ritual act which, after four years, had become as much and as inescapable a part of the formal ritual of war as the Grand March which opens the formal ball each evening during a season of festival or carnival. (pp. 122, 123)

The military recognizes the necessity of continuing the war so as to hide from the populace (and thereby preserve their military identity) the fact that the people can stop wars

by simply refusing to fight. But their outrage is beyond fear. As the German general stated, it is an "immorality" to conduct war improperly. The war must grind on until its ultimate end appears, even though that end is not really an end in the sense that positive action closes upon itself. An indication of war's essentially static nature is contained in the Marshall's reply to the aide who is keeping him informed of the German general's "progress" in getting to the meeting, "it is indistinguishable from his destination" (p. 238). War is simply a swirl, kinetic and frenzied but directionless; yet the military demand that its ritualization be held intact. As Bidet tells Gragnon,

If the world thinks it wishes to stop fighting for twenty-five or thirty years, let it. But not this way. Not like a group of peasants in a half-mown field suddenly shouldering their scythes and lunchpails and walking off. (p. 53)

Although the necessity of keeping the war going was the reason for the meeting of the generals, the point of the incident is not to indicate Faulkner's beliefs as to why wars are fought --surely Faulkner knew better than to harbor this simplistic view (and Schendler's very apt interpretation of it as a satirical treatment of "the myth of the brass" does more justice to it than the silly criticisms of a lot of critics who should know better). Undoubtedly the scene occurs mainly

to emphasize the essential quality of the war, which is static in nature--it has to be shoved to keep it going, and to stress its paradoxical nature also. This scene also serves a structural function which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Time and again the military men see war not in terms of victory--glory need not necessarily reside in victory--but in terms of the ritualistic necessities the war demands. What worries them most is that the war might not end properly, for as the Runner states, and correctly so within the terms of this novel;

Because--don't you see?--they can't have this. They can't permit this, to stop it at all yet, let alone allow it to stop itself this way--the two shells in the river and the race already under way and both crews without warning simply unshipping the oars from the locks and saying in unison: We're not going to pull any more. They can't yet. It's not finished yet, like an unfinished cricket or rugger match which started according to a set of mutually accepted rules formally and peaceably agreed on, and must finish by them, else the whole theory or arbitration, the whole tried and proven step-by-step edifice of politics and economy on which the civilized concord of nations is based becomes so much wind. (pp. 79,80)

But to perpetuate the war one must consider its paradoxical nature. In considering the position of the doomed regiment, the "eye" of the novel stresses this paradox.

In fact, the only thing that could save the regiment would be the

resumption of the war: which was their paradox, their bereavement: that, by mutinying, the regiment had stopped the war; it had saved France (France? England too; the whole West, since nothing else apparently had been able to stop the Germans since the March breakthrough in front of Amiens) and this was to be its reward, the three thousand men who had saved France and the world would lose their lives, not in the act of it, but only after the fact. . . . (pp. 125, 126)

The Marshall notes a paradox also in his scene with the Corporal, when he speaks of the German enemy.

The one people out of all the earth who have a passion and dedication not even for glory but for war, who make war not even for conquest and aggrandisement but as an occupation, a vocation, and who will lose this one for that very reason: that they are the best soldiers on earth . . . [they] will have to surrender because the phenomenon of war is its hermaphroditism: the principles of victory and defeat inhibit the same body and the necessary opponent, enemy, is merely the bed they self-exhaust each other on. (p. 344)

The ludicrous possibility of a poor nation waging a war with a rich one so as to mastermind a profitable defeat "in order to feed its people out of the conqueror's quartermaster stores" (p. 345) is one that has been explored for comic effects in the movies, notably The Mouse that Roared.

War is also, according to Gragnon, one of two things (drink is the other) that man is never too poor to buy.

More than that. The last person a man planning to set up in the wine trade would approach for a loan would be a rival wine dealer. A nation preparing for war can borrow from the very nation it aims to destroy. (p. 25, italics Faulkner's)

The very fact that the military is aware of these qualities, and yet engage in maintaining the war and in seeking the trappings of glory which accrue to it, is another paradoxical quality that their actions more than their words imply.

The antagonists to the war point to its paradoxical qualities also. The Runner sees it, not as a necessary condition, but as essentially a ludicrous episode, since it is self-destructive by nature, yet very difficult to stop.

War is an episode, a crisis, a fever the purpose of which is to rid the body of fever. So the purpose of a war is to end the war. We've known that for six thousand years. The trouble was, it took us six thousand years to learn how to do it. For six thousand years we labored under the delusion that the only way to stop a war was to get together more regiments and battalions than the enemy could, or vice versa, and hurl them upon each other until one lot was destroyed and, the one having nothing left to fight with, the other could stop fighting. We were wrong, because yesterday morning, by simply declining to make an attack, one single French regiment stopped us all. (pp. 74, 75)

So the war, seen as an extension of the military segment of the closed society, is viewed in various ways, but these



projections, though they are essentially static, since they all point toward self-destruction, though they are at times barren, unnatural and machine-like, are nonetheless never projected in irrational terms, in the sense that no plan is evident. The war as a symbol may be grotesque, as with the Marshall's nightmarish vision of the final battle of the final war in which two machines are

engaged in the last gigantic wrestling against the final and dying sky robbed even of darkness and filled with the inflectionless uproar of the two mechanical voices bellowing at each other polysyllabic and verbless patriotic nonsense.
(p. 354)

This is not necessarily a picture of irrationality. The verbless polysyllables which the machines utter point toward stasis (no verbs, no real action), as does their battle, but as projections of the intelligence, machines are best examples of over-rationality rather than irrationality. The war is exactly this; a gigantic over-rationality, a gigantic paradox. Born of the intellect and perpetrated through machines the war is engendered by greed and folly and ends in stasis. But paradox is not irrationality. The war kindles its own kind of loyalties, just as it motivates the Marshall to act the way he does, and by so acting, to help perpetuate the myth the Corporal is beginning with his death. The war is a synecdoche,

an extension of the human condition--of man as intelligent and social in the Bergsonian sense--and "though the war-in-~~stinct~~ instinct exists independently it nonetheless hinges on rational motives" ²⁹ as it progresses in A Fable.

Just as the war is the means of definition for the military, so is the city the symbolic extension of the civilian, or civilized segment of the closed society. Bergson constantly sees the city as a metaphor for the social society as opposed to the human society. The city is a more complex closed society which uses the same methods--education, discipline, habit, and custom--in a word, pressure, to reinforce the individual's attachment to the group. The city is the place where custom and ritual are clustered, where the symbols which focus upon tradition and duty and laws are most fixed. Static morality is "binding in respect of the city more than in respect of humanity,"³⁰ and between the morality of the city and the larger morality lies the qualitative and insurmountable difference. "Never shall we pass from the closed society to the open society, from the city to humanity by any mere broadening out."³¹

²⁹Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 277.

³⁰Ibid., p. 27.

³¹Ibid., p. 216.

Faulkner uses the city extensively to reinforce this idea, which, as was noted above, was the chief error of the priest and the Norman. A Fable begins with and ends with a crowded city scene. The opening passage describes Chaulnesmont in terms of Bergson's closed insect-society, with the inhabitants suddenly pouring out of their "hive-dense tenements " (p. 3) to fill the Place de Ville (the city square). Faulkner spends much time describing the Grand Headquarters of the Allies. The Hotel de Ville (city hall) which has become the headquarters building also houses the dungeons in which Gragnon's execution takes place. The Hotel de Ville is contrasted to the Place de Ville where the populace gathers to await word of the regiment's fate. Both these structures serve as meeting points, as symbolic stages where the closed society's various forces merge. The Place de Ville is "a stone sink whose walls were older than Clovis and Charlegmane " (p. 133). The long history of the Place as dating back past the Merovingian kings establishes the weight of history bearing upon the inhabitants. The Hotel becomes more obviously symbolic in Faulkner's description of the underground passage leading to Gragnon's cell.

The whitewashed stone sweating
 in furious immobility beneath the
 whole concentrated weight of history,
 stratum upon stratum of dead tradition
 impounded by the Hotel above them. (p. 378)

The linkage to a static society is obvious here. The citadel which sits above the city "not looking above them but squatting, not Gothic but Roman not soaring to the stars out of the aspiration of man's past but a gesture against them of his mortality like a clenched fist " (p. 343), points up again the essentially static character of a society which constructs such things as the citadel or the Hotel de Ville.

The most complex symbolic fusion of the three main facets of the closed society occurs in the long-sustained description of the city on the Wednesday night before Gragnon's court martial. This passage best illustrates Faulkner's fusing of the civil, religious, and military segments. He begins with a description of the physical city, its "massed chiaroscuro like a tremendous beehive" becoming the "effigy and the power rising tier on inviolate tier" out of the darkness (p. 239). Faulkner first traces its rise to the "smore" of stars above it. He then describes, in terms of the city's inhabitants, the tiers, the various levels of which the city is the effigy and power. The military segment is described beginning at the top and descending down to the lowliest private. The description is ironic, but what is most important is the fusion of the military with the religious hierarchy in terms of the city.

First and topmost were the three flags
and the three supreme generals who served

them: a triumvirate consecrated and anointed, a constellation remote as the planets in their immutability, powerful as archbishops in their trinity, splendid as cardinals in their retinues and myriad as Brahmins in their blind followers; next were the three thousand lesser generals who were their deacons and priests and the hierarchate of their households, their acolytes and bearers of monstrance and host and censer. . . . (p. 239, 240)

The description continues in a downward spiral to include the lowliest privates and the few soldiers who were "stained with the filth of the front lines" and who moved diffidently among the pomp and glitter of the rear echelon brass. The description suddenly shifts to the civilian counterparts of the military, but the religious imagery is still the primary means of comparison. The implications are those of an unholy trinity.

Then the civilians: Antipas and his friends and their friends, merchant and prince and bishop, administrator claquer and absolver to minimize the attempt and applaud the intention and absolve the failed result. (p. 241)

From the mighty to "anonymity's absolute whose nameless faceless mass cluttered old Jerusalem and old Rome" the description continues its downward spiral to include "the lepers beneath the city gate and temple door who did not even know they were not whole, who belonged neither to

the military nor to the merchants and princes and bishops . . . who owned nothing in fact save a capacity for endurance" (p. 242). The parallels are clearly delineated, from the princes and generals down to the filth-stained out-cast leper-like soldiers. The sustained satirical panegyric on the city suddenly takes an upward turn to end upon a concrete description where it began, describing the Hotel de Ville, but the focus is away from the proud flags this time.

Out of that enduring and anguished dust it rose, out of the dark Gothic dream, carrying the Gothic dream, arch-and-buttress-winged, by knight and bishop, angels and saints and cherubim groined and pilastered upward into soaring spire and pinnacle where goblin and demon, gryphon and gargoyle, and hermaphrodite yelped in icy soundless stone against the fading zenith. (p. 242)

The image is a religious one. It accurately depicts a gothic spire, with its eclectic mixture of pagan and Christian elements; what is most pertinent is that it focuses on all that has gone before and fuses, or rather freezes, the different segments and strata of the whole closed society into one energized yet static mass. The various pagan and Christian emblems become merged as the effigy and the power, the concrete expression of the gothic dream, religion well entrenched. This is a fitting image for static religion. The frozen violence in the yelping grotesqueries suggests the war, and the whole paradoxical quality of the soundless yelp at a fading sun from

a blind creature staring at it reinforces the paradox of a society expending energy to inhibit the flow of creative energy.

This chapter has dealt with the way Faulkner describes the actions of one of the major antagonists of the "deep structural dialectic" of A Fable, the intelligence. The next chapter will deal with the other source of morality and religion, the intuition, but here we will note a definite shift in method. Its influence must be presented more in terms of its potential rather than its accomplishments, since human history cannot attest to the existence of any of the conditions it posits. As Bergson states

Now, a mystic society, embracing all humanity and moving animated by a common will, towards the continually renewed creation of a more complete humanity, is no more possible of realization in the future than was the existence in the past of human societies functioning automatically and similar to animal societies. Pure aspiration is an ideal limit, just like obligation unadorned. It is nonetheless true that it is the mystic souls who draw and will continue to draw civilized societies in their wake.³²

One may still describe the mystic society as it embodies itself in a particular man; this subject occupies the next chapter.

³² Ibid., p. 75.

CHAPTER III

A RADICAL POTENTIAL:
THE CORPORAL

Leslie Fiedler dismissed A Fable as positing "The accumulation of horror to the point of nausea, sustained by the sense that nausea is a moral attitude,"¹ and had this to say of the Corporal,

[Faulkner] is able to show us only a somewhat surly and illiterate peasant, suspicious of ritual and without rhetoric, who we are loath to believe could have led the mutiny much less be the representative of Christ.²

Fiedler's final evaluation of Faulkner's accomplishment in A Fable is certainly not in agreement with mine, but his description is fairly accurate regarding the presentation of the Corporal. What disturbs Fiedler about the Corporal is essentially the same thing that disturbs Irving Malin, who writes

We cannot suppose the corporal to be both a soldier and a pacifist. How are we to believe in the palpable reality of the corporal if we are so conscious that he is Christ.³

¹Leslie Fiedler, "Stone Grotesques," The New Republic, CXXXI (August 23, 1954), 18.

²Ibid., 19.

³Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation (Stanford, 1957), p. 70.

Both critics express a widespread attitude regarding the character of the Corporal; both also exhibit an essential misconception in their reading in that they fail to recognize the essential qualities embodied by the Corporal in his person. The Corporal's "palpable reality" is a strange one--he is essentially a mystic. Both Fiedler and Malin, like the other dissenting critics, offer a view which is tempered by their preconceptions of what a "Christ-figure" ought to be, and they take umbrage at obvious deviations from the "norm" of presentations. A Christ-figure may embody paradoxes, but the contradictions the Corporal presents are seemingly unresolvable ones. Humble, pleasant, meek, and mild, or even robust, he may be, but surly he must not be, earthy he must not be. The Corporal is obviously more in accord with the last two attributes than he is in accord with the first group--at least this is the way it appears on the surface, but Faulkner has used a rather singular method of presenting the Corporal.

What Faulkner has done in his treatment of the Corporal is to let the action around the Corporal speak for him rather than letting him speak for himself; often the action seems to run a contradictory course to what is being verbalized by characters around the Corporal. This observation goes to the heart of the Corporal's character

and the implications toward which his presence in the novel points. The Corporal, for all his taciturnity and seeming passivity, is the essence of action--meaningful action. He is the essence and embodiment of what Bergson considers the mystic, the representative of "dynamic religion." The Corporal, if not exactly suspicious of ritual, at any rate has no need of ritual, for ritual is extraneous to the dynamic religion he represents. It is, as Bergson states, "a religion of men, not rules," a religion in which "prayer is independent of its verbal expression; it is an elevation of the soul that can dispense with speech."⁴

Bergson, in attempting to define "dynamic religion," equates it with mysticism, but not the Eastern type of mysticism we generally identify with the Hindu ascetics. These are not true mystics, according to Bergson. True mysticism is not escapist, is not withdrawal, but is vitally activist; it emerges only when man has re-immersed himself in the elan vital.

. . . the ultimate end of mysticism is the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an

⁴Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 191.

impetus; it is this impetus itself, communicated in its entirety to exceptional men who in turn would fain impart it to all humanity, and by a living contradiction change into creative effort that created thing which is a species, and turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop.⁶

What the Corporal attempts to do, and succeeds in doing for a while, is exactly this. All the action of A Fable is generated by his act of mutiny. That he ultimately fails is also perfectly in accord with Bergson's ideas. This failure will be explained within that context, but for the moment we may see this characteristic, dynamism, operating in relation to the Corporal in the particular way Faulkner has chosen to portray it. The Corporal does not have the gift of rhetoric--he has no need of it; action, experience, is his primary method of expression. His monosyllabic answers to the casuistic arguments of the priest and the Marshall are not owing to stupidity or sullenness. An examination of his answers to most of the questions put to him shows that he does not answer the question directly so much as simply state a "fact" which ultimately has bearing upon the question. For example, in answering the priest's charges that he must bear the responsibility for Gragnon's execution, he simply repeats,

⁶ Ibid., p. 223.

"Tell him [the Marshall] that " (pp. 364-366). To the Marshall's long argument in the "Maundy Thursday" scene, he first answers simply, "there are still ten" (meaning his disciples), when the Marshall indicates the futility of his martyrdom (p. 346). To the last part of the Marshall's argument, when the Marshall expands at length upon the "narrative of the bird" to reinforce his offer of life, the Corporal simply answers, "Don't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing worth it " (p. 352).⁷ The Corporal is equally taciturn in other scenes. He does not speak his first word until page 249; he speaks fewer words than any other major character in the novel, unless one considers the Groom to occupy equal stature, and even the Groom is referred to as constantly mouthing curses, even though Faulkner does not record them for the reader.

Actually, the Corporal's lack of speech is simply part of his makeup. He is exhibiting the mystic temperament as Bergson conceives of it.

A calm exaltation of all its faculties makes it see things on a vast scale only, and in spite of its weakness, produce only what can be mightily wrought. Above all it sees things simply, and this simplicity which is equally striking in the

⁷Although some critics read this statement as a rather pessimistic rejection of the things of this world, it appears to me that the Corporal is echoing Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech. The emphasis should be on the fact that nothing is worth being afraid over, rather than mere rejection of the worth of everything.

words it uses and the conduct it follows, guides it through complications which it apparently does not even perceive.⁸

This passage, which goes far to explain the Corporal's peculiar actions also in relation to the other characters in the novel and the events which surround him, bears a resemblance to Faulkner's description of the Corporal as he calmly watches from his prison window above the rage and turbulence of the crowd below.

He looked exactly like a stone-deaf man watching with interest but neither surprise nor alarm the pantomime of some cataclysm or even universal uproar which neither threatens nor even concerns him since to him it makes no sound at all. (p. 227)

The Corporal is able to transcend much of the human passion that is normally aroused either in argument or in anxiety over one's future. Bergson may offer a reason for the Corporal's "odd" qualities of character when he writes of the difference between ordinary ideas of love and the mystical love of mankind.

The former [types of love] alight directly upon an object which attracts them. The latter does not yield to the attraction of its object; it has not aimed at this object; it has shot beyond and reached humanity only

⁸Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 221.

by passing through humanity.⁹

Here is an adequate explanation, I believe, for the seemingly indifferent mannerisms of the Corporal. He is not indifferent; he has, in a sense, won the world by going beyond the world. He has attained this state before the opening action of the novel, and Faulkner's initial presentation of him, "the face showing a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of compassion" (p. 17) can, in this light, be seen as far more than mere indifference to his fate.

The Corporal, as mystical, intuitive man, then, becomes the embodiment of the open society, which must emerge from the universal love of mankind, as well as the embodiment of the "dynamic religion" which is embodied in men, not rules.

I have stated earlier that it is the Corporal's "presence" which causes action more than any direct action he engages in. By this method his effect is felt throughout the entire novel. He has no personal eloquence, nor radiance, nor energy of the usual sort associated with action. The key to his effectiveness lies in his presence. He is dynamic in the deepest sense, not merely kinetic. He embodies in himself all of the facets and possibilities that the complex of attitudes arising from and involved in the refinement of the

⁹Ibid., p. 31.

intuition posit. Just as the closed society and static religion, as extensions of the intellect, found their apex in the Marshall, so do the open society and dynamic religion, as extensions of the intuition, find their apex in the Corporal. Just as the Marshall depends upon ritual, meeting, dialectic, and intelligence, so does the Corporal have no need for any of them. He is beyond the necessary rhetoric of the preacher, the casuistry of the plotter, or the energy of the builder. He is effective nonetheless, because his presence alone suffices to cause meaningful action. As the old man at the ammunition dump, who first informs the Runner of the Corporal's mission, tells him,

"Go and listen to them," the old porter said.
 "you can speak foreign; you can understand them."

"I thought you said that the nine who should have spoken French didn't, and that the other four couldn't speak anything at all."

"They don't need to talk," the old porter said. "You don't need to understand. Just go and look at him." (p. 67)

Events which occur as a result of the Corporal's "presence" are the action of A Fable.

Although he is not described energetically, the Corporal embodies dynamism in everything he does, as opposed to the essentially static character of his antagonist, the Marshall, who engenders much kinetic activity in the novel. Images of movement and stasis surround these two antagonists constantly and reinforce their essential characteristics.

Mobility and stasis become the two primary "environments" within which they will be presented throughout the novel.

The Corporal and the Marshall are brought together at the beginning of A Fable in a confrontation scene which foreshadows the later, climactic "Maundy Thursday" scene above the city of Chaulnesmont. More important than foreshadowing is the way in which each is described in relation to the other in this scene. The Corporal is riding in a lorry carrying the 13 "ringleaders" of the mutiny to the stockade. It passes the Hotel de Ville

where the three generals still stood
like a posed camera group . . .
[the corporal and the marshall] stared
full at each other across the moment
which could not last because of the
vehicle's speed--the peasant's face
above the corporal's chevrons and
the shackled wrists in the speeding
lorry, and the grey, inscrutable face
above the stars of supreme rank and the
bright ribbons of honor and glory on
the Hotel steps, looking at each other
across the fleeting instant. (p. 17)

The setting of this first encounter clearly puts the two in opposition in more than mere foreshadowing; they are immediately seen in terms of motion and stasis. The "deep dialectic" of the human condition is thus very early joined, with each antagonist's essential qualities pointed up by the setting in which each appears. The Corporal is dynamic, moving, even though manacled. The Marshall is static, posed, though

apparently free. The two are seen in paradoxical relationship at the very outset, also, since the apparently "free" omnipotent man, the Marshall, is fixed; and the apparently shackled man, the Corporal, is moving. This paradoxical relationship will widen and encompass all of the action of the novel as it progresses, for paradox is the main method by which action is resolved in A Fable.

The Marshall is constantly described in settings which render him immobile. As a young man at St. Cyr Academy he is described as seemingly "not entering the gates, but rather framed immobilely by them . . . fixed as absolutely and irrevocably discrepant to that stone bastioned iron-maw of war's apprenticeship as a figure out of a stained glass window " (p. 247). He is pictured at Gragnon's court martial as

motionless in the chair whose high carved back topped him like the back of a throne, his hands hidden below the rich tremendous table which concealed most of the rest of him too and apparently not only immobile, but immobilized beneath the mass and glitter of his braid and stars and buttons.
(p. 237)

He is described in his final confrontation scene with the Quartermaster as sitting "immobile and gaudy as a child's toy behind the untouched bowl and the still uncrumbled bread " (p. 333). In most of the scenes in which he appears, the Marshall is posed, either by windows where he stands

immobile, or sitting, as in the court martial scene "beneath the illusion of crushing and glittering weight of his blue and scarlet and gold and brass and leather, until even the five who were still sitting had the appearance of standing, too, surrounding and enclosing him " (p. 279). When the Marshall does move, it is not to engender meaningful action, but to continue a meaningless kinetic agitation. Just as the paradoxical nature of the war, the symbolic extension of all he represents, was expressed in its "hermaphroditic nature," so are all the Marshall's actions ultimately aimed at stasis.

In contrast to the Marshall's immobility is the Corporal's dynamic nature. One of the mysterious qualities he possesses is his uncanny ability to simply go almost anywhere along the front to pursue his mission.

the obscure corporal . . . and the [twelve] others . . . had been spending their leaves and furloughs for two years now among the combat-troop rest billets not only throughout the entire French Army zone, but the American and British ones too. (p. 128)

Not only is he capable of traversing the Allied areas, but

. . . less than three weeks ago, the entire squad had vanished from France itself, vanished one night with their passes and transport and ration warrants from their rest billets and reappeared one morning two weeks later in ranks again, with the passes and warrants still unstamped and intact--

monstrous and incredible since there was but one place on earth in almost four years now where the thirteen men in uniform could have all gone without having their paper stamped, needing no papers at all in fact, only darkness and a pair of wirecutters . . . (p. 128)

The "one place on earth," of course, is no-man's-land, a point which is made more precisely in the Runner's ironic commentary on why the Germans had not counter attacked when they obviously became aware that Gragnon's division had refused to attack.

Those thirteen French soldiers apparently had no difficulty whatever going anywhere they liked in our back areas for three years, why weren't they across yonder in Jerry's too, since we all know that, unless you've got the right properly signed paper in your hand, it's a good deal more difficult to go to Paris from here than to Berlin. (p. 79)

This mysterious part of the Corporal's makeup, I believe, plays a more vital part in structuring the novel than merely pointing up mystery. It heightens his essentially dynamic nature. The Corporal is truly capable of "transcending the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature"¹⁰ in a most dramatic fashion.

One of the more confusing incidents in A Fable, the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 209.

apparent "multiple deaths" of the Corporal, can be most simply explained in the context of his essential dynamism, rather than in the context of the Gospel stories.¹¹ This is one of the minor "miracles," like his ability to wander over no-man's-land, although it is admittedly a more dramatic "transcendence of the limitations of the species." Most critics after admitting their confusion merely resented the multiple deaths, seeing them as an out-of-place episode blandly inserted into a situation whose treatment, if anything, demanded more "realism" than Faulkner had offered up to that point, rather than adding elements of the supernatural.

Schendler offers a very good explanation. He sees the multiple deaths as a means of transferring the Corporal from the Christ-like man to Everyman. I would agree, since this view does not disallow Bergson's conception of the potential mystic in every man. To see it particularly in Bergsonian terms seems to offer a greater consistency, since at this point in his argument Schendler is actually refuting one of his major points--that Faulkner is using the Christian

¹¹One must, it would seem, either posit multiple resurrections without any apparent transcendence, or possibly link his reappearance, remotely, to the mysterious presence of Christ in the journey to Emmaus; even then the Corporal's "deaths" were not crucifixions in the sense that the one he will undergo is. There is no neat parallel of these incidents to any of the Gospel stories.

myth as an ironic counterpoint to the action and as a meaningful ethic against which to posit the ethic of A Fable. This being the case, Everyman, the "myth" of Everyman, should function ironically, not as a living myth, to remain consistent with Schendler's argument. But to see these incidents as merely underscoring the essentially dynamic quality of the Corporal, a quality which embodies itself in actions not necessarily recognized as action by the intelligence (which must view action from the "outside" view of mechanism), is to render their function in the novel more simple, yet more cohesive to the structure of the novel. A counterpoint to the Corporal's mystical qualities occurs in Faulkner's comic presentation of military outrage and disbelief at the Corporal's feat of traveling behind the enemy lines without the proper credentials.

. . . the moment when the inspectors and inquisitors in their belts and tabs and pips and bars and eagles and wreaths and stars, realized the--not enormity, but monstrosity, incredibility; the monstrous incredibility, the incredible monstrosity, with which they were confronted. (p. 128)

One may contrast the Corporal's attitudes, which are translated into calm and meaningful action, with the frantic activity of the military and civilian population, whose motion ends in stasis, aimed at no real progress. The Corporal's action is not easily discernible, because it is an action of a more

profound nature than mere motion, which is easily recognizable and easily mistaken for action. The war is one of the focal points of action which is not really action, and will serve to illustrate the difference between action and mere motion.

Hannah Arendt, who considers action as one of the essential defining agents of ethical existence, defines true action as more than mere motion.

To act in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin, to set something in motion . . . It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before.¹²

The Runner defines bona fide action with greater clarity in relation to A Fable when he notes that the Corporal initiated action of the type Miss Arendt is considering.

For six thousand years we labored under the delusion that the only way to stop a war was to get together more regiments and battalions than the enemy could, or vice versa, and hurl them upon each other until one lot was destroyed, and the other having nothing left to fight with, the other could stop fighting.

¹²Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (New York, 1959), p. 157. Miss Arendt comes remarkably close in assessing the Corporal's function in A Fable. She refers to it in a footnote, which states that A Fable "surpasses almost all of World War I literature in perceptiveness and clarity because its hero is the unknown soldier" (p. 351). This is not quite to the point, but her aim is slightly different from mine, since she is attempting to define action by aligning it to an ethic

We were wrong because yesterday morning, by simply declining to make an attack, one single French regiment stopped us all. (p. 75)

Here is demonstrated action precisely of the type Miss Arendt defines, and herein lies one of the larger paradoxes within which much of the "action" of A Fable takes place; what often seems like action is actually mere kinesis, action viewed from the "outside," the intellect. What initially appears as mere negation, passivity, is actually creative action. The former view, according to Bergson, breaks action down into components (as the Runner explains above), as a series of stops along a path; whereas, if one views action from the "inside," the intuition, it can be seen as simply a single uniform leap, an indivisible act (as the "feel" of one's swinging one's hand) made to overcome a problem. Such is the initial act of the Corporal which sets everything in motion in A Fable. The military and the civilian crowd express great motion which leads nowhere, or at least nowhere new; whereas the seemingly stolid Corporal, who merely "observes" throughout the novel,

which demands that the action be defined--cannot be anonymous --thereby noting that the monument to the unknown soldier is an attempt to make known "all those whom the war failed to make known and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity." (p. 161) This observation has validity in its own right, but it is somewhat irrelevant to the Corporal's being buried there in A Fable.

who functions "without rhetoric," is the innovator of action. In fact, the initial act of the Corporal, which sets everything in motion in A Fable, appears to the intellect to be an attempt to stop action. The Corporal had fostered a mutiny, a refusal to act under the military dictates. This act has occurred before the opening scene of A Fable, and since all subsequent surface conflicts emerge from it, one may view even the paradoxical precondition of the conflicts in A Fable in terms of stasis and motion.

The Corporal's seeming refusal to act is in reality more creative than the subsequent posturings and seeming action of the military, since the action they initiate, and which the crowd responds to, is aimed merely at restoring a previous condition which had apparently come to a stalemate. The war had continued with neither side attaining any appreciable advantage for four years. The Corporal's simple act ("by simply crying, 'enough'") had violently changed the condition of all involved. One need merely go again to Bergson to find a feasible explanation of how a mere Corporal could cause all of the later frenzy on the part of the military hierarchy, for the Corporal is that individual who can "in spite of his own weakness produce only what can be mightily wrought."¹³

¹³Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 221.

Stasis and dynamism are not confined to image systems in A Fable. The Marshall's views of man are directly related to these two attitudes; although his view of man goes beyond any of those opinions offered by his subordinates in the previous chapter, he nonetheless views man essentially in terms of stasis and motion. In the final meeting with the Quartermaster, where he admits to responsibility for shelling the troops, he first sets up his context, a purely intellectual one, by denying the charge that he is afraid of man.

"Fear implies ignorance. Where ignorance is not, you do not need to fear: only respect. I don't fear man's capacities, I merely respect them."

"And use them" the Quartermaster General said.

"Beware of them," the old general said. (p. 329)

The "capacities" referred to become more precisely defined moments later when the Quartermaster repeats the charge that the Marshall is afraid of man. The Marshall's response is set clearly in terms of stasis and dynamism.

"I respected him [man] as an articulated creature capable of locomotion and vulnerable to self-interest." (p. 331)

Although the Marshall refers here only to the dynamic quality of man, one must conclude that he is speaking from his opposite viewpoint in "respecting" this quality in man. The action (locomotion) is referred to here in potential terms, also. The fact that self-interest is inimical to the Marshall's position would coincide neatly with Bergson's claim

that the intelligence must counter the very bent of intelligence (the ego) by intellectual means, which the Marshall does.

Another character who resembles the Marshall closely in his intellectual apparatus and attitudes toward man is the lawyer who seeks, and fails, to spellbind the crowd with rhetoric ("Ladies, gentlemen . . . Democrats . . .") in the courthouse in the "horsethief" episode. The crowd ignores him and as it brushes past him, he notes "my first mistake was moving" (p. 185). Real action is inimical to those who rely on intellect alone and who are the manipulators in the closed society. The lawyer's long internal monologue is couched in slightly different terms, but his views on man are essentially the same as the Marshall's.

Thinking (the lawyer) how only when he is mounted on something . . . is man vulnerable and familiar; that on his own feet and in motion, he is terrible; thinking with amazement and humility and pride too, how no mere immobile mass of him . . . mounted on something which, not he but it was locomotive, but the mass of him, moving of itself in one direction toward an objective by means of his own frail clumsily jointed legs . . . threatening only in locomotion and dangerous only in silence. (pp.186,187)

It is important to note here that the lawyer, although contemptuous in part, still has the feeling of amazement and pride when thinking of this aspect of man, an attitude which

parallels the Marshall's in the "Maundy Thursday" scene when he tells the Corporal "with pride" that man will prevail. The above passage tends to reach back to the introductory scene where the Corporal is introduced riding in the lorry, and to underscore the point that, although he is at that time vulnerable to the machinations of the military, the action which had precipitated all the later action (the mutiny) had already been accomplished. The Corporal has been able to set a mass of men in one direction simply through the power of his presence in better fashion than the military, which had consciously aimed at this end (witness the statement of L'Allemont, the corps commander, to Gragnon on page 52) with its references to disciplinary training and rituals of honor and glory.

One may also compare the actions of the civilian arm of the closed society, the crowd, in respect to meaningful action. Much has been written of how the crowd, mass man, is reduced to bestiality or complete passivity, as though Faulkner were attempting to demean man. As one negative critic put it, "You do not lift the heart of man by rubbing his face in the dirt."¹⁴ But the crowd's action, which is not really action at all, can best be seen in the context of

¹⁴Walter F. Taylor, op. cit., p. 477.

the civil arm of the closed society. Frantic, frenzied at times, but essentially static, the crowd is all wasted motion, as in the description of their running to the compound where the mutinied regiment is interned.

. . . not that they had no plan when they came here, nor even that the motion which had served in lieu of plan, had been motion only so long as it had had room to move in, but that motion itself had betrayed them by bringing them here at all, not only in the measure of the time it had taken them to cover the kilometer and a half between the city and the compound, but in that of the time it would take them to retrace back to the city and the Place de Ville, which they comprehended now they should never have quitted in the first place, so that, no matter what speed they might make getting back to it, they would be too late. (p. 131)

Their directionless anguished flowing--Faulkner constantly uses imagery of water flowing down myriad streets into cul de sacs to describe them--attests to their aimlessness. At one point the "eye" of the novel states plainly, "They had no plan: only motion " (p. 130) and later the crowd is described as "one aspic of gaped faces " (p. 137). This unpleasant image, which, if not completely immobile, is certainly restrictive of motion when describing people.

Thus the essential antagonisms of stasis and motion are ramified in relation to the characters and the action in A Fable. Meaningful action occurs only in the category of

the intuitive approach to experience; the other category which forms the opposite of the "deep dialectic," the intellectual, makes motion, but meaningful action is lacking for the most part. This view does not necessarily force one to see the novel as divided neatly in terms of good and evil. Each category has set up its own morality and must act in accord with it. Each category seeks to define man and in some way to make of him what it can.

What seems remarkable is how Faulkner has managed to embody all of the potential of the mystic-intuitive response to experience, as Bergson defines it, in one character, who apparently seems not to move. Faulkner has made the Corporal the focus, not the agent for movement, as far as describing action in the novel. Those elements of the Corporal's character which offended Fiedler are precisely those traits which allow the Corporal to transcend the limitations of the intellect. Fiedler's credulity, which allows little room for paradox, is offended, not his morals; and this response is precisely what the character of the Corporal should evoke. One does not expect such great accomplishments from a mere man who lacks all of the seeming necessities of leadership which the intellect demands, since these are the necessary trappings by which the civilized world recognizes a leader. Just as Fiedler is offended, so is F. W. Dillistone impressed

by the Corporal's meanness. He writes of the Corporal

He lives and moves for the most part incognito. But around him the destinies of individuals and nations are gathered. This is in itself a paradox--that an obscure corporal could be the touchstone of the world's fate.¹⁵

Dillistone, writing of the Corporal as a "Christ-figure," concludes that the character is fascinating, although "religiously, the story is open to every kind of criticism."¹⁶ Since I believe the Corporal is the embodiment of Bergson's "dynamic religion," it would be well at this point to consider Faulkner's employment of the Gospel stories as a frame.

Faulkner's use of the Gospel stories in A Fable has been touched on earlier; one need only note that most critics were far more harsh with Faulkner's treatment than was Dillistone's soft chastisement. Most commentators were sure that the author did nothing to enrich the Biblical sources or even make them as meaningful as did the original writers. Had it been his intention to retell the Passion story in modern dress, simply to make it current, then these

¹⁵F. W. Dillistone, The Novelist and the Passion Story (London, 1960), p. 126.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 128.

critics are, in their various degrees, correct. But Faulkner never stated that his intention was to limit the novel to a modern version of the Passion story. To begin with, criticism which focuses upon A Fable from the standpoint of the Gospel stories, which demands that characters and action fit into traditional conceptions of figures out of these stories, and which requires an adherence to the various doctrinal articles of faith implied by Christianity is perhaps correct in its strictures from the standpoint of orthodox Christian theology;¹⁷ however, such adjuration is not necessarily literary criticism, nor is it necessarily clearly focused upon the action and the thematic implications of A Fable.

One may make another point in reference to the use of the Gospel stories. A Fable does not clearly offer an allegorical presentation of the Passion. Allegory does not generally make specific references to the institution behind the action represented, but allows the parallels to make the connection. Were this simply a modern allegory of the Passion, the obvious parallels of action would certainly have

¹⁷Some of these strictures may themselves be open to question, since the distinction between what is dogma and what is doctrine is not always made clear by some of the critics. See John W. Hunt, William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension (New York, 1965), p. 173.

been sufficient to draw the resemblance, but Faulkner goes much beyond this. There are many references to the original Christ throughout the novel. The Runner states at one point, in his usual ironic fashion, that the Corporal's job is more difficult than Christ's was.

"His prototype had only man's natural propensity for evil to contend with; this one faces all the scarlet and brazen impregnability of general staffs." (p. 206, italics Faulkner's)

The old porter in admonishing the Runner to go and see the mysterious 13 men who preach pacifism tells him

"Just go and look at him."

"Him?" the Runner said. "So it's just one now?"

"Wasn't it just one before?" the old porter said.

(p. 67)

The priest, after having warned the Corporal to "Beware whom you mock by reading your own mortal's pride into Him . . ." (p. 363) reflects before his suicide upon the mercy of Christ.

"He was nailed there and he will forgive me " (p. 370, italics Faulkner's). Even during the "last supper" scene one of the Corporal's men refers to Christ, "Christ assoil us " (p. 337), punning on the word, since the prisoners are talking about their becoming manure to enrich the soil of France.

One can hardly be confused as to the Corporal's role within the frame of an allegory. He clearly is not Christ.

Whatever symbolic reflections accrue to him by the

actions he imitates is something else again. If the novel is read as an account of the Second Coming, the problem arises of explaining other relationships, such as the connection between the Corporal and the Marshall. One might also easily concede that if A Fable is a novel about the Second Coming of Christ, one hardly needs to employ all of the cumbersome machinery of the combined Gospel stories, plus the whole framework of the war. Novelists who depict modern parallels to the Passion generally avoid following the lock-step pattern of imitation, and Faulkner himself is no exception to this rule in his previous novels. Carvel Collins points with pride to his being the first to discover the use of elements of the Passion in The Sound and the Fury,¹⁸ a novel certainly remote from a lock-step imitation of the Gospels, so one may easily concede that Faulkner was capable of disguising his imitation if he so desired. But in A Fable Faulkner has obviously gone out of his way to evoke similar patterns, even to the extent of wrapping a barbed wire crown of thorns around the Corporal's head and other such "excesses" of similarity. Another point to consider is why the Second Coming, if it is that, should be destined to end so far below the first, especially after its author had made a speech in

¹⁸Carvel Collins, op. cit., p. 13.

Stockholm four years earlier which was practically a testament to man. Certainly one must concede to Faulkner that he was aware of the differences as well as the resemblances between his novel and the Passion story.

A more reasonable explanation of the use of the Gospel stories is that Faulkner used them in relation to certain artistic and philosophical considerations which he must have been well aware of, and that he felt free to use them strictly in accordance with his art rather than subjecting them to strict religious dicta. That the Passion is the most profound story in our immediate culture few would deny; but that all treatments of any part of it must reflect, or at least imply, in that part, the whole range of theological or ethical considerations surrounding the Passion is not necessarily valid literary criticism. This idea is what most of those who object to Faulkner's usage ultimately fall back on, although their objections are usually not stated so baldly as this. The Corporal's "Christianity" offends them because it does not in some way "measure up" to what Christianity means to them. Especially offensive are the ironic "resurrection" scenes and the final interment of the Corporal in the tomb of the unknown soldier.¹⁹ These critics use as their focal point orthodox doctrinal or theological

¹⁹Walter F. Taylor, op. cit., is perhaps the best example of outraged Christianity. He sees the novel as "ending where traditional Christianity begins. There is no divine atonement, no salvation, no lasting escape from evil" (p. 476).

considerations. But Faulkner's focus need not even be on Christianity as such. The thought does not occur to those who are offended or confused that they may be broaching another truth, that the use of the Passion may be something other than a restatement in another form of Christian doctrine. This idea apparently does not even occur to such sympathetic critics as Dillistone, who submerges his potential criticism on religious grounds, and simply reduces the action to an expression of "reconciling love."²⁰

If we consider that the mere resemblance--even a close and obvious resemblance, between a new work and one which has already become established as a key, or even the core structure of an institution (be it a religious or national or whatever institution)--does not of itself demand that the new work under consideration adhere to the ethical, moral, or metaphysical beliefs of the institution which the original focused upon; our critical perspective need not be hamstrung by these considerations. Allegory, to function as allegory, as H. R. Warfel has demonstrated,²¹ must function on at least three of four possible levels. The story must be a literal story; it must

²⁰Dillistone, op. cit., p. 126. Dillistone's idea is not incompatible with my own view of the Corporal, but our definitions of the "love" would, I am sure, differ broadly.

²¹Harry R. Warfel, personal communication, 1968.

establish parallel relationships between it and the original story upon which it is based (if it is based on a story); it must establish parallel relationships between it and the institution which lies behind the original story; and it must establish a final universal or metaphysical level on which it may be read. I believe that analogical qualities in A Fable which resemble the Passion work primarily on the first and second level, but that it denies much of the third level which is necessary for allegory. A Fable denies the institution, both in the action that is outside those parts which resemble the Passion directly, and, more importantly, by internal differences between those portions that do parallel the original Gospel stories, owing mainly to its treatment of those portions. In fact, the very parts that seem to offend most of the critics, the character of the Corporal, the "degrading" last supper scene, the barbed wire crown, the ironic resurrection, the final interment in the military monument and certain aspects of "character" of the Corporal, find their ethical and "theological" perspective, not in the codifications of institutionalized Christianity, which in A Fable is equated with "static religion," but in "dynamic religion" as Bergson describes it. And therefore, A Fable is not a true allegory if one sees the Passion story in the sense that an allegory is supposed to bring us into

contact with the ethical and moral teachings of an institution in order to further its teachings. In relation to the Passion one may say that A Fable merely utilizes a profound and meaningful story as background to add force to its own meanings.

The parallels between certain obvious incidents in A Fable and the Gospels, insofar as the purely imitative qualities go, may be read simply as part of the complex symbolic extension of the static religion of the closed society, much the same as the war is the symbolic extension of the military, and the city of civilized man. The allegorical trappings are simply part of the agglomeration of myth surrounding the institution, and the resemblance of the Corporal to the historical Christ is simply another manifestation of the mythmaking function of the intelligence. This action is obviously "earthed." But the reduction of much of the agony of Christ to the mute, impassivity of the Corporal, the grotesqueries of the barbed wire crown, the irreverence and scatology in the last supper scene, the ironic resurrection, point to something beyond a mere retelling of the original story. What the Corporal is, how he functions in A Fable--more than how he functions as a parallel of Christ--is beyond a mere point for point imitatio Christi. To discover his function, which has already been described in part, we may go again to Bergson, this time to consider some

of his explicit statements about the nature and function of dynamic religion, which he equates with mysticism of that particular order which emanates not from withdrawal but from re-immersion in the elan vital.

This impetus is thus carried forward through the medium of certain men, each of whom thereby constitutes a species composed of a single individual. If the individual is fully conscious of this, if the fringe of intuition surrounding his intelligence is capable of expanding sufficiently to envelope its object, that is the mystic life. The dynamic religion which thus springs into being is the very opposite of the static religion born of the myth-making function, in the same way the open society is the opposite of the closed society.²²

The parallel between the representative of the open society and dynamic religion, and the inherent antagonism that this new being must project upon the established institutions, is thus clearly drawn. Another facet of the "deep dialect"--one which is based on experience--is thus established, and one may draw obvious implications from the parallel, fusion as it were, of dynamic religion with the open society. The Corporal is both the representative of the open society and that individual who has immersed himself in the elan vital, and, as his confrontation with the priest illustrated, has

²²Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 257.

embodied within himself, as a "species composed of a single individual," the power to overcome the casuistry of dialectic simply by "being." The Corporal is one who, in the Bergsonian sense, has immersed himself into "real" time, which "if it is not God, is of God," and the "religion" which emerges from this inundation is one which cannot be defined by ethical laws or theological argument. It is "a religion of men, not laws." The whole emphasis of Bergson's attempts at "defining" the new religion will be focused upon a man involved in experience rather than on some abstract theology or ethic. Thus the constant "earthing" of the Corporal, who embodies within himself all of the new, and thus, also, the treatment of the action surrounding him. The seeming disparities between what the Corporal's character should evoke, and what does happen as a result of his presence, is exactly what the mystic, according to Bergson, is able to accomplish. To be effective, the Corporal does not have to "do," does not have to preach; he just has to "be." Treating him in such a manner as to evoke this sense of incredulity--the disparity between the man and the acts he affects, Faulkner is able to at once emphasize his "reality" (what many critics take to be a sentimental and degrading humanization of Christ), and emphasize the power that the Corporal represents in himself, simply because events happen.

One may still reasonably ask why Faulkner had to choose the obvious parallel to the Gospel stories, why he could not have demonstrated these ideas on their own merits rather than borrow from the Gospels. Bergson may again supply us with an explanation.

. . . But just as the new moral aspiration takes shape only by borrowing from the closed society its natural form, which is obligated, so dynamic religion is propagated only through images and symbols supplied by the myth-making function.²³

A careful reading of the last sentence shows the reason for the trappings of Christian allegory in A Fable.

Bergson also states that

Humanity really understands the new only when it inherits much of the old . . . What the mystic finds waiting for him, then, is a humanity which has been prepared to listen to his message by other mystics invisible and present in the religion which is actually taught.²⁴

The necessity of the new forcing its way through the images and symbols of the old traditional symbology is certainly an ample reason for their use; and the framework of the Passion story--for it is really only that which is used in A Fable--becomes useful even though it has become encrusted through

²³Ibid., p. 257.

²⁴Ibid., p. 227.

intellectualization.

If religion is the expression of the myth-making function which offers "counterfeit experiences" to allay the impulse of intelligence toward a possibly egotistical path inimical to society, the insistence in A Fable upon the experience of the acts as true human experience more than mythical experience, the delineation of the Corporal as a concrete contrast to the "counterfeit" experiences of the Gospels, stands out as "fact." In this context, the Corporal's earthbound, "real" qualities, such as his apparent lack of "spirituality" as we expect to see it manifested in human beings, becomes more reasonable and need not vitiate our conception of a unique individual who compels love and action. Bergson, in a rather lengthy statement which relates the two types of religions to the morality which they assert, is specific upon these points, and his explanation may serve to further clarify the treatment of the Corporal and A Fable.

. . . it is of religious dogmas and the metaphysical theories they imply that we generally think of as soon as the word religion is mentioned: so that when religion is said to be the foundation of morality, we picture to ourselves a group of conceptions relating to God and the world, the acceptance of which is supposed to result in the doing of good. But it is quite clear that these conceptions, taken as such, influence our will and our conduct in the same way as theories may do, that is to say, ideas; we are here on the

intellectual plane, and . . . neither obligation nor the force which extends it can possibly originate in bare ideas. . . . Now if you distinguish this metaphysical system from all others by saying it compels our assent, you may again be right, but then you are not thinking of its content alone, of ideas pure and simple, you introduce something different, which underpins the representation, which imparts to it some undeniable efficacy, and which is the specifically religious element; but then it is this element, and not the metaphysics with which you have associated it, which becomes the religious basis of morality. Here indeed we are concerned with the second method, but then we are dealing with mystic experience. I mean mystic experience taken in its immediacy, apart from all interpretation.²⁵

A Fable is primarily concerned with illustrating the power of the second method in opposition with the first, and the "immediacy" of experience as it surrounds the Corporal is the way it does it. The very reductions of the Biblical-historical counterparts in A Fable assert the experiential qualities rather than the ideational qualities of those acts. The "last supper" scene, for example, parallels the Biblical scene in no way except that it occurs. What I mean is the scene takes place, there are 13 men present, they hint of betrayal, wine is drunk, bread is eaten. Other than the obvious parallel of the overall scene, nothing else resembles the Biblical story. Here the "disciples" offer ironic commentary upon their fate, using imagery of defecation and

²⁵Ibid., pp. 89, 90.

eructation, referring to the "Christ-figure" as "Corp." The Corporal, for his part, says nothing which may be termed "spiritual" or "inspirational" in any way. The focus of the scene is to emphasize the experience of the scene. Imagery of defecation is rarely beautiful, however artfully expressed, nor is it generally aimed at spirituality. One perhaps needs the excesses of the American Transcendentalists for that, and Faulkner's bent is more akin to that of Melville and Hawthorne than Thoreau. But it can, and in this case does, emphasize experience, in human terms (and this says much when the human terms are Bergsonian) of the act of eating.

The use of the barbed wire crown and other obvious parallels also emphasizes experience in the present rather than attempting to invoke a historical awareness of the original story. Faulkner's scenes which parallel the gospel stories do much more than merely parallel them; they overpower them. A Fable wrenches through and past its supposed allegorical frame, and it is this very intensity that causes the confusion and revulsion among certain critics. The scenes which parallel them are designed to go beyond a mere intellectualising or recapturing of the originals, and by their own intensity force a new awareness in the reader of the human condition. A Fable is not a morality--it is not prescribing

a morality--it is describing a condition. One of these conditions is the implied potential in all men that is made manifest in the Corporal as representative of the dynamic, intuitive individual. In his three-fold capacity, as representative of intuitive man, as progenitor of the open society, and as the embodiment of religious dynamism, a religion of men, not laws, in which "prayer is independent of its verbal expression: . . . an elevation of the soul that can dispense with speech,"²⁶ the Corporal functions as the "living contradiction" that Bergson speaks of, the paradox that is "very close" to Faulkner's God who is "the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests both in the eternity and in the now."²⁷

Bergson had stated that the dynamic religion "is propagated only through images and symbols supplied by the myth-making function."²⁸ He also stated that "Religious dynamism needs static religion for its expression and diffusion."²⁹ Here is a rationale for the use of the Gospels as an analogical frame in A Fable. Bergson, in another discussion, alludes

²⁶Ibid., p. 191.

²⁷Bouvard, op. cit., p. 362.

²⁸Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 257.

²⁹Ibid., p. 168.

to the mystic experience with a rhetorical question that points to a further extension of the use of the primacy of experience as a determining factor in Faulkner's use of the allegorical frame to be exceeded.

The next thing was to find out whether mysticism . . . while assimilating as much as it can from this religion, while turning to it for confirmation, while borrowing its language, it did not possess an original content, drawn straight from the very well-spring of religion, independent of all that religion owes to tradition, to theology to the churches.³⁰

The essence, the well-spring of religion, is the immersion in experience, in "enduring time," or as Bergson would say, in the elan vital. Bergson constantly insists upon experience as the defining factor in place of an abstract attempt to define the nature of God. The same applies to the idea of the soul.

. . . Let us call it spirit, or again, if you will, let us refer to it as soul, but in that case bear in mind that we are remoulding language and getting the word to encompass a series of experiences instead of an arbitrary definition.³¹

Thus it is the primacy of experience, experience defined as the immersion into "enduring time" (the Corporal's insistence

³⁰Ibid., p. 239.

³¹Ibid., p. 252.

upon "endure" takes on added significance in this context) which defines everything, even religion.

Faulkner, in truth, may never have come to grips with the more arcane theological niceties (which, if one demands a "theological" interpretation of A Fable on that level, are important); nevertheless, he could have created his characters along the obvious lines of the religious tradition within which he exists, without intending that the story reflect all of the original. Neither do I mean to imply that A Fable was intended as a handbook for a new religion--it certainly is not that. I do not believe that it is even proselytical literature, but it can be read as an attempt at describing a condition in which religion is an important facet, and thus the religious aspect of that condition is portrayed, among others. If one is able to consider the use of the Gospel stories, not as the necessary ethical and religious basis for the thematic implications of A Fable, but as simply another important point of reference, perhaps the main point, and one whose position historically demands that it be placed under the large category of the intelligence (as opposed to the intuitive, as per the dialectic) and ultimately as simply another institution--particularly "static religion"--the confusion between what the Corporal is and what the Passion story is in relation to him should be somewhat alleviated without the necessity of labeling Faulkner a heretic.

The Corporal is, simply, experience on the level of what Bergson terms duree, the immersion in real time, which is closely associated with the elan vital; and in him is embodied all of the radically new, as much as the past he "represents." As a later figure than Christ, historically, and by emulating the older story in full awareness that he is not Christ, the Corporal wrenches the historical context of the Passion story out of its perspective, at least so far as it is considered as a "history"; all of the ameliorative effect of Christianity which the popular mind may believe exists historically is washed away by the ensuing action of the inevitable crucifixion and earthly resurrection and the interment.³² The Corporal is, therefore, more than merely a "Christ-figure," or a moral example to be followed. He is the embodiment of a whole radical condition; solidly, stolidly a man, but also a symbol as complex as any Faulkner has created, for in him all of the implicit open society, morality, and dynamic religion exist in potential. His role is not merely to act out the Passion on the human, modern level, but to serve as the core of the whole attitude which manifests itself in "aspiration" rather than compulsion, in experience rather than symbology.

³²The question of whether the gospel stories, as "kerygma," lose historical importance, since they are aimed not at the intellect, but at enjoining man to a decision of faith (as opposed to offering "facts" about Christ) has relevance, since this is an approach which is close to Bergson's own belief that the Gospel stories were not written so much to explain as to enjoin. ". . . are we not justified in pointing out that it [the morality of the Gospels] borders on paradox, i.e., if riches are evil, should we not be injuring the poor in giving them what we possess? . . . but the paradox disappears, the contradiction vanishes, if we consider the intent of these maxims, which is to create a certain disposition of the soul" (pp. 50, 51).

In fact, all of the actions which the Corporal engages in which are direct imitations of the Passion are static, fixed, not really in accord with the rest of the initiatory action he engages in (something like the "corpses" of real time, according to Bergson, that the intellect sees as the past), except for those instances in which the Corporal's action goes beyond the mere imitation to grotesquerie, in those very portions where his action offends critics who prefer orthodox imitation. Insofar as the Corporal resembles the historical Christ, then, he is static, but insofar as the action he initiates himself, stopping the war (for a time), confounding the hierarchy of powers, he is the essence of the dynamic. This is the reason why the Corporal is not described in action. He does little else except be there, but his presence is the catalyst to meaningful action.

In short, the Corporal's acts, or more particularly, the actions which surround him, are essentially a denial of the mythical context of Christianity, a denial of the myth-making function. The Corporal, in a sense, destroys all symbols, so that he alone eventually stands as concrete, even though he ultimately is absorbed by the institutions he denies.

Schendler has noted that the whole myth of the Passion stands as an ironic counterpoint to the actions of A Fable, and also as an ethical norm which by implication transcends the very antinomies the novel presents (those that parallel

the antagonists of what I term the "deep structural dialectic"). In this context the Corporal becomes a moral example to be followed, who is followed by the highest representative (according to Schendler) of ethical action, the Runner. I concur with the first part of this thesis, since this does little to diminish my own findings, but I find that the Corporal is more than a mere moral example--he is the core meaning of the entire novel, I believe, in a more profound sense than simply as an ironic counterpart or ethical norm. To see the historical, mythologized Christ as part of the very structure and fabric of the opposition--the static religion of the closed society, imparts to the Gospels a complexity and profundity of effect which greatly enriches the thematic implications of the novel without, I trust, adding to confusion. In this latter context they are able to function both as a reference point in time and in the eternal present. The reflection of the Gospels that the Corporal acts out becomes meaningful only after his presence and actions are capable of denying the original to the extent that they are "living myth." Faulkner's quarrel is not with Christianity--the institutionalized, historicized recording of the acts of Christ through Scripture and teaching of disciplines is not a moral evil (just as paradoxically, war as an act of will is not clearly a moral evil, although, like disease, as a condition war is evil in its static,

unproductive effect). In the same way, the codification of the acts of Christ have become a structure in themselves rather than an opening into new relationships. They have become "corpses" of time--outside duration. Christianity as an institution is as much a national religion as any earlier paganism or Old Testament God was. Faulkner's constant fusion of the military and the priesthood in the examples shown in the previous chapter constantly points up this fact. The Corporal, although he is doomed to failure because he is a man, is, nonetheless, an embodiment of the attitudes of a Christ who was perhaps the rebel in his contemporaneous setting. Thus the Corporal can function on multiple levels of meaning, but ultimately all of his symbolic attachments to the Gospel stories which the critics have demanded that he reflect in his character must be stripped away by the intensity of his experience, not Christ's before him. He must pull all of the past up to his present. The grotesque crucifixion, the ironic resurrection, the lack of ritual and rhetoric, and the final interment in the monument to the unknown soldier³³ focus upon the Corporal as the Corporal--

³³Although there is some slight ambiguity as to whether the body is actually the Corporal's, it appears to me that quibbling over miniscule points of identification is, in this case, hardly worth the effort. The total thrust of the thematic considerations of the novel, besides its structure, demand that the body be the Corporal's.

the qualities which distinguish him from Christ, are ultimately more important than the resemblances. Just as the intensity of the scenes paralleling the Passion overpower the originals (not in the sense of beauty or religiosity, but simply in terms of felt experience) so does the focus finally fall upon the Corporal in all his limitations and power. The primacy of experience rendered concretely cannot be stressed too much, for this is the essential method by which the Corporal is able to exert power through his presence--his power resides in his not needing symbology, that ritualization of experience which the closed society and static religion demand for their perpetuation and definition. The Corporal, though, is not complete, as dynamic religion can never be complete; nor can the morality which emerges from A Fable be codified in neat terms. The Corporal is pure action, pure dynamism in his person--and one of the many paradoxes in the novel is that he appears to be the opposite.

The multiple deaths and the resurrection are not blasphemous unless one again demands orthodox Christian parallels. A simple explanation is that they focus, not on the divinity of the Corporal, but on his essential dynamism. The resurrection may be ambiguous and ironic, but it nevertheless is involved with reimmersing the Corporal into the human condition, into human time. Even his final interment

in the tomb of the unknown soldier becomes a coherent and profound example of the deathless quality of the human condition he represents. It is ironic that the Corporal, who sought to end war, should be buried in a monument dedicated to the glory he scorned, but it is also fitting, within the total context of what the Corporal is, and, more so, what he implies by his presence. The eternal flame burning above him is testament to the eternal qualities he fused into himself; more than this, Faulkner emphasizes both the particularity and the universality of what the Corporal is in this scene by subtly manipulating point of view in his description of the Arch of Triumph.

It lifted toward the gray and griev-
ing sky, invincible and impervious,
to endure forever not because it was
stone nor even because of its rhythm
and symmetry, but because of its
symbolism, crowning the city; on the
marble floor, exactly beneath the Arch's
soaring center, the small perpetual
flame burned above the eternal sleep
of the nameless bones brought down
five years ago from the Verdun battle-
field. (p. 434)

The reader, of course, knows that the "nameless bones" are the Corporal's; thus the "split vision"--the knowledge that we have, and the knowledge that the world has of the meaning of the tomb, becomes more complex, and one is able to fuse the particular and the universal easily into this symbol.

Faulkner also emphasizes the spirit in his description, which

tends to reinforce the eternal qualities which are embodied in the Corporal. He becomes at this point that god "who is the most complete expression of mankind," who "rests in the eternity and in the now." And in his apparent anonymity, the Corporal becomes all men in potential--or more aptly, all men are, in potential, what the Corporal is.

By the final scene in A Fable, the Christian parallels are quite diminished, and the Corporal has far outweighed, in his own character, the parallels indicated by the analogical correspondences with the Passion. The final scene also reconnects the two antagonists in terms of stasis and motion, with the Marshall, again, being dominated by the "presence" of the Corporal. Faulkner has set the scene so that the entourage of the Marshall has stopped directly before the arch under which the Corporal lies. The orator has just finished his address to the corpse of the Marshall when the Runner steps out of the crowd and tosses his medal at the coffin as he offers his three "epitaphs" on mankind to the Marshall. Once his "sacred talisman" is gone, the crowd, which has been surging forward, eager to get its hands on him, sweeps over him and almost kills him. But the ritual, the pomp and circumstance, has been destroyed. The formalization of experience has been disrupted by a simple act of defiance, and all of the trappings of glory are reduced to a frenzy of directionless action, which is the frenetic

counterpart of stasis.

. . . rite and solemnity gone for good now, parade marshals' whistles shrilled and the chief marshal himself grasped the bridles of the horses drawing the caisson and swung them around, shouting to the driver: "Go on!" the rest of the cortege huddling without order, protocol vanished for the moment too as they hurried after the caisson almost with an air of pell mell, as though in actual flight from the wreckage of the disaster. (p. 436)

It is, of course, the "spirit" of the Corporal residing in the Runner which has forced him to his action, but the locale of the scene is important in terms of what has gone before in the novel. Both the Corporal and the Marshall are vis a vis again, so to speak (the caisson is halted before the tomb), and their basically antagonistic approaches to experience are again seen in terms of motion and stasis. Again, the Corporal's meaningful action, here perpetuated by the Runner, though minute in one sense, is enough to completely disrupt the ritual and ceremony of the ultra-closed society--the military. That the crowd is grieving and that they, even in their anger, respect the symbols of the closed society (the "sacred talisman") merely draws again more tightly the cohesiveness between the crowd and the military. The action of the Corporal and the Runner confounds both segments.

The fact that no "god" has come of the Corporal's actions--he did not end the war; human society is essentially

still the same at the end; the old ways remain; nothing has been transformed--would seem to point toward complete negation. But the end of A Fable does not necessarily posit the negation that Rice and Taylor saw. The apparent "failures" are not complete failures. It is true, I believe, that the Runner does not have the qualities which the Corporal had, but nonetheless something of the Corporal lives on in him. The gains are few, and the possibility of a complete transformation of society or religion is remote, but the transmission of the Corporal's "spirit" is not completely nullified. The implications are still there, residing in the very symbology that he sought to end, and in the spirit of the Runner. This idea is not so paradoxical as it at first seems. Bergson explains how the whole evolution of the human condition continues even though "the open society has never been attained, perhaps never will be attained."³⁴ But a subtle transformation takes place, even though the outward action--experience viewed solely by the intellect--seems to have been completely nullified.

A dream dreamt, now and again, by chosen souls, it embodies on every occasion something of itself in creations, each of which through a more or less far-reaching transformation of man, conquers difficulties

³⁴Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 86.

hitherto unconquerable. But after each occasion the circle that has momentarily opened closes again. Part of the new has flowed into the mould of the old; individual aspiration has become social pressure; and obligation covers the whole.³⁵

In the light of this observation we may view the last scene as consistent with the character and actions of the Corporal, and as consistent within the scheme of things as Bergson would view them. The interment of the Corporal into the tomb of the unknown soldier is ironic, but it also reaches beyond irony to rest in a condition that demands a new vocabulary. As one critic put it, regarding the Corporal's entombment, "it is odd, but somehow fitting." Part of the Corporal has flowed into the mould of the old, part of him has flowed also into the frame which houses the action of A Fable, and part of the Corporal has flowed into our conception of the Christ of the Gospels. Whatever his "short-comings" as a "representative" Christ-figure to the orthodox mind, almost all that can be pointed up ultimately serves to empower him within the limits that human action can attain.

The Corporal is not a unique character in the Faulkner canon. He has many predecessors, from the taciturn "hero" of Pylon, Schumann, who makes a rather vain sacrifice within

³⁵Ibid., p. 256.

an ambiguous experiential situation, to Ike McCaslin, who renounces his inheritance to become a carpenter, only to "fail" in the sense of winning the world (as those who wish to detract from his actions are willing to note in "Delta Autumn"). The characters who in some degree emulate some of the actions of Christ "fail" in winning the world. But this is not to say that Faulkner is maintaining that all human action is destined to failure in the largest sense. There is a paradoxical quality to failure in the world as it is experienced purely in the intellectual apparatus we have. What we "learn" is often a condition which may confuse the true nature of what we are. Faulkner's views on this are translated into action beyond creating fiction in the following example.

In a letter to The New York Times in 1954 (the same year A Fable was published) lamenting the wreck of an airliner which apparently crashed owing to the pilot's trust in an apparently faulty instrument over and above his own senses, Faulkner makes known his view.

. . . we had all better grieve for all people beneath a culture which holds any mechanical superior to man simply because the one, being mechanical, is infallible, while the other, being nothing but man, is not just subject to failure but doomed to it."³⁶

³⁶William Faulkner, "Letters to the Times," The New York Times, (December 26, 1954), p. E6.

Here, couched in terms of "failure" and "doom," is the same affirmation of man. One may choose to be misled by the apparent use of words, but the underlying import of this letter is that in spite of the limitations that man's nature places upon him, he is, and should be, superior to those very events which foredoom him and force his failure. Within this context of man doomed to failure yet superior to the very forces which "doom" him, the Corporal's actions and Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech can fuse. The Corporal can prevail in the midst of his "defeat."

CHAPTER IV

THE LARGER PATTERN

What A Fable "is" seems to be a central question for some critics in determining its structural features. Thomas H. Carter, for instance, felt that it was basically cleanly structured, but "the other sub-plots obscure the simple rightness of the Corporal's story."¹ Many see the essential failure occurring in the attempt to mix genres and tones which, in their view, it is impossible to mix. Most critics read A Fable as an allegory which has either been contaminated or enriched in a dreadful way by certain "realistic" features which clash with the main action, the Passion. Whether it is contaminated or enriched is apparently owing to whether the critic personally prefers the realistic or the symbolic mode. R. W. Flint, who seemed especially embittered over the crosses which appeared on the cover of the Random House edition, noted that the main plot was "an elaborate gimmick of the most dismal sort, mainly a puzzle whose solution is obvious at the outset."² He tells us

¹Thomas H. Carter, "Dramatization of an Enigma," Western Review, XIX (Winter, 1955), 152.

²R. W. Flint, "What Price Glory?" The Hudson Review, VII (Winter, 1955), 602.

that "although some episodes have a massive cloudy splendor," most of the novel fails because it is, for Flint, "too symbolic."³ One may easily contrast this opinion to that of Hyatt Howe Waggoner, who sees the novel's process as "almost the opposite of the symbolic," one that emerges from "an interpretation of scripture based on the supposition that historic Christianity was founded upon a hoax."⁴ Roma King feels that Faulkner's view is basically Christian, but that the book fails because he has "no systematic intellectual grounding or comprehensive theology," and the allegory "gets lost among naturalistic irrelevancies and details."⁵ But for Lawrance Thomson the "allegorical skeleton sticks through the flesh unpleasantly."⁶ And Irving Howe considers the book to be "a splendidly written fable that is cluttered and fretted with structural complexities appropriate only to a novel."⁷ And finally, we may go to Carter again, who delivers

³Ibid., p. 605.

⁴Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington, Ky., 1959), p. 229.

⁵Roma A. King, Jr., "Everyman's Warfare: A Study of Faulkner's 'Fable,'" Modern Fiction Studies, II (Autumn, 1956), 132.

⁶Lawrance Thompson, Willim Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1963), p. 13.

⁷Irving Howe, "Thirteen Who Mutined: Faulkner's First World War," The Reporter, XI (September 14, 1954), 44.

another critical edict. "Whatever its symbolic structure . . . A Fable must be judged by the standards of naturalistic fiction."⁸

Flint echoes other reviewers who lectured Faulkner upon what he could and could not do when writing a book. Faulkner should have stuck with his good instincts, which "deal profoundly only with experienced realities, not, as in A Fable, with received ideas." The ideas are "divorced and disembodied, muddled and self-defeating."⁹ Flint's view merely restates the general claim that A Fable is essentially an intellectual, a conceptual failure. The structural failures emanate from Faulkner's incomplete conception and manifest themselves in the mutation they consider A Fable to be. Faulkner has offered us neither fish nor fowl because of "an inability to decide whether he was writing a novel or a bare fable."¹⁰

Unlike Flint and Thompson, I prefer not to dogmatize upon what limitations writers must bow to in respect to the mixing of modes and genres, or whether they should consign themselves to such modes as critics deem appropriate to their

⁸Carter, op. cit., p. 147.

⁹Flint, op. cit., p. 602.

¹⁰Howe, "Thirteen Who Mutinied," p. 44.

particular talents. Also, since few of the critics offered any concrete examples to justify particular claims they made, in terms of the novel itself, one must simply allow that for them A Fable ranged from an "earnest, high-minded mistake"¹¹ to "one of the most desperate and radically bleak visions of human experience that any novel in our time has advanced,"¹² to the merely "boring."¹³ What is interesting, though, is that practically all of these critics find some parts, either particular passages or complete episodes, whose excellence redeems A Fable partially. What is more interesting is that practically all of the redeeming passages are different ones for different critics. Flint believes that the funeral scene is the most powerful.¹⁴ Roma King prefers what he terms the "gethsemane scene"¹⁵ (meaning, apparently, the "Maundy Thursday" scene, where the Corporal is informed of Polchek's betrayal). For Irving Howe the "last supper" scene, where the 13 "fumble for the words of grace"¹⁶ is the

¹¹ Flint, op. cit., p. 602.

¹² Howe, "Thirteen Who Mutinied," p. 44.

¹³ Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 226.

¹⁴ Flint, op. cit., p. 605.

¹⁵ King, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁶ Howe, "Thirteen Who Mutinied," p. 44.

finest in the book. For Waggoner "the only parts that really live are of the heart,"¹⁷ and although he does not specify these parts, one may at least assume they are successful for him.

The limited vision of these critics appears to parallel those who demanded that the Corporal correspond to certain attributes they held to be necessary in portraying a "Christ-figure." Their preconceptions were focused on characterization while the above named critics demand certain formal structural characteristics to be present (i.e., a fable should be allegorical and symbolic, a novel should be realistic and naturalistic), yet both groups resemble each other in their propensity to proscribe certain practices rather than analyze what these practices might attempt to accomplish in a given work. One critic closely aligned with those above straddles both camps, since his rejection of theme stems from his rejection of plot which stems from his rejection of character. Stavrou finds that A Fable is poor because it does not really show man prevailing; therefore, the plot goes to pieces after the crucifixion scene, because the reins must be borne by someone, since the Corporal-Christ's martyrdom is unsuccessful,

¹⁷Waggoner, From Jefferson to the World, p. 229.

and the Runner simply does not appear to be prevailing.¹⁸ One might well wonder, in the light of the conditions the "crucifixion" imposed upon the Runner, just what attitude he could assume in order to "prevail"¹⁹ in a manner pleasing to Mr. Stavrou, since to do other than what Faulkner has done would obviously be to falsify what the experience of history has taught us (i.e., the mutiny did not end the war--in fact the war itself did not end wars, nor have the ideals of Christianity prevailed or the crucifixion itself, even though much of the world is Christian). To simply beatify the Runner would be to falsify everything the character points toward in

¹⁸C. N. Stavrou, "Ambiguity in Faulkner's Affirmation, The Personalist, XL (Spring, 1959), 172.

¹⁹A great deal, too much, I believe, has been made of the use of the word "prevail" in the Maundy Thursday scene, owing mainly to the fact that the "wrong" person, the Marshall, uses it, and since it echoes the Nobel Prize acceptance speech. But if one simply realizes that the Marshall is speaking from within a context, that of the defender of the closed society which he represents, and that within this context, it simply means that he will prevail over the things of this world, even though they are to threaten him, since they are the result of his folly. Too many critics forget that the Marshall says that not just man and his folly will prevail. The Corporal does not deny that folly also will endure. The folly is part "of his immortality."

The worrisome, tedious attention given to this "ironic reversal" of speakers is exemplified in Hyatt Waggoner's long explanations of what "prevail" means in Old Testament vs. New Testament terms. See H. H. Waggoner, "William Faulkner's Passion Week of the Heart," The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith, (New York, 1957), 306-323. Waggoner finally comes to the conclusion he could have reached without going to all the trouble he did; i.e., that Faulkner's conception of "prevail" is neither simple nor orthodox, but somewhat closer to paradox (Waggoner calls it "ambiguous").

the novel, as well as to blur his function, which is to link up the various events thematically. But Stavrou, unlike Howe, does see an affirmation in the novel, even though it is an ambiguous one owing to the "defects" mentioned.

I point up the odd conjunction of the homogeneity of opinion as to why A Fable fails, with the diversity of emphasis as to why it fails, merely to attempt by these examples to mark certain errors which I believe occurred owing to a blurring of what is truly structural in the novel, and what is preconceived as thematically necessary in the critics' minds. I merely mention certain characteristics of the novel which link it to certain ideas of genre, but I shall not attempt a normative judgment upon the grounds of formal genre characteristics, since it does not seem unreasonable to me that a work may be a genre unto itself. Also, it appears to me that one may legitimately define a work in terms of genre when the work corresponds neatly to the various characteristics which have become acceptable as the definitive norms of a genre. If one reverses this procedure and approaches a particular work with a preconceived idea of what form it should take owing to certain features actually outside its essential structure and which it resembles (in the case of A Fable, Holy Week) and demands that certain actions adhere to these preconceptions, or be submerged below some other consideration

more to one's liking, and proceed to use these preconceptions as a basis for normative judgments, then I believe the process is not a legitimate one. This latter method, I believe, occurs in the examples above. And the weaknesses of the method are pointed up by the very differences which each critic seems to find redemptive in the work. It would seem that certain close considerations they would apply to the work would at least draw them together more closely than they are, since all of their objections emanate from the same essential source--the improper mixing of genres.

I do not choose to follow either method here, since I do not propose to attempt a definition of the "genre" which A Fable fits. But certain structural relationships which I believe tie in inextricably with them are necessary to note; they are more easily assayed if one does not try to force a straight-jacket upon the work itself, but rather chooses to follow the contours it demands one follow.

Mr. Ernest Sandeen is a good case in point of one who simply accepted what was offered without preconceived formal or moral demands. Mr. Sandeen is, I assume, a political scientist, since his review appeared in The Review of Politics, and although his view has a historical bias, he is nonetheless free from certain strictures which literary critics are heir to. A Fable, he says, is a political

allegory,²⁰ but this observation entails no strict formal limitations; he merely means that one may extract a politically relevant theme from the action it presents. He maintains that A Fable is a novel, that all of the characters, being men, are anchored in history, and therefore one may extract political implications from their acts.

While Mr. Sandeen's conclusions are limited by his historical bias, from his relatively free vantage point he can nonetheless offer some excellent insights which relate to the structure of A Fable. He claims that the parallels to Holy Week are only incidental to the main action, which is the struggle of two diametrically opposed individuals who are engaged in a conflict of principles that are highlighted by the historical fact of a war. The differences between A Fable and Holy Week are more striking than the similarities, he notes, thus emphasizing the fact that these characters are men, not merely pawns who are acting out a story previously told. Mr. Sandeen is so comfortable with generic terms that he merely mentions in passing that A Fable seems to be more closely related to the Iliad than the Passion, thereby linking it to the epic tradition,²¹ although limiting

²⁰Ernest Sandeen, "William Faulkner: His Legend and His Fable," Review of Politics, XVIII (January, 1956), p. 59.

²¹Ibid., p. 48. Sandeen hit better than he knew, possibly. A Fable certainly contains as many conventional epic techniques and considerations as allegorical ones. Among

its meaning to a political allegory. But the most important point he makes is one relating to the very core structure of A Fable. He maintains that to understand the "dialectic" at work, one must see the protagonists in the light of each other.²² Either one alone is not "true," not total; both together constitute the totality that is man. This insight frees one from the necessity of imposing strict tags of good and evil upon the protagonists, as the allegorical approach demands, and also removes the inexorable incongruities it occasions on other characters. Sandeen's observation can be extended, though, to include more than just the main characters--whole episodes may also be seen in this light. Actually, meaning emerges from the interplay of parallels of action and character both within the main action itself, and between the main action and the "peripheral episodes" many critics see as hardly discernible sub-plots. Not only this, but it also links the "dialectic" of action directly to Bergson's

these, prominent are: The condensed arena of action and time, the journey motifs, both in flashback and into the underworld (the exhumation at Verdun), heroes as representatives of ideals, a concern with weapons, a catalogue of heroes, revelatory visions, epic similes, formal speech, and of course, it begins in medias res.

²² Ibid., p. 55.

conception of the human species as the best expression of the elan vital's attempt to wrest form from matter, a point vital to an understanding of structural elements in A Fable and worthy of some elaboration.

Bergson states that the elan vital, in its primal state, contained within it two tendencies or modes of knowledge: instinct and intelligence. These were only an apparent duality, since both were more or less simply different views of the same quality at the beginning.

We may conjecture that the vital impulse began by possessing these characteristics in a state of reciprocal implication: instinct and intelligence . . . must therefore be taken one with the other, before their separation: not combined into one, but one in the beginning.²³

Instinct dominated in the development of the insects, intelligence with human societies, but since both species emanated from the elan vital, each species retains a vague residue of the other dominant characteristic, even though they had to part company in order to develop. Man has by and large relied upon his intelligence to render experience of the world meaningful to him, but in so doing has weakened a principle that may be the source of his power to finally realize the

²³Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 104.

possibilities which exist in him in potential, for instinct was essentially intuitive.

. . . intuition had had to debase itself to become instinct; it had become intent . . . on the interest of the species . . . but just as there subsisted around animal instinct a fringe of intelligence, so human intelligence preserved a halo of intuition.²⁴

The mystic, then, is the particular individual who has seized upon this lingering fringe of intuition, and though it is "vague and evanescent, has proceeded to intensify and above all consummate it in action."²⁵ The Corporal has been discussed as a representative of the true mystic in the preceding chapter.

Thus the two basic approaches to experience, biologically fused at their source, spring from the same primal well. Here then is a plausible explanation of the father-son relationship of the two antagonists; both have a common biological source, and both represent opposing views "we are articulations . . . two inimical conditions. . . . No they are not inimical really . . . they can even exist side by side" (pp. 347, 348) of reconciling experience

²⁴Ibid., p. 238.

²⁵Ibid., p. 201.

into a meaningful expression of the human condition. But Bergson's rationale does more than help reduce certain ambiguities apparently existing in the father-son relationship within the allegorical context; it provides a key to the overall structural form of A Fable, for from this basic biological linkage of the two modes of knowledge, he formulates two concepts he loosely designates as "laws," the definitions of which may serve to describe the action of A Fable.

Bergson notes that these two basic approaches seek to preserve the species in different ways. At all times one will be dominant, but the other will rise to challenge it, springing from the original. He terms this action the "law of dichotomy." The intensity with which each mode pursues its ends he terms the "law of two-fold frenzy." Each "tendency" has, it seems, an "imperative demand" to pursue its course to the very end.²⁶ Thus, from the "splitting up of the original tendency"--the will to elevate man and preserve the species, come the two "forces" in opposition, the intuition and the intelligence, the two "articulations" in the Marshall's statement above, which he considers himself and the Corporal to be. Thus the intuition and intellect, the

²⁶ ibid., p. 285.

antagonists of the "deep structural dialectic," comprise the splitting up of the original tendency of the elan vital, but both, springing from the same source, may function in a close biological relationship. The "law of two-fold frenzy" accounts for the inflexibility both antagonists demonstrate in their pursuit. The Corporal, of necessity, is as implacable as is the Marshall in the pursuit of his goal, even though the goal seems an absurdity to the logic that our intellect demands. This is why the Marshall refers to himself as "champion of this mundane earth," and the Corporal as "champion of an esoteric realm of man's baseless hopes and his infinite capacity--no: passion--for unfact " (p. 348).

Here is a rationale which can take into account all of the action that occurs, explain a structural framework large enough to keep all the action within a consistent whole, and is yet flexible enough to avoid the distortion that inevitably occurs when one places this total action on the rack of allegory. It is a complete conception; it is also clear in its implications. Thus is avoided the necessity of taking a strict moral stance in regard to the major antagonists; the result is a structural framework which describes the human condition rather than prescribes for it. Of course, certain associated values which are contained in the implications of the Corporal's actions--more particularly

the "weight" of the open society that is felt throughout the novel, even though it is not described, may indicate a potential moral advance which the novel does not delineate in particular, mainly owing to the fact that the open society has never existed, and as Bergson admits "may likely never occur." The moral conflict at any rate is still one of the surface conflicts emanating from the more basic antagonism of the intuition or intelligence being the primary means of imposing an order upon existence.

Since both modes are actually in their essence two "views" of the elan vital, they will retain certain resemblances, even though each rises to challenge the other when it is dominant. These resemblances may manifest themselves in the characters of the antagonists, and one may offer this evidence to explain why Faulkner could easily transfer some of the optimistic elements of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech from one to the other, since both tendencies seek, in their way, to preserve and elevate the species. Also, although the "deep structural dialectic" posits two modes of existence unalterably opposed, this confrontation does not necessarily posit a rigid dialectical presentation of the surface conflicts, each minutely and neatly described in its opposition to the other. This is not even the case in the main conflict. Indeed, as mentioned above, the "weight" of the open society

is something which is only "felt" throughout the novel--the open society is not ever described since it has never existed: we have never known it. The open society is presented in much the same manner that its representative, the Corporal, is presented--not through a minute description, but in terms of the action which it (or the implications of it) generates. Also, the main parallel action to the conflict between the Marshall and the Corporal is the long narrative of the Groom and the racehorse and this episode functions not as a contrast but as a parallel commentary upon the main action. The "deep structural dialectic" was so-named because it lies much below the many surface conflicts; it does not operate obviously as a unifying structure, but all of the surface conflicts are explainable within its context. In a sense, A Fable's structure may be likened to a wheel; the vital center, the hub of the wheel, is the mutiny (itself not described in detail but only registered in the mind of a character, Gragnon). The mutiny is the expression of the opposition of the two modes. All of the conflicts on the surface lie at the rim of the wheel, and all take on their meaning from their attachment, in some way, to this hub. In short, the parallels of action, or the resemblances of characters to characters in other episodes take on more significance

as their various spokes come closer to the hub. It is the mutiny which gives all of the action of A Fable its significance, but the focus of the action is not on the hub itself; it is on the spokes and the rim of the wheel; by describing its effects we describe the hub.

This wheel image is not precisely correct, or at least we must note that it would be a lopsided wheel, since all the spokes would not be the same length. Another analogous but less definable structural parallel would be to consider the entire action existing as a magnetic field, all action existing in a sort of tension to other action and paralleling each other much the same way that lines of magnetic force relate to each other. The "center" of this "field" would again be the mutiny, again not described, just as the center of any magnetic field may be defined by the lines of force emanating from it. Neither analogy above is exactly correct, but may serve as rough metaphoric frame within which to consider the seemingly disparate episodes as unified.

The various episodes, or "sub-plots" as some critics refer to them, range from the lengthy "horsethief" episode to minor incidents such as the small scurry regarding the spoon in the main action. Nonetheless, all draw their significance from how much they indicate their attachment to

or estrangement from one of the two approaches to experience-- the intellectual and intuitive--which are radically different aspects of the same original tendency. The resemblances may serve, paradoxically, to point up essential differences; in fact, paradox becomes the main means by which the disparities are resolved within the total, final fusion of structure and theme.

Since the most complex remote parallel action occurs between the main action and the "horsethief" episode, it would best serve our purpose at this time to give a *précis* of the complete narrative in which the Groom plays the central role.

A superb English racehorse is purchased from an Argentinian merchant prince by an American oil baron. The horse is shipped from Argentina, accompanied by a small, bowlegged Cockney groom who was the only person it would tolerate handling it. Upon arriving in New Orleans, they are met by an old Negro groom-cum-preacher and his grandson, both in the employ of the oil baron. The three ride with the horse in a boxcar, headed for Kentucky, but a trestle in the bayou outside of New Orleans collapses under them, and in the wreckage the horse breaks its hip. The three manage to save the horse and, rather than continue with it to the farm where it will undoubtedly be turned out to stud, they decide to hide it, set its hip, and nurse it back to health.

The oil baron decides to search for the horse when it mysteriously "disappears" and sets massive machinery in motion to recover it. The state, federal, railway insurance, and private police forces attempt to retrieve the horse with no success. Meanwhile the Groom and his companions manage to forage enough money, mainly by the Groom's periodic forays at the gaming tables in New Orleans, to keep the horse and themselves fed while it heals out in the bayou.

Soon a legend goes around the Mississippi watershed about the three-legged horse which is beating all horses

in races in local fairs, etc., between Illinois and the Gulf of Mexico. The group wanders an uncanny path always just ahead of the pursuing forces of the oil baron and the government. The legend grows among the back-country people, and the oil baron's rage grows with it until at last he is putting the entire weight of his power in his efforts to retrieve the horse, and bring the absconding ones to justice.

After pursuing them for eight months with no success, the federal deputy in charge of the pursuit, a maverick himself, suddenly finds that he is on the side of the culprits, and goes to the oil baron attempting to buy the horse, but is refused. The matter is obviously no longer one of money. He rejoins the chase, but no longer as a man in power, simply as one of the group, mainly interested in helping the culprits when they are, inevitably, captured. The chase ends in a back-water Missouri town, with the pursuers riding in a van across a meadow toward a stable where the Groom and his companions have holed up. Upon approaching the stable, they see the 'room in the doorway, a smoking gun in his hand. He has shot the horse rather than allow it to be taken. The total time elapsed since the wreck has been 22 months, 16 of which were spent in the racing and chasing.

The ex-deputy hires a famous lawyer to defend the three men, but when the lawyer arrives, the three have mysteriously vanished, apparently set free by the local townsfolk. On the sixth day, the old Negro appears at the door of the jail, wearing his legendary frock coat purportedly containing \$40,000 in the tails. The ineffectual little turn-key who runs the jail is so dominated by the crowd that he is able to do nothing when they push their way into the courthouse. There the lawyer seeks to spellbind them with his rhetoric while the deputy supposedly spirits the Negro away to another, larger jurisdiction, but the crowd, suspecting this, pushes past the lawyer, recaptures the old Negro, and puts him on a train. They are apparently awed by the amount of money he supposedly has tucked away in the tails of the coat, but their action is enough to set him free.

The old Negro had returned to say goodbye to the Groom, who he knew would be leaving for England since the war had started. The old Negro and his grandson, who had ridden the horse, got off the train at the next stop, and from there walked to where they suddenly

know the Groom has been staying since his release from jail. He had gone back to the place where they had first raced the horse, the southeast corner of Tennessee where Georgia and North Carolina meet it. The walk takes them three months (they had never won any money to speak of). In the interim the Groom has simply reappeared there, and lived for some time, not questioned by the people, actually taken care of by them. After a time he moves out to help an old poverty-stricken couple who work a meager farm until the war breaks out, after which he leaves suddenly for England to enlist. He had not waited for the old Negro.

An earlier version entitled Notes on a Horsethief appeared separately in a limited edition in 1950.²⁷ The incidents covered in the last paragraph above are not included in that version. Also, the earlier version is narrated by an unidentified speaker, with occasional sojourns into the mind of the ex-deputy and the lawyer. Faulkner revised the story when he incorporated it into A Fable, but there is clear evidence that he saw the parallels between it and the main conflict, perhaps much earlier than 1950, since he had been working on A Fable intermittently for eight years by that time. ✓
The title even implies that it is part of a larger work.

At any rate the episode is made more complex in A Fable. The story here is narrated for the most part by the old Negro groom, the Reverend Sutterfield, who is telling it to the Runner, who has come to Paris on leave seeking out the mystery of the Groom. (The Groom is in the Runner's ✓ regiment and now runs a callous "insurance" business where he advances the men money against their insurance policies.

²⁷William Faulkner, Notes on a Horsethief (Greenville, 1950).

They, in effect, bet him that they will live out each month). Actually, the "horsethief" episode is much more complex in A Fable than the précis indicates, because I have taken the liberty to set the chronology in strict order, while most of the story is told through flashback at different points of time, and the narration is frequently interrupted by the projected musings of the Runner, the deputy, the lawyer, or the narrator behind all of these. My reasons for forcing the story into this strict mold is to facilitate pointing up the parallels between it and the main action. These parallels may not be immediately apparent, since some elements are markedly different (i.e., the racehorse had been fine before the accident which precipitated the Groom's action--no comparable pre-condition exists in the main story), but if one considers the stealing of the horse an act paralleling, within its context, the mutiny of the Corporal, the events which follow the initial act take on a much closer resemblance to the main conflict.

The act of stealing the racehorse is an act of defiance of authority, one analogous to the Corporal's act. The reasons each party used for its act do not greatly differ. The Corporal had simply wished to end what he saw as a destructive institution by a refusal to act--an act of negation. The Groom's act is also one of negation. He refuses to deliver

the horse to the owner, because he considers the owner to be a destructive force who will turn the horse out to stud instead of racing it. Both "mutinies" resemble each other in the impact that both simple acts set off, the colossal reaction their refusal engenders. The massive machinery of the five police agencies, all directed at restoring the status quo (the horse to its legal owner), is analagous to all the frantic action in which the military engages to resume the war. And the absurdity of the final situations of the military hierarchy and the owner of the horse are paralleled by the latter's offering the deputy a blank check (any amount he wished) far in excess of the horse's original monetary worth. Just as the military ultimately views the war in abstract terms of "glory," "honor," "valor," etc., and seeks a continuation merely for its own sake in relation to their abstract conceptions of man, so does the horse's owner forget the original intent of his purchase, and seek to restore ownership even at a price far beyond the horse's worth in money. In short, both want adherence to abstract formalities.

The original negative act of defiance, the theft, leads to positive and incredible results, when the crippled horse begins to beat all competition, running on only three legs, and the trio manage to elude the massive search for 16 months while the horse is winning its races. One may

easily compare this with the short interregnum, the incredible respite from the war which the mutiny causes. The very use of stasis and motion in regard to the ability of the thieves to move within their restrictive area without being caught, and the ability of the horse to win, is tantamount to the difference between real and apparent action discussed in the previous chapter in describing the Corporal's relationship to the static society. The fact that the long sojourn up and down the Mississippi watershed ends in a death, one that was really inevitable, also parallels the necessity of the "crucifixion" and resumption of the war. Both acts end ultimately in a defeat, but a defeat that is somehow a triumph of sorts.

Other general parallels are evident. The mysterious way the thieves can wander up and down the watershed for such a long time without getting caught is similar to the uncanny ability of the Corporal and his retinue to wander along the entire front and across no-man's-land without using credentials. The mysterious ability of the rural folk to sense when the pursuers were drawing near and communicate this intelligence to the thieves, always being just one step ahead of the pursuers, parallels the incredibility of the whole mass of enlisted men to communicate with each other, yet keep the Corporal's mission secret from the officers and non-coms.

The whole "horsethief" episode, in fact, has easily as many happenings which may be ranked near the "supernatural" as does the main action. Thus it seems surprising to me that many critics who demean the novel overall because of its overly "symbolic" treatment of experience could prefer the "horsethief" episode as a portion of the novel more in keeping with Faulkner's "natural talent." For even allowing that it could happen that a crippled racehorse, one with an actually useless leg, could consistently over a period of 16 months travel steadily and each time beat the best backwoods horses (and even the better regular racehorse from Knoxville) in every race it ran, sometimes two a day; certain other events in the "horsethief" episode are actually as incredible as anything in the main action.

The most striking "supernatural" incident parallels, in a rough way, the "multiple deaths" of the Corporal. It occurs in the scene describing the Groom's return to the town in Tennessee where they had first raced the horse. He had earlier appeared at the church, but now appears at the loft above the post office where the men are shooting dice. He suddenly appears there, no one speaks, he goes to the game, a coin mysteriously appears at his foot "where 10 seconds ago no coin had been," he plays the coin, and immediately wins enough for food. The scene below describes

his exit and return. He went

to the trap door and the ladder which led down into the store's dark interior and with no light descended and returned with a wedge of cheese and a handful of crackers, and interrupted the game again to hand the clerk one of the coins he had won and took his change and, squatting against the wall and with no sound save the steady one of his chewing, ate what the valley knew was his first food since he returned to it, reappeared in the church ten hours ago; and--suddenly--the first since he had vanished with the horse and the two Negroes ten months ago. (p. 194)

The above scene points to something radically beyond a mere unspoken sympathy, to something actually beyond the natural. Whatever the Groom's capabilities in handling horses and exciting the love of people, one can hardly consider this a reasonable explanation of his ability to do without food for 10 months. The return is treated somewhat like a return from the dead. This incident does not occur in the 1950 edition.

The above samples may be perhaps stretching a point somewhat, but the similarities between the Groom and the Corporal hardly end there. The description of the Groom's impact upon the "stasis" of the Mississippi watershed resembles the impact of the Corporal's "aggregation" on the vacuum the military had created. The Groom

who brought without warning into that drowsing vacuum an aggregation bizarre, mobile and amazing as a hippodrome built around a comet. (p. 190)

Both men are orphans (the Corporal is an orphan to all intents and purposes, since his mother died in childbirth and the Marshall has never acknowledged him). Both have loyal, devoted followers, but each remains isolated beyond even their reach. Both do not use words with facility. The Corporal does not speak his first words until page 276, and when he does speak it is usually to cut past argument into action, as in his confrontation with the priest and the Marshall. The Groom reacts to questions much in the same manner, but he actually speaks even less than the Corporal. In fact, in the "horsethief" episode he does not say one word; he never is presented in dialogue (he speaks to the Runner but this is within another context, the main action). He is described as offering curses to whatever questions are put to him. As Sutterfield describes this to the Runner, though, it roughly resembles the Corporal's contempt for rhetoric and the effect his words demand.

". . . that time they tried to talk to him because the Chattanooga and Knoxville papers was coming over the gap every day now and they was reading them too: about that battle--"

"Mons," the runner said.

"Mons," the old Negro said. "--saying to him, 'Them was your folks too, wasn't they?' and getting the sort of answer there wasn't no reply to except just to hit him." (p. 197)

The necessary response is a crude one, but it nonetheless resembles the Corporal's ability to cut past speech and force action.

The Groom's mysterious abilities to create the fierce loyalties of those around him links him to the Corporal also. It is this ability which carries over into the main action, and is the means by which he and the Runner are joined. But in the context of the main action, the Runner is a different person, a point which will be taken up below. His mysterious qualities are even highlighted in the near play on words Faulkner employs in Sutterfield's pronunciation of his name, "Mistairy" for Mr. Harry. The Groom is, in a sense, "resurrected" also. His mysterious reappearances are not the only point of resemblance in this sense. Faulkner describes him at the very beginning of the "horsethief" episode as having undergone a sort of rebirth as a result of his experiences with the horse. The rebirth is somewhat analogous to the Corporal's final interment in the tomb of the unknown soldier, since it suggests outwardly everything that he was not previously, and also points to the anonymity of the Corporal as far as the world is concerned.

Three things happened to him which changed completely not only his life, but his character too, so that when late in 1914 he returned to England to enlist it was as though somewhere behind the Mississippi Valley hinterland . . . a new man had been born, without past, without griefs, without recollection. (p. 151)

Both men are foreigners--in another country during that time when they initiate their meaningful action. And if one may stretch the image patterns a bit, the Groom is at the last placed in the mountains (the Corporal is on different occasions contrasted to the others in that he is a "mountain man"), and shortly before he returns to England he is described wearing overalls "of faded blue," a slight linkage to the Corporal whose faded blue tunic is referred to often. This last image does not occur in the 1950 version, since that had ended with the freeing of Sutterfield. But whatever the case, the image is ironic, and actually contrasts to the Corporal, for this is the new Groom, and the blue overalls, Faulkner tells us, were

not the regalia of his metamorphosis, but concealed even the horse-warped curvature of his legs, obliterating, effacing at last the last breath of recollection of the old swaggering aura bachelor. (p. 197)

This last information points up the action that has gone before. The Groom we were introduced to earlier in A Fable

was the misanthrope who, though still possessing the mysterious power over the men which the Corporal possessed, had debased that power into the insurance lottery he was running with the men in the division.

Faulkner uses other characters as parallels to the main action through the part they play in the "horsethief" episode. The Runner's parallel is the federal deputy who becomes sympathetic to the thieves' cause. Faulkner links the two almost immediately in the "horsethief" section.

Sutterfield tells the story

. . . until presently the runner five years afterward was seeing what the federal deputy marshall had five years ago while in the middle of it: not a theft, but a passion, an immolation, an apotheosis. (p. 153)

Just as the Runner defected from the commissioned ranks and reenlisted as a lowly private, so did the deputy resign his position as leader and return to the chase as a mere observer. Both had, in a sense, defected from the static society. Faulkner describes them both as somewhat sensitive dillettantes. The Runner had been "an aesthete, and even a little precious (p. 60) before his enlistment; the deputy was "a poet, not the writing kind, or anyway not yet " (p. 158,159). Faulkner makes the connection between the two quite clear in the version in A Fable when he describes their mutual reactions, even though they do not occur simultaneously, in relation

to the sympathy each suddenly feels for the Groom's position.

The federal deputy . . . found that, suddenly and with no warning, something had happened to him which was to happen five years later in Paris to a British soldier even whose name he would never hear. (p. 158)

The British soldier is, of course, the Runner. The deputy also has an abortive attempt aimed at ending the pursuit of the thieves. The Runner's abortive mutiny aimed at ending the war is a parallel whose internal action is, of course, far more serious and consequential; nonetheless, structurally, and within their separate contexts, both of these acts parallel each other. Faulkner uses one other instance which is highly subtle and skillful to push the similarities past mere similarity toward an actual fusion of the two characters. This fusion occurs when he injects an observation into Sutterfield's description of the Groom's return to the Tennessee town after his release from the jail.

. . . the runner seeing it, too, seeing almost as much as the federal ex-deputy would have seen if he had been there.
(p. 189)

This deceptively simple statement actually conceals a rather complex design, for what Faulkner has done here is to fuse the two characters' vision upon an event which neither had seen, so as to erase their separateness and reinforce their unity.

Ultimately the Runner's function in A Fable is far more important than the deputy's: the Runner serves to knit together practically all the episodes, but the similarity of their roles, at least insofar as they relate to the protagonist of the episode in which they each are the actors, serves to knit the episodes on more than the general level of overall action. Thus the actual plot-line connection, though tenuous, is far from the only linkage.

Other characters also function internally with parallels in the main action. The famous lawyer whom the deputy hired to defend the thieves has already been linked to the Marshall in the preceding chapter, where he was pictured as one of the major members of the closed society. In that instance he was shown to be wrong in his assessment of the crowd. His intellectualization of the event led to his miscalculation, an example of the difference between real and superficial action. The lawyer echoes many of the sentiments of the Marshall. His world view is sophisticated, but over-intellectualized. It does not take into full account the "old verities of the human heart." But, like the Marshall, he is not simply an example of evil; in fact, he considers himself in his inner monologue as a champion of a mode of life.

He would imagine, envision himself-- perhaps . . . as a--figure in a pageant, . . . the affirmation of a creed, a belief, the declaration of an undying faith, the postulation of an invincible way of life. (p. 167)

One need only compare these words with the Marshall's statement to the Corporal: "We are two articulations . . . postulated to test two inimical conditions" (p. 347) to see the resemblance. But the lawyer, like the Marshall, constantly considers man in the abstract, man in the mass, rather than individual men engaged in concrete action; thus his rhetoric becomes his undoing.

He is linked to the Marshall in other less concrete ways also. Both he and the Marshall are linked to murderers of females, the Marshall when he delivers the soldier up to the Riffs; the lawyer when he retains the Negro murderer as his chauffeur. The lawyer's toying with the idea of letting the Negro suffer just enough resembles the duplicity of the Marshall in allowing the soldier to think he is going for reinforcements. A significant deletion occurs in the version in A Fable. In the 1950 edition, the lawyer had spent a long passage musing upon the money he would make on the case, and the measured display of ostentation he would achieve from it. Faulkner erased this portion from the version in A Fable, because, I believe, he wished to reinforce

the idealistic commitment the lawyer has. The musing on money and ostentation would have been an obvious disparity between him and the Marshall, who had turned away from the wealth he could have enjoyed and chose a rather Spartan personal mode of living.

The most obvious indication that Faulkner recognized and intended the resemblance between these two characters is evident when one notes that he lifted, practically wholesale, a large portion of the lawyer's internal monologue, which occurs at the end of the 1950 edition of Notes on a Horsethief, and placed it practically verbatim in the mouth of the Marshall in the "Maundy Thursday" scene. A more telling fusion of the characters can hardly be imagined. Both have just undergone a defeat of sorts. The Marshall in his scene has failed to convince the Corporal that his martyrdom is meaningless; the lawyer has just failed to spellbind the crowd with his rhetoric, so as to allow the turnkey to spirit Sutterfield away. In both instances rhetoric lost out to simple action, and neither character has retreated in bitterness but only in a sort of admiration for man and his ability to survive his follies.

Sutterfield and the Quartermaster play a near-parallel part in their separate contexts as each relates to the protagonist to whom he is dedicated. Just as the Quartermaster, upon meeting the Marshall, immediately subserved his aims to

the greatness he saw in the Marshall, so did Sutterfield place himself immediately in the hands of the Groom. Both ultimately are separated and travel long distances to reunite themselves with their "hero." Both become prominent in their own right. Both realize the necessity of sin, or at least the necessity for man to realize and accept that man is both evil and good. Both, in a sense, fail in their final assessment of their "hero." The Groom never really reenters the human community, but goes out more than half against his will during the walk across no-man's-land, cursing Sutterfield and the Runner. The Quartermaster must face the knowledge that the Marshall ordered the bombardment of the men. Actually, both fail because they rely too heavily upon intellect. Sutterfield's reaction to the horse was not instinctive the way the Groom's was--and he still is a preacher, even if an unorthodox one. Sutterfield is actually highly articulate, even though his statements are couched in Negro dialect. Sutterfield, like the Quartermaster, is a wise and a good man, but he is mistaken in some respects--one of these being his reliance upon a particular man to accomplish feats that the man is incapable of. He is not, as many critics feel, Faulkner's only spokesman--he is merely, like many characters in this novel, one of them.

Even minor characters bear resemblances between the

different episodes. The young pilot, David Levine (who is the favorite of everybody who likes the "traditional" Faulkner, owing no doubt to his Bayard Sartoris-like qualities) and the ineffective little turnkey in the horsethief episode are, in their way, "innocents." Levine is constantly referred to as "the child." The turnkey is generally described as a small boy trying to exist in a world of men, as in his confrontation with the pursuing crowd when he is trying to keep Sutterfield in custody.

. . . drawing the pistol from its holster all in one blind motion like the hopeless and furious repudiation of the boy turning, once more whole, stainless and absolved, to hurl his toy pistol . . . and cried in a thin forlorn voice which itself was like the manless voice of a boy. (p. 169)

This passage, in isolation, might almost describe Levine's suicide. Both characters harbor dreams of glory and derring-do. "What had I done for Motherland's glory had Motherland but matched me with her need" (p. 89) dreams Levine, while the turnkey dreams of the day when "he should be called upon to prove not merely his fitness for his office but his honor and courage as a man by preserving and defending the integrity of his oath" (p. 177). Note that both attach glory to abstract principle, Levine to "motherland," the turnkey to his oath of office. Both are in a sense dominated by women.

Levine had delayed entrance into the war for two years because of his "inability to say no to a woman's tears " (p. 88). The turnkey's whole sufferance was owing to his having married the sheriff's sister. They resemble each other in their constant bewilderment over what is going on, and both give the impression of being pawns in the manipulations of the mighty, much more so than the Corporal or Runner. Both are involved in a scene concerning the transportation of a key individual, and both never quite know what the situation is until too late. The reversal of norms that is ironically pointed up in the turnkey's inquiry about Sutterfield whom he is to escort to another jurisdiction:

This thing's all wrong. It's backwards. The law spirits a nigger prisoner out of jail and out of town, to protect him from a mob that wants to take him out and burn him. All these folks want to do is set this one free. (p. 178)

This situation parallels Levine's involvement with the ferrying of the German general to the allied headquarters at Chaulnesmont. He muses over the shooting of the pilot, and what he at the time believes is a surrender mission.

Though why they had to do it this way, when all somebody needed was just to hold out a white sheet or a tablecloth . . . and somebody owes something for that poor bloodstained taxi-driver he--which was not like the book either: he did it backwards. (p. 110)

Levine's suicide, done in repudiation of deception and the loss of glory, is paralleled in part by the turnkey's wish, when the crowd advances on him as he is chained to Sutterfield, to sever himself from the handcuffs by

one single lightening stroke of sword or scimitar across the betraying wrist, and then running, the scarlet-spurting stump inevitably held aloft . . . not even in adjuration, but in abdication of all man and his corruption. (p. 170)

The two most resemble each other, overall, in their constant battle with time, a battle they constantly lose. Each is continually hurrying toward something and arriving there just too late. His introductory scene pictures Levine, just waved down to an unscheduled landing, and

even before he could switch off the mechanic was shouting at him: "The mess, sir! Right away! the major wants you at the mess right away!"
 "What?" he said. "Me?"
 "Everyone, sir," the mechanic said.
 "The whole squadron, sir. Best hurry!" (p. 87)

From that point on Levine is constantly attempting to catch up with time, for Levine fears that his tardiness in enlisting (he had waited a year to please his mother) had cost him his chance at glory. His commission had arrived two days too late to allow him to wear the old RFC uniform, and now the war was apparently over. Faulkner uses the clause "It was too late," or "But there wasn't even time for that," or some similar words approximately seven times during the thirty-four

pages devoted to Levine, and there are approximately as many references to clock-time as he ponders his condition during the long night. Levine just misses on many counts, and goes to his suicide feeling betrayed and guilty. He incurs his guilt by acknowledging the bombardment, but he feels betrayed by time as much as by the war. The turnkey is also locked into an ineffectual situation by time. He has existed, a petty little man in his job, waiting for his moment to come. While he waits, his musings betray his ineffectuality in terms of time. His wife has denied him her bed "since three years and two months and 13 nights ago, now, but that didn't matter " (p. 170). This situation apparently does matter, as the exactitude suggests. The turnkey does not have time to accomplish his deed of derring-do either, since the crowd catches up to him and relieves him of his prisoner. The turnkey is, in a sense, on borrowed time: the four year tenure of his office is mentioned twice, and his rising to his supreme moment is likened to a simile locked in time: "As the male mayfly concentrates his whole one day of life in the one evening act of procreation and then relinquishes it " (p. 170).

Other minor elements besides character resemblance parallel the main action also. Certain images which cluster around the agencies of the government resemble those which cling to the military in the main action. "The federal police

had more at stake than even the state ones who could only share in the glory and reward: they had a file to be closed out " (p. 156). This passage resembles the absurd necessity of the military to execute the whole regiment "if for no other reason than to enable its executioners to check their rifles back into the Quartermaster's stores " (p. 125). The catalogues of the leaders of church and state, a device for fusing the segments of the closed society used often in the main action, are repeated here in the lawyer's ruminations: "Caesar and Christ, Bonaparte and Peter and Mazarin and Alexander, Genghis and Talleyrand, etc." (p. 181). War's paradoxical qualities are also pointed up in the odd reasons behind the Missouri mountain men's reasons for joining the Federal army against the Confederacy ("their own geopolitical kind"), to fight not against slavery but against Negroes, to abolish the Negro by freeing him from them who might bring Negroes among them " (p. 190).

What is actually occurring in the "horsethief" episode is a story that is not so disparate as it would seem at first glance. There is a much greater resemblance on the surface than initially appears. The differences which seem so apparent are not really differences--that is, the "story" is not so remote from the main action as a cursory reading might suggest. The "foul-mouthed Groom" is closer to the Corporal

in more ways than would appear (he is certainly not the anti-Christ which some critics see him as), and the action he initiates is not so remote from the Corporal's, in its context. But this knowledge does not necessarily posit an identical likeness of theme between the two episodes. Faulkner's rationale, it must be remembered, is to allow the various "actions" to comment upon each other in terms of parallels of structure between episodes and within episodes. The differences between the horsethief episode and the main action actually lie below the surface action, and are of a more profound nature than the apparent surface differences indicated to critics who saw only unconnectedness.

The major indication of the true differences between these parallel actions may be seen in the technique Faulkner employs in the telling of these episodes, techniques which ultimately function as indicators of theme. The most obvious departure in technique between the two episodes is the way Faulkner relates the immediate action taking place to the larger "action" which looms behind each episode. In the main action the parallels between the events surrounding the mutiny and the events of Holy Week are so obvious, actually exaggerated (as the last supper and crucifixion scene are exaggerated), that Faulkner does not intrude upon them but merely lets the action create its own tensions between it and the

"larger" story. In the "horsethief" episode the reverse is true. Nothing could be further from the "tender legend" which looms behind it than the story of the "foul-mouthed Groom," as it is told on the surface. But Faulkner intrudes upon this story, obviously so, through the Runner, who is actually a central intelligence in the horsethief episode; and he does so to thrust the story, through the Runner's reactions to it, far behind the immediate arena in which it takes place, and into the realm of legend and myth. This technique occurs near the beginning, as Sutterfield is describing the races the horse won.

. . . the runner five years afterward seeing what the federal deputy marshall had five years ago while in the middle of it: not a theft but a passion, an immolation, an apotheosis--no gang of opportunists fleeing with a crippled horse, but the immortal pageant-piece of the tender legend which was the crowning glory of man's own legend . . . Adam and Lilith and Paris and Helen and Pyramus and Thisbe and all the other recordless Romeos and their Juliets . . . the doomed glorious frenzy of a love story. (p. 153)

The above quotation is central to an understanding of how the "horsethief" episode functions as a commentary upon the main action, because it is, truly, a love story, just as the main action is a love story in its particular sense. The difference lies in the level, or more precisely the qualities, of the loves presented.

Critics who saw the "horsethief" episode as extraneous comic relief, or as an example of revolt on the naturalistic or profane level as contrasted to the spiritual and sacred level of the main action failed to see that the essential motivation in both episodes is a spirituality. These differences can best be described in terms of the tradition which looms behind each story and which each story implies. The main action exaggerates on one level the playing out of agape, Christian love, the love of neighbor, crystallized by Jesus Christ, the manifestation of God's love for man, and his sacrifice. The "horsethief" episode exemplifies the pagan, essentially Greek ideal of eros, the love of man for the ideal. The basic differences between these two spiritual loves is accentuated by the techniques mentioned above which Faulkner uses to "describe" the action.

Christian love, agape, implies a "descent" in that the love is made manifest through the appearance of God choosing to become man. By contrast, eros is recognized essentially by the quality of "ascent," in an attempt of man to fuse himself with the higher Platonic order of eternal ideas. Anders Nygren, the Bishop of Lund, Sweden, describes eros this way.

The Platonic eros is desiring love.
As such it is marked by two elements:
The consequences of a present want,
and the direction of this want toward

the freedom of a higher and more blissful state . . . According to its structure it is egocentric. . . . Its desire is, however, not directed toward the nether-world of the senses. Eros is love directed toward the higher regions; it is the longing upward toward the world of ideas and in relation to the present world it assumes the form of fleeing from the world. But even in its highest and most sublimated form it never abandons its desiring, egocentric direction.²⁸

Unless one is writing a theological tract, which A Fable is not, the comparison between eros and agape need not be an invidious one. The two orders of love are fundamentally different in their approach to love, but each is spiritual at its base.

Eros and agape signify two principally different orientations towards life, two fundamental motives which compete with each other. Each is the highest of its kind.²⁹

Bishop Nygren's description of eros practically describes the Groom's actions in the "horsethief" episode, even to the extent of his attempting to "flee the world." And although the Corporal and the Groom, within their separate contexts, resemble each other more than they differ in the types of love they exemplify, these differences point toward what the Groom will become in the later context of the main action. He flees the

²⁸Anders Nygren "Eros and Agape," A Handbook of Christian Theology, ed. Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen, trans. Werner Rode (Cleveland, 1958), p. 98.

²⁹Ibid., p. 98.

world and nurtures his bitterness over his loss to the extent that he becomes a misanthropist; he actually rejects the world, as is evidenced by the "lottery" and his resisting the Runner's urgings.

Another aspect of eros was what the Greeks termed a "daemon,"³⁰ a sort of spirit that drove man to seek fulfillment beyond himself. Faulkner describes the Groom's relation to the horse in somewhat daemonic terms, as though a "daemon" had taken possession of the Groom.

He was not merely included in the sale of the horse, he was compelled into it. And not by the buyer nor even the seller, but by the sold: the chattel: the horse itself. (p. 151)

Or in Sutterfield's description of the horse.

"The horse," the old Negro said. "That they claim we stole. Except that we couldn't have stole it, even if we had wanted to. Because it never belonged to no man to be stole from. It was the world's horse. The champion. No, that's wrong too. Things belonged to it, not it to things. Things and people both. He did. I did. All three of us did before it was over." (p. 150)

Viewed in this light, the very techniques that Faulkner employs serve to reinforce the idea of the fundamental qualities of the two loves. By exaggerating the upward thrust of the "horsethief" episode, the quality of "eros" becomes more evident, even though the surface action remains

³⁰Van A. Harvey, A Handbook on Theological Terms (New York, 1964), p. 14.

the theft of a horse and the subsequent flight and pursuit.³¹ The obviously "strained" diction of the intrusions functions in two ways. It accentuates the actually idealistic motives underlying the action of the Groom, at the same time that it accentuates the ludicrous qualities that this fusion must occasion. The "horsethief" episode, in short, is a ludicrous tale on the surface with intrusions thrusting the action upward into the ideal. The main conflict's action is a "descent," since the ideal is done in exaggeratedly "real" human terms. In the former the intrusions are necessary; in the latter the mere exaggerations of the action relating to the symbology looming behind it suffices to draw a response that shocks one into recognition (witness the barbed wire crown of thorns and the shellburst ascension as examples). Thus what functioned in the main action as a technique by which the static quality of the legend was emphasized is reversed in the horsethief episode, since the Groom's action by itself could hardly be termed anything but ludicrous. The intrusions are necessary, and they push the action beyond irony, just as the use of exaggerated parallels to the Passion story push the main action past a simply ironic presentation into an area where

³¹That Faulkner was thinking in terms of emphasizing the spiritual, ascending quality of the action in the "horsethief" episode, especially after its inclusion into the total action of A Fable, is evident when one notes that he inserted the words "an apotheosis" into the passage noted above linking the Groom's action to the legendary lovers. The 1950 version of the Groom's story does not contain these words.

the recognition of the truly "dynamic" religion must reside in the person of the Corporal, must be allowed to function on its own terms, stripped of the myth that surrounds it. But in the "horsethief" episode the myth, which looms behind the action and serves to elevate it, does so in such a ludicrous juxtaposition that the emphasis at the last is on the static quality of the legend, even though the legend itself is beautiful. Faulkner even states this specifically.

The Groom was pursued not by an unclosed officefile nor even the raging frustration of the millionaire owner, but by its own inherent doom, since, being immortal, the story, the legend, was not to be owned by any one of the pairs who added to its shining and tragic increment, but only to be passed through by each in their doomed and hopeless turn. (p. 154)

The Groom cannot break through the old legend because of the nature of the action in which he is engaged. He fails because, even though his aspiration was equivalent to the great lovers (by and large pagan lovers, or a least pre-Christian) it is still an egocentric, desiring love: eros. In Bergsonian terms, the Groom has not gained humanity by passing through it--his love was fastened upon a particular object. Thus he is simply another increment in the "tender legend" through which he must pass. He does not overpower the myth. Here is where he differs from the Corporal, because this is exactly what the Corporal does accomplish in his relation to the myth.

He creates his own presence by overpowering the earlier legend. He does break through the legend to embody in himself all that he represents. The Corporal's love resembles the selfless love which agape implies, and it is his very transcendence of the love of "things" which allows him to remain unmoved by the knowledge of Polchek's betrayal. The Groom cannot give of himself once the horse is killed.

Even though the Groom is opposed to intellectualizing all of experience, he is not up to the level of intuitive action of which the Corporal is capable. His responses are closer to the instinctual rather than the intuitional. A hint of this limitation is given in the description of the attraction between him and the horse "which was no mere rapport but an affinity, not from understanding to understanding but from heart to heart and glands to glands " (p. 152). This level of knowledge is not the sense of complete esoteric understanding which describes the Corporal in the opening scene of the novel.

If we consider the totality of its action in relation to the main action, the horsethief episode is actually well integrated into the novel's structure, as the main resemblances it contains to the main action indicate; but the rationale by which it is integrated is not so much one which links the action directly through a tight plot sequence, as it is one

that seeks to point up the unity, or near-unity of experience through various points of similarity of character and action. Ultimately the real points of difference become more meaningful in the light of the overall theme--a description of the human condition as it manifests itself according to the two basic modes of comprehending and evaluating human experience.

These two episodes, the two main total "actions," became two ramifications of the essential antagonisms between the two modes. But they are ramifications of that experience; they are not identical. The Groom is not the "complete manifestation of mankind" that the Corporal is; he can function well enough in the context in which he assumes heroic proportions, but he is unable to maintain his stance in the main action, for here he is truly out of context. His "selfless" activity, directed toward the ideal, was functional only while the ideal lived for him. Thus, although the Corporal and the Groom, within their separate episodes, are protagonists rebelling against the established, legalized, static, closed society which is the extension of the intelligence, their separate actions in relation to each other are manifestations of a love resembling agape and eros, a more complex inter-relation than the simple reduction of the action to a sacred vs profane, or natural vs spiritual, tragic vs comic level, etc. Schendler has described the "horsethief" episode as the

main theme played in another key. This is not quite the case, but the musical trope is an apt one, except that I prefer to consider the "horsethief" episode as more precisely the trio of a minuet. It occurs within the total structure as a complete and separate action; it recalls the main theme in little, but it is not quite the same as the main theme.

One further point. The action of the crowd in the "horsethief" episode has been seen by some as the ability of the American crowd to act in a positive manner, played against the crowd's inability to act in the main action. This view is only superficially correct. The crowd in the horsethief episode does release the prisoners, as the federal deputy notes (acting here as a central intelligence, indicated by the absence of quotation marks).

"All right, all right," the ex-deputy said.--right perhaps, justice certainly might not have prevailed, but something more important had . . . truth, love, sacrifice, and something else even more important than they: some bond between or from man to his brother man stronger than even the golden shackles which coopered precariously his ramshackle earth." (p. 165)

True, but the situation actually refers to the thieves, not the crowd. The crowd is actually emphasizing the very attitudes which the static morality venerates, and against which the crowd seems to be acting here. Insofar as the backwoods people helped warn the thieves and maintained their silence,

they resemble the soldiers who were able to maintain their silent communication system and keep the Corporal's secret intact from the hierarchy, but the crowd's act in releasing the prisoners, the act which precipitated this observation by the deputy, is born of a motivation less than ideal. They simply release the thieves because they admire anyone who can make as much money as they believe the thieves did. Money is the prime mover for them. Thus, they are actually much closer to the crowd in the main action, the crowd which respects the talismans of the static society. The talismans were medals in the main action; the talisman is money in the "horsethief" episode. In one sense the crowd in the main action can also "act." Once the Runner has released his "sacred talisman," has thrown the medal at the Marshall's casket, the crowd surges forward and almost kills him. That the crowd in the "horsethief" episode is not too removed from this attitude is evident in the last statement made by a member of the crowd to Sutterfield as they release him from the turnkey.

"There'll be a train at the depot in twenty-five minutes. You be on it when it leaves and don't come back. We don't like rich niggers here." (p. 189)

The use of internal parallels of character and action serving as a unifying principle connecting the episodes to the main action, rather than a direct, tightly linked chain of events, is evident in the other scene in the novel which is apparently

most remote from the main action: the exhumation scene at Verdun. This scene occurs as the initial episode of the final section of the novel, a section containing three episodes all subsumed under the heading "Tomorrow." Each section moves forward in time ("tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"), but the exhumation scene is most remote from the main action because the other two episodes are concerned with characters who have played a part in the main action, the first episode describing the Runner's meeting with Marthe, Mary, and Polchek at the sisters' farm, the last, shortest episode concerned with the Marshall's funeral, which brings together in the final scene all the major participants in the main action. The exhumation scene occurs shortly after the end of the war; the meeting between the Runner and his sisters, approximately four years after the war; and the Marshall's funeral, roughly six years after the war.

At first glance the exhumation scene bears little internal resemblance to the main conflict, but a closer examination will reveal that parallels do exist and do, indeed, comment upon the main action. A brief resume of the action would be appropriate to our purpose, since it will serve to point up the apparent differences, while the skeletal outline of the action will afford an easy reference point when we consider the submerged resemblances and what

they imply.

A working party of 12 French soldiers is dispatched on a mission to Verdun to attain the intact body of an unidentified French soldier from Fort Valaumont and bring the remains back to Paris. They get drunk on the way, and the sergeant in charge hides the rest of their brandy ration. Upon arriving in Verdun they notice that the peasants all seem to know why they are there, and they are accosted by a little old woman who wishes to go out to the fort with them so as to claim her son who died there in 1916. The sergeant gruffly brushes her aside and the men ride out to the fort. The sight of soldiers in butchers aprons emerging from the fort with parts of bodies heaped in wheelbarrows, and dumping the contents upon an enormous midden of human flesh and bones is nightmarish. The smell is overpowering. The men want to get it over with and leave, but the sergeant demands that they enter the fort, get a complete body, and do everything according to regulations.

Inside the fort, as they descend deeper and deeper, the scenes get more and more nightmarish, until finally in the nethermost depths of the fort they are in what is, literally, a massive grave. The defenders had had to throw their dead into a large cavity dug into the wall of the fort, and cover them with sand, while they were under siege two years previously.

Two men go forward with a corporal and are given a body with which they return, eager to get out of the fort, but the sergeant, almost gleefully, insists upon all the papers being signed and intact. The men are now nearly mad from the atmosphere and demand that he give them their brandy ration, which he carries in a small black valise. He refuses, so they simply take it from him, and although angry that there is only one bottle, they drink it hurriedly and then begin their ascent, practically running with the corpse on the stretcher.

Emerging from the fort, they hurriedly place the body in the coffin they had brought with them in the lorry and ride back to Verdun, where they transfer the coffin to the boxcar they had traveled in from Paris. The sergeant leaves to sign some papers, and the old woman reappears, this time with money, asking to see the corpse so as to tell whether it is her son "Theodule" or not. The recognized leader of the group, one "Picklock,"

allows her to view it after she brings them two bottles of brandy. Upon viewing the unrecognizable corpse, she insists it is Theodule, and begs them to let her carry it away in her cart so as to bury him. Upon learning of the money she has, Picklock decides to sell her the body, so she brings the cart around and they shove the corpse in and she gallops off as Picklock having tossed her valise into the wagon after extracting one hundred francs, enough to buy twelve bottles of brandy.

The men get drunk and wake up later with hangovers and the realization that they are in trouble, as they witness the boxcar being draped in folds of crepe. Apparently they are to be part of some great ceremony. Picklock is at a loss what to do, until he goes to the local canteen and there meets a farmer who, upon inquiry, learns of their predicament. He offers them a body which turned up in his field shortly after the bombardment that had ended the lull in the war the previous spring. Picklock, the farmer and one Morache, who surrenders a fine Swiss watch for the body, ride out to the farm, dig up the body, drive back and sneak the body back into the coffin just in the nick of time. The men, relieved, curl up in the boxcar with the brandy, and the episode closes.

The body is obviously the Corporal's since the farmer's land is adjacent to the sisters' farm, where the Corporal's body had "disappeared" after the bombardment which signalled the resumption of the war. Thus, the Corporal's remains are destined to be buried in the tomb of the unknown soldier.

The obviously "contrived" plot by which the Corporal becomes the unknown soldier is as unabashed as the obviously exaggerated parallel between him and the events of Holy Week. But more important than this to an understanding of the structural function of the exhumation scene is recognizing that parallels exist between it and the main action itself, and that they comment upon it in more ways than simply being the connecting link between the first interment and the last.

The opening lines

"Once more there were twelve of them,
though this time they were led by a
sergeant." (p. 403)³²

are heavily ironic, as indicated by the slight elevation in rank (even more ironic in the light of subsequent events which even deny his leadership) but their most important function is to link the action to follow directly to the previous actions of the Corporal. Although these events occur shortly after the war's end, Faulkner clearly wants the reader to be aware that the main action lurks directly behind this action and colors all of what is about to occur. Along parenthesis he inserts only three sentences later points up the main actions "presence."

. . . now that peace and victory had really come to Western Europe in November (six months after the false armistice in May, that curious week's holiday which the war had taken which had been so false that they remembered it only as phenomena). (pp. 402, 403)

Besides being a direct statement of relationship, the

³²Schendler sees these lines as devastating irony aimed at reducing the myth of the Passion. These lines are certainly ironic, but their impact is more directly aimed at the events which have just previously occurred, as the parenthesis below them indicates. Also, other parallels to the Passion are extremely remote here, except for an uttered "Christ" in disgust, or the references to pounding down the nails in the coffin. Also, the action itself is twice-removed from the Passion story itself, and it must force its irony through the prism of the Corporal's story itself, and some of its effect is bound to diminish to below devastating. The connection is there, of course, but this is not its major function.

parenthesis provides the key to the point of view from which this scene will comment upon the main action. From the perspective of "tomorrow" (paradoxically, history, since the future will comment upon the present as "history") the action will be seen as unusual but false, in the sense that it did not accomplish what it attempted: it did not end the war, at least in the terms that history demands. Although no character states this relationship, it emerges obliquely from the reflection that the main action casts upon what is happening, by means of the implications certain parallels conjure up.

What the exhumation scene actually does is function as a parody of the main action. Although the parallels are rather faint, they nonetheless function as a reductio ad absurdum of the original action, but not so much in terms of the action itself as from the environment that "tomorrow" places upon the participants. The closed society has assumed complete control again after the initial creative action of the Corporal; "the circle that has momentarily opened closes again; individual aspiration has become social pressure and obligation covers the whole." All of the men participating in this incident are unwilling participants, including the sergeant "who had not wanted the assignment either " (p. 403), and they must operate in an atmosphere completely devoid of aspiration. What we have at this point is a description of

hell in more ways than the nebulous one which the descent itself resembles, for this is the lowest point of the novel, and all the action, up until the reintroduction of the Corporal's body, is indicative of a reduction. If despair exists at any point in the novel, it is at the point when the men get "Theodule"--not at the end of the novel. Aspiration here becomes appetite; corpses are manhandled, all is reduced, degraded. Even the closed society itself is no longer represented by medal-bedecked generals but by a fussy little sergeant who was "an office man, meticulous and reliable; [whose] files were never out of order" (p. 408). The "mutiny" against that authority, the refusal to obey orders, is no longer one involving human life and aspiration but death and appetite. It also occurs at the very bottom-most point in the novel, in the depths of the catacombs beneath Fort Valaumont, where the sergeant has refused the men their brandy ration, whereupon

. . . this time they simply took the valise away from him in one concerted move of the whole twelve of them, not viciously, savagely, just rapidly: with no heat at all but almost impersonally, almost inattentive. (p. 412)

Their lack of emotion resembles the calm of the original 13 men, but this calm is only apparent; it is born of desperation and near-insanity, not the inner peace of the

mystic. More important, the reduction of motive is indicative of the nature of all the action in this episode; again, owing to the environment more than to the intrinsic character of the men, as is evidenced by Picklock's statement after he has extracted the hundred francs from the old woman's valise after selling "Theodule" to her. "Tomorrow I'll be ashamed I took even that much" (p. 417). The subsequent action their mutiny generates, the selling of "Theodule," and the frantic attempts to retrieve another body faintly resemble the contrasts between apparent and real action in the main episode. But what was incredible and "miraculous" in the main episode is reduced here to a mechanical and macabre slapstick of motion. The frantic "split-second" timing, the use of a lumbering deus ex machina in the person of the stolid stocky farmer actually mock the original action but not so as to demean it so much as to allow it to comment upon the current environment through the parallels. Even so, the men do manage to create some minor "miracles" within this degraded context, as is evident by the sergeant's reaction to their second drunken stupor, a reaction paralleling the impotent rage of the military upon learning of the Corporal's ability to wander along and across the front.

. . . when the sergeant returned about an hour later, his outrage--not rage--outrage--knew no bounds. (p. 418)

But it is not their drunkenness which outrages him, as the farmer tells Picklock later.

"He didn't seem to care a damn that they were drunk. What seemed to fry him was how you managed to get twelve more bottles of brandy without him knowing how you did it." (p. 420)

This is a minor "miracle," to be sure, but it still resembles the ability of the intuition, here reduced to appetite, to confound the intelligence.

Certain images also draw parallels between the main action and the exhumation scene. The fusion of the military and the priesthood, so often noted in the main action, is reflected in the farmer's remark to Picklock concerning the sergeant. "What is he, anyway--some kind of reformist preacher like they say they have in England and America?" (p. 420). The civilian peasants also exhibit their uncanny sense of communication, constantly occurring in the main action, and are awaiting the working party when it arrives in Verdun, but even the crowd now has diminished to "a clump, a huddle, a small group" (p. 403). The soldiers in butchers' aprons who carry out the fragments of bodies from the fort, with their "fixed exhaustless unseeing unrecognizing glares of sleepwalkers in nightmares" (p. 408), are described almost identically with the men in the trucks in the opening chapter who stare unseeing at the crowd with faces "like the faces of

sleepwalkers looking backward across nightmares " (p. 14). Once Picklock has assumed leadership among the men (the sergeant even bestows this recognition) he is addressed as "Mister Corporal" by the old peasant woman, an accolade which, however faint, still points toward the Corporal.

The multiple deaths of the main action become parodied here in the sense that the corpses simply do not act dead, an example of which is the "action" of "Theodule" when they lift the lid of the coffin so the old woman can identify it.

They . . . recoiled from the thin burst of odor which rushed up at them almost visibly, like thin smoke--one last faint thin valedictory of corruption and mortality, as if the corpse itself had hoarded it for three years against this moment or any similar one with the gleeful demonic sentience of a small boy. (p. 416)

The reduction here could hardly be more pointed or complete. Death itself is parodied through the apparent "life" function of "Theodule," but that function is hardly one of life's noblest. Even so, this parody helps to conjure up parallels to the main action, since it is the heavy, oppressive presence of the dead, expressed primarily through olfactory images, which precipitates the necessity of the Corporal's "return" from the dead. The smell of death is literal in this episode. Before the men awoke from their first drunken stupor, outside the fort "they were already smelling it " (p. 365).

and the smell got more intense as they went deeper into the crypt, until at last it is

a smell subterrene and claustrophobe
 . . . not alone of putrefaction but
 of fear . . . attenuated to that point
 where it must choose between coma and
 madness (p. 410)

Through these olfactory images associated with death, which actually define death in this scene, Faulkner can obliquely offer the "return" of the Corporal from the dead, simply by noting the absence of any smell about his corpse when it is exhumed.

They could see nothing and after this
 length of time or perhaps because it
 was only one, there was little odor
 either. (p. 424)

The exhumation scene is not so complete a unit in its parallels to the main action as is the "horsethief" episode. It functions more as an indicator of an environment of absolute zero--the ultimate paradoxical situation that arises from the complete ascendancy of the intellect. The "law of two-fold frenzy" has peaked in one direction here; the pendulum has swung to the limit of its arc in the direction of the intelligence; and the resultant nightmare that this engenders is the paradox which emerges from the completely rationalized, systematized approach to experience. The attempt to fix time, the love of absolutes, of symbols, of changeless concepts is made manifest in the military hierarchy's

desire to "eternalize" their glory in another monument (there are two other monuments mentioned in this episode, both descriptions emphasizing their stolidity and precision and symmetry). But what should normally be an episode describing relief or joy--the war has finally been ended--is actually the most grotesque, the most strained, the most nightmarish of all the episodes. Everything is systematized to the degree that systems conflict with systems, as the Corporal in charge of the crypt tells the sergeant when he delivers the body below Fort Valaumont.

"Wait here," the corporal said.

"My orders say--" the sergeant said.

". . . your orders," the Corporal said. "We got a system here. We do things our way." (p. 411)

The Corporal's system is not at all out of place in a total environment characterized by grotesqueries of order that border upon the insane. In fact, the very act of imposing order upon the horror that the fort was and is, is an extension of the rational love of order into a situation which turns that very act into one of systematized lunacy. The image of the soldiers in butchers' aprons trundling wheelbarrows full of fragments of bodies, and heaping them onto the giant midden of human bones outside the fort, is infinitely more grotesque than the comparable action of the fort's defenders simply tumbling their dead into the cavern dug out of the wall and covering them with earth. Theirs was an act born of necessity,

"during the height of battle when there had been no other way to dispose of them" (p. 410). The later action is born out of the love of order as much as respect for the dead--the neat cemeteries that the exhumed bodies will rest in appeals to the orderly propensities of the intelligence. But the action this demands is the action described in this scene--the manhandling of the dead. At its lowest level, this reduction is exemplified by the Sergeant's remark to the old peasant woman who wants to accompany them to the fort.

"There ain't nothing out there any more by now but rotten meat." (p. 404)

The frenetic rhythms of jostling, jogging, groping, running, colliding do not cease until the end of the episode when Picklock's men have placed the Corporal in the casket.

They were safe now. They had a body, and drink to take care of the night. There was tomorrow and Paris of course, but God could take care of that. (p. 425)

And it is more than a merely casual connection that Morache has to give up a fine watch for the Corporal's body, for the watch is the perfect symbol of the intellect's attempt to systematize the fluidity of experience by reducing it to disparate fragments of "clock-time." In order to effect the Corporal's return the "clock-time" context of the episode must surrender to the "inner view" of the intuition which the Corporal embodies in his person, a view which exists in

"human time," or "duree," as Bergson terms it, a view which denies clock-time as the actual definitive measure of experience. The Corporal's burial in the tomb of the unknown soldier is a compound irony that thrusts itself beyond irony at the last, since the "spirit" that he is, although concealed in anonymity (but not to us), is an "eternity" that will far outlast the tomb which is supposed to perpetuate his memory in time.

Faulkner does not confine his technique of parallel juncture to connecting episodes alone, but also uses it to knit together elements of the main action itself and to point up certain ironic equivalencies of character and action. The Runner and Quartermaster at first glance might appear to function at diametrically opposite poles. One supports the Marshall; the other the Corporal, and on the surface it would appear that they reside in opposite camps, representative of opposite approaches to experience. On closer inspection, however, they exhibit many similar characteristics and engage in experiences that are also similar, although these experiences occur at different times in their careers. Actually, they gravitate toward each other; beginning from opposite ends, their lives converge upon each other. Both resemble each other, at the last, in that they are motivated by aspiration rather than pressure, and it is an aspiration that finds its

embodiment in a man. (Sutterfield is to be their counterpart in the "horsethief" episode.) They contrast each other in that the Quartermaster had immediately placed his hopes in the Marshall upon meeting him at the Academy. The Runner begins in complete absence of faith in man, and, acting out of a seeming compulsion, he almost grudgingly gives his faith to a man he never meets, the Corporal. Both attempt to resign their commissions upon learning certain knowledge, the Runner at the beginning of his career (not actually, but at the beginning of his career in the novel) out of disgust with man, because man would allow himself to be led into death. The Quartermaster attempts to resign his commission at the end of his career, out of the knowledge that he could have prevented the bombardment (in which the Groom and Sutterfield are killed and the Runner maimed) and did not. Both, in a sense, accept the "sin" their commission imposed upon them. The Quartermaster reclaims his resignation; the Runner forces his, but reenlists in the very ranks he despises. Both attempt to emulate their "hero." The Quartermaster takes a long trip to relieve the Marshall at his desert outpost, always referring to himself as second to the Marshall's first. The Runner takes a long trip to learn of the background of the Groom, so he can utilize the Groom's power over the men to get them to emulate the Corporal's mutiny.

We must do it now . . . do as that French regiment did, the whole battalion of us: climb over this parapet tomorrow morning and get through the wire, with no rifles, nothing, and walk toward Jerry's wire. (p. 84)

The Quartermaster is told a long tale concerning the Marshall's background, just as the Runner is told the Groom's background in the horsethief episode. The difference is that the brother officer who relates the tale is obviously hostile to the Marshall, and it is a tale of the sacrifice of a man, rather than a horse.

Both are witness to and victims of a betrayal and are powerless to do anything to prevent it. The Runner had puzzled out the reason for the three miles of blank shells, realizing that the men had to walk unarmed across no-man's-land "before the German emissary or whatever he will be can reach Paris or Chaulnesmont" (p. 84) in order to negotiate the resumption of the war. The Quartermaster figures out the reason for the bombardment of these men, and realizes his own unwitting guilt in the action, since he had signed the transportation order for the blank shells which allowed the German general to arrive at Chaulnesmont through the subterfuge of a seeming attack.

A rather minute but important point of resemblance is the fact that these two are the only major characters who

openly display strong emotion in the entire novel. (The Groom gets angry and kicks the Runner, but this is only a spasmodic reaction--otherwise he is nerveless.) Both display this emotion, oddly enough, upon learning of the stoppage of a war. They weep. The Runner is trying to convince the Groom that the war has stopped, and will remain stopped if only they will act, and

. . . the sentry could have discerned that what washed over the Runner's face was neither the refraction assumed from the light of a flare nor the grease it resembled, but the water it was. (p. 83)

The Quartermaster's weeping is occasioned by the story of the Marshall's preventing the desert war by sacrificing a Legionnaire to the Riffs. "These tears are not anguish, only grief " (p. 271) The two occasions are similar also in that both men are attempting, unsuccessfully, to convince another soldier hostile to their views, that the other's assessment of the situation is incorrect. Their outward displays of emotion, unimportant in themselves, at the last assume an important structural function, since the last scene in the novel brings them together and fuses their complementary qualities, unifying them through their emotions. The Runner has just been beaten by the crowd after having tossed the medals and shouted at the Marshall's coffin. The police rescue him, drag him to a side street gutter where he is

lying in the cradle of the old man's arm,
laughing up at the ring of faces enclosing
him. . . .

"That's right," he said: "Tremble, I'm not
going to die. Never."

"I'm not laughing," the old man said. "What
you see are tears." (p. 437)

These are the last words in the novel. The tears and laughter
complement each other, are actually the same thing. The Runner's
laughter is the laughter of defiance and rage born of the bitter
knowledge the bombardment taught him and the Corporal's martyr-
dom forced on him. Earlier he had laughed when Sutterfield
had predicted an end to the war.

"The war? This war? Did God tell you that?"

"It's all right. Laugh at Him. He can stand that too."

"What else can I do but laugh?" the Runner said.

"Hadn't He rather have that than the tears?"

"He's got room for both of them. They're all the
same to Him." (p. 202)

Both the Runner and the Quartermaster have deepened their in-
sight into the human condition. The Runner had held a naive
hatred of man owing to certain surface appearances of man's
condition. The Runner had to learn what Sutterfield knew
instinctively, that you have to accept all of what man is, the
good and the evil. The Corporal, by his act of mutiny, taught
the Runner what a simple commitment to man could accomplish,
but the Runner, like the Groom, is no mystic either, and here
lies his anguish. His rage is one of the conditions ordinary
men must face upon learning the knowledge that the great
mystics can teach us by their actions. The Runner's lesson

is bitter but profound, and although he is not up to the level of the Corporal, he nonetheless carries on the spirit that is represented in the Corporal. The Quartermaster had entertained a naive hope in the condition of man, owing to certain surface appearances. He had placed his hopes upon a false savior, the Marshall, who is not so much evil as he is bound to his intellection, and limited by it to the extent that he can only act out of the rationality of sophisticated disillusion, meaning bereft of the aspiration that the feelings can engender. Thus his intelligence is always directed at preservation rather than aspiration, and paradoxically preservation involves war in his projection of the capabilities of man. The Quartermaster had misread the abilities of the Marshall (as some critics misread this quality in the Marshall)³³ just as the Runner had misread the inabilities of the men. The Corporal's mutiny had taught the Runner that man is not so mean a creature as he had imagined; the bombardment of the men teaches the Quartermaster that the Marshall, magnificent though he is in some respects, is nonetheless

³³William Sowder, "Faulkner and Existentialism: A Note on the Generalissimo," Wisconsin Studies in Literature, IV (Summer, 1963) 163-167. Mr. Sowder offers a grossly oversimplified, one-sided view which elevates the Marshall as a Sartrean existential hero who "reaffirms life, as opposed to the Corporal, who refuses it.

bound by his limitations to commit an act that blasts the hopes of the Quartermaster. Both the Runner and the Quartermaster receive the strongest shock of recognition of any of the characters in the novel as a result of the bombardment. Both had miscalculated the extremes to which the closed society would go to preserve its position and both suffer for it. One is maimed physically, the other spiritually by the bombardment. The Runner is literally bathed in fire which neatly burns half his total body from head to toe; the Quartermaster is maimed spiritually by having to withdraw his resignation and accept partial responsibility for the bombardment; he must share in the sin. Thus the Runner's anguish finds its outlet in defiant laughter, the Quartermaster's anguish in tears; but one should note that neither of these emotions indicates that man will not prevail; they are simply the expression of the profound awareness these two characters have attained into the complexities of the human condition. The Runner and the Quartermaster are complementary figures whose actions converge upon each other from opposite poles, but both relied more upon intellectual than intuitive means to attain their knowledge. Their final knowledge had to come about through an experience which stuns the intellect; in both their cases this experience was the bombardment of the troops by the military hierarchy in order to keep the war

going.

Marthe (Magda), Mayra, and the young Marseilles prostitute do not serve a definite function in terms of the "deep structural dialectic," but they do offer oblique commentary upon it through their characters. Their exact function, outside of the obvious allegorical connections to the Passion story, which in their case is strained out of all proportion to the original, is somewhat difficult to pinpoint. It is noteworthy that practically none of the critics has devoted an appreciable amount of space to them, a fact which may point to their relatively minor importance or perhaps to critical obtuseness. At any rate there is a definite difference in the way the two sisters approach experience, a difference which corresponds to the antagonism of the "deep structural dialectic." Marthe is the intelligent sister; it is she who seeks a meaning in worldly moral terms of the whole complex relationship between the Marshall, their parents, and the Corporal. Marthe has strength and dignity, also. In the confrontation with the Marshall she accuses him of betraying the Corporal out of fear, reasoning faster than he can answer her, anticipating argument--much as the Marshall himself does. She knows that the Marshall will not remand the order for the Corporal's execution. Her "failure lies in seeking an answer in terms of what the

closed society offers. She misconstrues completely the reason for the Corporal's execution as the sergeant-major delivers the Corporal's body to them.

"The war is over."

"Ah," the sergeant-major said.

The woman made no movement, no gesture. "What else can this mean? What else explain it? Justify it? No, not even justify it: plead compassion, plead pity, plead despair for it?" She looked at the sergeant-major, cold, griefless, impersonal. "Plead exculpation for it?"

"Bah," the sergeant-major said. "Did I ask you? Did anyone?" (pp. 387, 388)

Marthe, brave, resouceful, and admirable as she is, is also hemmed in by her intelligence. Her reaction to the Runner in the second section of the "Tomorrow" section is the result of a misconception on her part, also, when she asks the Runner if he would like to go see where the Corporal's grave was.

"What for?" he said. "He's finished."

"Finished?" she said in a harsh stern voice.

"He didn't mean it that way, sister," Marya said. (p. 431)

What the Runner was actually doing was simply repeating in an oblique way the words of Christ, according to St. John (19:30), immediately before his death.

Marya's statement points up the difference between her and Marthe in their knowledge of experience. She is supposedly the idiot sister. As the farmer who delivered the Corporal's body to Picklock told him, "She has flies up

here." But Marya actually bears a closer resemblance to the Corporal than does Marthe. Her serenity is very like his remoteness, and she is able to see past situations where the intelligence would founder, as in the case cited above. Her intuitive knowledge is illustrated in a number of incidents, and her mere presence every time outweighs the admonitions of Marthe in its effect on other characters. As in the scene of the Corporal's execution, the sergeant-major tries to avoid confronting her.

Then he had to meet the second woman's eyes, the face no longer incipient now but boundless with promise, giving him a sweet and tender smile, saying, "It's all right. Don't be afraid. Good-bye."
(p. 389)

Myra repeats the Corporal's words ("don't be afraid") on more than this occasion. In the cart carrying the Corporal's body, it is she who communicates to the peasants who are opening a path for the cart, but who are fearful, or perhaps ashamed, and refuse to look at the cart as it passes. "Come, you owe him no obligation; you don't need to hate. You haven't injured him; why should you be afraid?" (p. 391). And when Marthe admonishes her she explains "I didn't mean to frighten them, only to comfort them " (p. 391). She continues to gaze down serenely at them (much like the Corporal in the lorry in the opening scene) until, finally, as the cart leaves the city, one old man doffs his hat, and is

followed by the rest, so that

it was as though it had quit the city enclosed in a faint visible soundless rustling. "You see sister?" Marya said with serene and peaceful triumph: "only to comfort them." (p. 391)

Marya also has the element of the uncanny about her, another point of resemblance between her and the Corporal. The "miraculous" qualities which the corporal seems to possess are apparently hers in modified form. The odd incident of the spoon occurs on the Place de Ville the night before the execution, when the crowd vents its hatred upon the women after realizing that they are the Corporal's relatives. Upon the sisters' proffer of food from their basket, the woman throws a basket at them, whereupon it strikes Marthe and caroms off her, emptying itself. Marya catches the empty basket. "That is, although none had seen her move, she now held the empty basket " (p. 219). The woman then throws the heavy iron spoon at them.

But it missed. That is . . . she realized that the spoon had struck nothing, that none of the three strangers had even ducked, as though the spoon had vanished into thin air as it left her hand. (p. 219)

Marya later "Took from the basket which everyone had seen empty itself . . . a piece of broken bread a little larger than two fists " (p. 202). Later, in their meeting with the Marshall, she produces the spoon.

Marya's statements, although she is described as witless, are far from meaningless. Her remarks to questioners, or upon meeting other characters, resemble the succinct parable-like remarks of the Corporal when he answers a question. She lacks "rhetoric" in the same sense that the Corporal does, but she can see through a situation Marthe's intelligence cannot penetrate, as with her immediate remark upon seeing Polchek in the "Tomorrow" scene: "This one is looking for a tree " (p. 426). And she can cope with action more completely and serenely than Marthe, who gets flustered. Thus, through Marthe and Marya, Faulkner offers the two approaches in miniature and without hostility, linked again biologically, as are the Corporal and the Marshall. Marthe and Marya complement each other in their attempts to cope with the forces which rail against them. One is resourceful, industrious, intelligent; the other is not a mystic in Bergsonian terms, but she is apparently above the griefs that human beings are heir to who focus their love too particularly upon the immediate objects of this world. Faulkner reserves the only consciously beautiful and peaceful images that occur in A Fable for her. One describes her face as "quite empty for the moment but with something incipient and tranquilly promising about it like a clean though not-yet-lighted lamp on a kitchen bureau " (p. 387). The other occurs near the

last when whe is described on the farm, announcing the arrival of the Runner crossing

the yard toward the house as though borne on a soft and tender cloud of white geese. (p. 425)

These images are memorable in that they are perhaps the only pleasant and peaceful images in the entire novel.

Within the main conflict parallel episodes also occur which for the most part comment upon each other directly, but ultimately take their meaning from their relation to the Corporal's action. Faulkner juxtaposes two of these, the executions, and separates two, the suicides, but both pairs of instances point up differences as well as resemblances.

General Gragnon, who many critics saw as an admirable man treated badly by the hierarchy, is linked to the Corporal by these critics, since both are "sacrifices." These are the critics who usually lament over Levine, also. This is a superficial resemblance, as a consideration of the two "sacrifices" will demonstrate. The fact that the Corporal's execution immediately follows Gragnon's certainly indicates that Faulkner intended a comparison through the juxtaposition, but the comparison will highlight contrast rather than likeness. First, the Corporal's execution is conducted in the open, on the parade ground, in daylight, before the assembled units of the army. It is conducted with the necessary ritual the

closed society demands even for an ignominious death when that death fits within a recognizable category that is acceptable to it--in this case, death for cowardice in facing the enemy. The Corporal's execution and its exaggerated resemblance to the crucifixion has already been remarked upon. Gragnon's execution is conducted in secret, in the depths of the cells under the Hotel de Ville, without pomp or ceremony, designed to "prove" that he did not die a coward's death but in the face of the enemy. The Corporal's execution, though exaggerated, is done with a minimum of excess action. Gragnon's is botched and gruesome, with Gragnon struggling against his executioners in order to force them to shoot him in the back of the head, so as to deny the lie that will emerge that he was killed in action.

These are differences enough, but the real difference is that the Corporal's execution is a willing sacrifice; Gragnon's is an unwilling sacrifice; therefore, he is no martyr to any cause. The irony is compounded here, because it is the military which battens on pomp and ceremony to promote its "glory," and the very person who would scorn it all is given, at least, the ceremony, while the general who wished no more than "glory" and an unblemished record is denied even the rites of execution so that the lie will promote his glory. Ritual debases here; its absence serves to elevate on the

surface: the reader knows the lie that is perpetuated.

Two suicides also occur in the main action, Levine and the priest. Both parallel each other in that they are both the result of an awareness by them that the cause they have been serving has betrayed them. Both have served the cause of Caesar, the war, one unwittingly until his confrontation with the Corporal; the other unaware of what war really was. Levine is generally regarded by most critics as the innocent young man soiled and betrayed by the war, but this view is an incomplete assessment of Levine. It is not enough simply to say that he is "innocent," for his innocence is of a particular order. It is an innocence born of ignorance rather than purity of heart. Levine is too much in love with war; he does not hesitate to kill for glory.

The laurel of glory, provided it was even moderately leafed, had human blood on it; that was permissible only when motherland itself was at stake. Peace abolished it, and that man who would choose between glory and peace had best let his voice be small indeed. (p. 101)

Levine does not kill simply because, unknown to him, he has been using blank ammunition. Levine muses not so much over the German pilot's death itself, as the circumstances of the death. It is the lack of glory, the waste, the ignominious context of the pilot's death, plus the awareness that the war has deceived him that leads to his suicide. Levine's

awareness is still limited at the last, but it is the measure of the Runner's act (itself extended to the Corporal's act) which finally drives Levine to suicide. When Levine catches up to time again after his long vigil with the burning sidicott (the smell of death impending) it is a new time; he is no longer shielded in the ignorance of his previous innocence. But he still laments the old "idea" of war as he plays out his last day before entering the latrine to kill himself. He reads beneath a tree which was

secure from war yet still of it, not
that remote, in those days when they
had called it war: who were apparently
not decided yet what to call this now.
And so now there would be time (p. 325)

The tree is a projection of his own status prior to being caught up in time. The last thought before going back for his sidicott to take into the latrine with him concerns the irony of the bombardment.

. . . because what could he say to
Conventicle or they to each other?
"Well, Flight Captain Bridesman tells
me one of our battalions put down
their guns this morning and climbed
out of the trench and through the
wire and met a similar unarmed German
one until both sides could get a
barrage down on them. So all we need
now is just to stand by until time to
take that Jerry general home." (p. 325)

Levine develops a strong sense of irony with his loss of ignorance, but his failure, like the priest's, is an intellectual

rather than a moral failure. Both had failed to properly assess the ideal they served; both discover that the ideal is false, and as a consequence are emptied of the faith they had. For Levine it is the German pilot's death and the bombardment; for the priest the presence of the Corporal dissipates the illusion of their former selves.

One other important scene occurs in the main episode which, although it has no direct parallel within the action itself, is nonetheless important within this context of structural parallels, because it comments so ironically upon an implied parallel. I refer to the notorious meeting of the generals at which the "agreement" is reached to resume the war. This scene is one which completely alienates those who demand that a novel which uses events out of history treat them in the context of an approximate social realism. Schendler has offered the best account of its function in the novel by considering it a satirical rendering of the "myth of the brass,"³⁴ merely another myth-debasing element in the novel he sees as concerned with denying the myths of history and orthodox Christianity. I totally agree with him that the scene is intentionally satiric, and it can easily be

³⁴Schendler, op. cit., p. 124.

read within the context he assigns it.³⁵ But the meeting-scene performs a precise function for me within the general context of the rationale of parallels and contrasts as the unifying principle of the novel, because within this context, the mutiny becomes a devastatingly ironic commentary upon the Corporal's aspiration toward the open society. Here is the ultra-closed society aping the open, transcending the national boundaries upon which the closed society flourishes, and the incident becomes a mockery of itself. The military equivalent of brotherhood results in the bombardment that destroys the attempt at brotherhood. The ironies compound upon themselves at this point. The Quartermaster later describes the act in confronting the Marshall with it.

"a barrage by both of We to prevent
naked and weaponless hand touching
opposite naked and weaponless hand."
(p. 327)

Thus the scene is hardly to be railed against under the aegis that Faulkner did not really understand why wars are fought; as a functioning structure within the total thematic frame

³⁵The myth-debasing function is somewhat analogous to the Bergsonian idea of the static religion as a product of the "myth-making function," and insofar as the Corporal's creating his own "presence" past his mythic correspondences, the idea is not inconsistent with my interpretation.

of the novel it functions with devastating irony. On one level, that of myth-debasing satire it scores the military's pomposity in the impossibly rigid caricature of the German general, but on the second level it becomes a horrible parody of the brotherhood it resembles in one way, but which it really seeks to destroy. Their concession to the idea of the open society (transcending national boundaries) occurs at the very last in the scene when the Marshall responds to the German general's request for a "formal ratification of the agreement."

"Formal ratification of what agreement?"
the old general said.

"Mutual ratification then," the German general said.

"Of what?" the old general said.

"The agreement," the German general said.

"What agreement?" the old general said. "Do we need an agreement? Has anyone missed one?-- the port is with you, General," he said to the Briton. "Fill and pass." (p. 309)

The mechanical quality of the exchange is in contrast to the informality of the implied "gentleman's agreement," and a further irony emerges from the fact that the informality is not owing to the nature of the group that is meeting but to the need for secrecy.

Finally there are the two main characters themselves; the Marshall and the Corporal. Much space has already been devoted to them in the attempt to describe them as representatives of the Bergsonian concept of the two sources of morality

and religion, a situation which itself is a synecdoche for the total human condition. In this process I have continually stressed their qualities that exist in opposition: the dynamism of the Corporal, the essentially static qualities of the Marshall. Yet these two characters actually have much about them that is similar, although their similarities are often the very means by which their differences are emphasized through the conflict they are engaged in, since their two opposing modes of placing meaning upon experience tend to deny similarities. But both do emanate as different views of one basic force, the elan vital; both are, after all, father and son, are joined biologically at their source, and it is their similar qualities that sometimes actually force the conflict. A good indication of this occurs in the Marshall's response after the Corporal has refused his final offer (which the Marshall knew he would) in the "Maundy Thursday" scene. The Marshall bid the Corporal goodnight.

"Good-bye, Father," the corporal answered him.
 "Not goodbye," the old general said. "I'm durable too; I don't give up easily either. Remember whose blood it is that you defy me with." (p. 356)

Both characters have historical figures looming directly behind them, although at disparate points in time and of different qualities. The Corporal's obvious resemblance is to Christ, as is more than evident in the exaggerated parallels to the Passion. The Marshall's resemblances are more pointedly

"historic." His function in the allegorical context is quite ambiguous; he is more nearly related to mortal men out of history, although no single individual seems to fit neatly as his model.³⁶ Both exercise great power over their followers. The Marshall, of course, through his rank and wisdom, the Corporal simply through his charismatic qualities. Yet both are solitary, existing in an isolation that even their closest "disciples" cannot reach. Their remoteness, though, points up their differences. The Marshall exists in the ultra-rational, abstract world of the pure intellect; the Corporal exists in the fluid, internal world of the mystic. Both, though,

³⁶Historically, in point of time and incident, the Marshall is closest to General Petain, who was named Commander in Chief of the French General Staff approximately one month prior to the May mutinies of 1917, and who had restored calm to the French army within a month, ". . . at the cost of twenty-three executions, . . ."according to Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart, in The Real War 1914-1918 (Boston, 1930) p. 301. Liddell Hart, who is no apologist for the military, notes that Petain was "essentially patriarchal and not familiar, which inspired confidence," a point of character close to the Marshall. The resemblance stops there to action in A Fable.

In point of rank the Marshall is closest to Marshall Foche, who was appointed Commander in Chief of the Allied Armies, but not until April 14, 1918, more than a year after the May mutinies of 1917, and who apparently had little to do with them. Prior to Foche's appointment no general enjoyed supreme command over any armies outside his own country's.

The Marshall may, in a sense, be a composite of these two men, since Faulkner simply had the Corporal's mutiny occur in May of 1918. At any rate, the Marshall is an exaggeration of his historical counterparts, just as the Corporal is an exaggeration of his mythico-religious counterpart. Again, Faulkner's unconcern with being dominated by historical or allegorical concerns is evident here--they are simply elements in a structure that encloses them rather than being enclosed by them.

are able to accommodate their opposite in "virtue" and incur their love and loyalty. The Corporal chooses to wife (Marthe says that they "were to be married") a whore after rejecting all of the comely virgins the family had paraded before him; the Marshall seeks out and maintains an old batman who is incorrigibly non-military, and who remains with him, devoted to the last, yet even at the funeral is still "in step with nothing " (p. 433).

Both the Corporal and the Marshall engage in experiences which are similar at their center, but are actually in diametric opposition simply because of the circumstances surrounding their part in it. Both "stop" a war. The Corporal's mutiny has been described as the central point of action in A Fable against which everything is measured. But the Marshall has also prevented a war, as we learn through the story the Quartermaster hears from the officer. The incident occurred during the Marshall's tour of duty at the desert outpost (which the Quartermaster had relieved him of). The circumstances of the Marshall's action, however, are profoundly different from the Corporal's. The Marshall had used betrayal to accomplish his end, a betrayal which caused a man to lose his life. The Marshall's decision was purely calculation, more or less a matter of logistics, rather than any concern for the loss of life involved. The officer who relates the story denounces

the Marshall's action, even though the man the Marshall "sacrificed" to the Riffs was a murderer (in fact the man they wanted) whom the Marshall tricked by letting him "volunteer" to go for reinforcements, knowing that the Riffs were waiting to capture him. Ironically, the Marshall was simultaneously given a medal and relieved of his command, departing for the Tibetan lamasery after turning the command over to the Quartermaster.

The Marshall's stay in the lamasery also has implications within the purlieu of Bergson's statements on mysticism. Buddhism, he notes

did not believe in the efficacy of human action. It had no faith in such action. And faith alone can move mountains. A complete mysticism would have reached this point.³⁷

Here, then, is an implied parallel to the Corporal. The Marshall is an incomplete mystic at one point. In fact he is a false mystic, since, as Marthe states, he went to the lamasery not to meditate, but to think,

. . . not that dreamy hoping and wishing and believing that we would think is thinking, but some fierce and rigid concentration. (p. 288)

The Marshall's lack of faith in the efficacy of human action

³⁷Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 214.

is evident in the "Maundy Thursday" scene where he tells the Corporal that it is man's deathless folly which is "the quality-mark and warrant of man's immortality" (p. 352).

The Corporal has reached the point Bergson refers to in the passage above.

Although many critics seem to feel that the Corporal's superior position is owing to his demand for freedom, this does not quite describe his position for me. It is true that the open society which the Corporal embodies in himself is one that is fluid, undefined, as the dynamic religion he represents is also a matter of awareness that dispenses with prayer and ritual; yet, in the context of the conflict, the Corporal is not in a position to choose his life. He must not choose his life, just as the Marshall knows that he will not do so, for to do so will argue against everything that he is. Both characters, then, are in a sense merely acting out a role each knows must end in the way it does. The many references to the Marshall's being afraid of man are not correct. Neither is afraid of man. Both have their "morality," based on a faith in man, if not a faith in "the efficacy of human action." The Marshall's faith is based on a belief in man, but "within his capacities and limits." (p. 347). In the confrontation scene with the Quartermaster, the Marshall's relation to the situation the Corporal has created is spelled out vividly--he in a sense

is complementary to the Corporal in this respect. The Quartermaster has tendered his resignation upon learning of the bombardment, and in the ensuing conversation has accused the Marshall of having acted out of fear, to which the Marshall replies that he does not fear man, only respects him (the same answer he gives the Corporal later). The Marshall then reminds the Quartermaster of his moral obligation to remand his resignation, since the Quartermaster owes it to the Corporal to accept his share of the responsibility for the bombardment, and his attempt at resignation is, in a sense, an attempt to avoid his share of the "sin."

A man is to die . . . for a principle
that you were incapable of risking death
and dishonor for. Yet you don't demand
that life. You demand instead merely to
be relieved of a commission. (pp. 331, 332)

Then the Marshall explains his position, one of the excruciating paradoxes in the novel. He states that the Corporal is actually still within the limits of his control.

If I gave him his life tonight, I
myself could render null and void
what you call the hope and the dream
of his sacrifice. By destroying his
life tomorrow morning, I will establish
forever that he didn't even live in vain,
let alone die so. Now tell me who's
afraid. (p. 332)

The Quartermaster takes back his resignation at this point, and recognizes that the old Marshall and he himself must take upon themselves the "guilt" of the Corporal's death in order to

perpetuate the Corporal's mission. The Marshall's role at this point is very complex. He in one context is committing a great sin, and in another respect, in relation to the Corporal himself, acting out a complementary role in the context of what Bergson would call "The law of two-fold frenzy."

The Marshall acts out his role in full awareness of the threat that the Corporal's martyrdom will pose to everything that he stands for; yet he goes through with the execution, knowing that it will preserve the Corporal's act in its purity. Herein lies the "morality" of the Marshall's position. Both being in extremis, terms like "good" and "evil" in some simplistic sense simply do not apply to them--one in a sense perpetuates the other through the conflict. This is not to argue that war has any justification itself, but that some of the men who wage it do so on idealistic rather than purely selfish grounds. It would be more apt to say that the war, waged as it is, bears a closer resemblance to an intellectual error rather than a moral failure. Certain generals, "Mama Bidet" in particular, wage war for egotistical reasons, as Gragnon learned, but the Marshall's role is more complex than simple egotism. He does not lie to the Corporal; his remarks are his beliefs: his reasons are complex and in a sense paradoxical.

The two major antagonists finally resemble each other

in their funeral scenes or, more precisely, each has a roughly similar scene whose similarities heighten the differences. Both ride down the main street of a city, in a cart, behind a horse, between rows of people, toward an arch. This is the essential structure of both scenes, the resemblances stop there. The Corporal is executed on a day that "bade fair to be another bright and lark-filled vernal morning " (p. 383). The Marshall is buried six years after the Corporal's death," on a grey day though not a grey year." (p. 433). The Corporal is lying wrapped in a ground sheet in a "high two-wheeled farm cart with a heavy farm-horse in the shafts." (p. 387). The Marshall lies "in his splendid casket in full uniform" and rides on "a gun caisson drawn by black-draped and pompomed horses." (p. 433). During the Corporal's ride the crowd, unaware of the cart at first, simply parts to let it pass, and then falls in behind it, so that the cart appears to be

borne on the massed shoulders in a kind of triumph; borne along so high in fact that they had almost reached the old gate before the owners of the shoulders even appeared or thought to raise their eyes or their attention high enough to remark what they carried and to assume, divine or simply recoil from, what the cart contained. (p. 390)

The Corporal's "funeral" then is humble, but it is a "triumph" of sorts, especially at the end when it is marked by the "faint visible soundless rustling" of the peasants taking off their

hats as the cart passes. The Corporal's funeral actually belies its crude appurtenances--it is dignified and peaceful. The Marshall's funeral, on the other hand, is ornate, pomp and circumstance being the order of the day. The closed society is out in force with the retinue following the caisson containing the "uniforms of the generals and the robes and mitres and monstrances of the church and the sombre broadcloth and humble silk hats of the ambassadors " (p. 434). The three major segments of the closed society are again delineated for us. But in contrast to the Corporal's scene, which progresses from a sort of confusion into dignified silence, the Marshall's ornate funeral progresses from order and pomp into confusion, and the reason is the meeting again between him and the Corporal, before the Arch of Triumph, where the Corporal lies beneath the tomb of the unknown soldier. Here again the contrasting parallels become evident. Both are pictured at the last "alive" in spirit. But again the parallel serves to heighten the contrasts, for the Marshall is alive only in the hollow ritualized rhetoric of the orator.

"Marshall"

But only the day answered. . . .

"Marshall!"

But still there was only the dirge of day . . .

"That's right, great general! Lie always with your face to the west, that the enemies of France shall always see it and beware!" (p. 435)

The real spirit, or perhaps the "enemy" of the Marshall lives

on in the Corporal, whose "spirit" manifests itself in the Runner as he emerges, shouts his "three epitaphs," hurls his medal, and completely disrupts the funeral. The dynamic spirit of the Corporal is again placed against the essentially static quality of the Marshall through the use of parallel structured scenes.

Operating in A Fable is a structural principle not employed before by Faulkner exactly as it is employed here. Faulkner had previously used original methods of structuring his novels, all of which originally drew unfavorable responses from some critics. The closest approximation, and it is rather remote, to A Fable would perhaps be The Wild Palms and The Old Man, where he used interchapters of two separate stories which dealt essentially with the same theme, a method which resembles somewhat the use of parallel structures as indicative of theme. But A Fable is another uniquely structured novel in the Faulkner canon. It is a novel since this term, though difficult to define, allows some near-catholicity of application. The seeming incompatibility of the allegorical vs the naturalistic novel is not really important nor central to the case here. The representative function certain characters and incidents display is only the obvious, surface representation, which is only one level of importance. The internal, structural dynamics, the use of parallels of character, incident, and action within and between the certain episodes,

from the broadest to rather minute relations, far outweighs the apparent relations they offer to the religious, historical, or allegorical framework, and ultimately create their own thematic logic. The structural coherence of A Fable outweighs its seeming correspondence to the obvious historical-allegorical frame to which it superficially owes its structure. An indication of the relatively minor importance the historical-allegorical framework actually plays is noticeably apparent if one simply stops to consider how much Faulkner has departed from both the allegorical and historical "realities," to which the action of A Fable seems to refer, but how closely he has maintained the balance of the internal cohesion of parallels and contrasts. A Fable is a complex novel, but Faulkner has ever been anything but simple when it comes to constructing a novel. And complex though it may be, A Fable is still the expression of a vision that is completely, adequately conceptualized and controlled.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Structure, then, creates meaning finally in A Fable. The various actions depicting parallel events ultimately contrast, as complete episodes, to the main action, but these are connected contrasts, structural elements in a total structure which presents the various contexts within which action can occur and yield up a definition of man. A Fable forces its own definition of the human condition. Appeals to outside structures will not work as guides in determining that definition if one seeks it in the specific terms of those outside structures. Bergson's conception of the two sources of the elan vital and their competing moralities and religions is largely unstructured itself. It is a basis upon which to posit some "facts," as was noted in Chapter I. The similarities between A Fable and The Two Sources of Morality and Religion exist meaningfully within all of the various contexts of the action in A Fable, not just certain incidents which resemble those in sacred or profane history. Bergson's basic assumptions inform the sub-structure of A Fable. The opposition of the intuition and intellect is so basic that it can function as a strong structural frame, and yet fit

the various ramifications of this opposition which occur in the conflicts in A Fable without denying itself in the different contexts. Those critics who approached A Fable from a theological or historical perspective ended in confusion or frustration because they appealed to outside "structures" which demanded adherence to particulars that were rather inflexible. Absolutes are absolutes, and do not allow great margins for alteration. The anger of the critics who saw the Passion as sentimentalized or possibly blasphemed in the novel is testimony to the inviolate nature of that concept. The scoffing of the historically-minded critics is testimony to the "structure" they are using.

But A Fable does not seek to define or give meaning to abstractions of any sort; the "fable" of A Fable is man, not some abstract structure. It defines man by showing him in action in the contexts of the "main" episode, the "horsethief" episode, and the exhumation and funeral scenes of the "Tomorrow" section. The main action is the most extensive and meaningful portrayal of the basic opposition of the two aspects of man's nature and the condition each embodies. The conflict between the Corporal and the Marshall is not necessarily "higher" in the sense that it is sacred, it is different in that it is the most far-reaching and has the greatest potential in its effect upon the human condition. The shorter episodes

cast a reflective light upon the main action. Ultimately all of the actions of the characters in A Fable are judged in relation to the Corporal's acts--not necessarily in moral terms, but in terms of the significance of their actions in possibly altering the human condition in some way. ✓

All of the episodes offer the basic opposition of the intellect and intuition in the following parallel pattern. Each episode contains two major characters who are antagonists: one in whom resides authority and power and who approximates the intellect; one who represents the challenge to that power, and who approximates the intuition. The latter rebels in some way. The rebellion generates frenetic activity on the part of the powerful antagonist to restore the previous condition. It is reestablished, but is altered ever so slightly.

The process by which meaning is uncovered is a rather unique one. A superficial reading discovers little unity at all between the various episodes. Resemblances are remote. ✓ Upon discovering the resemblances one ultimately finds that the resemblances actually serve to point up contrasts of a more meaningful nature, because now one can see the total relationship of the action. Faulkner does not change the action so much as he shifts the "environment" of each action so that the total action of the episode serves as commentary ✓ rather than the individual characters. Thus the individual

characters can function on one level within the context of their particular episode, and function on another level in another context when seen as a reflector of the character in the main action with whom they act in parallel. These parallels on their loosest level reach out beyond the action of A Fable itself into the various analogical connections to the Passion and other Old Testament correspondences. But to seek the meaning of the action of A Fable in these loose connections causes the irreconcilable contradictions which Rice and Straumann see in the novel.

The following tables may serve as a crude approximation of the "environments" within which the action occurs. They are oversimplifications, but will serve as a guide to the many intricate relationships which exist in the novel simultaneously in parallels and contrasts.

| <u>Main Action</u> | <u>Horsethief Episode</u> | <u>Internal Parallel Relationship</u> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Corporal | Groom | rebel, perpetrator of meaningful action, spiritual isolate, dynamic, aspiration, no rhetoric |
| Marshall ¹ | Lawyer (owner of racehorse) | intellect, power, static, disillusion authority, attempt to reestablish status quo, non-creative |
| Runner | Federal Deputy | convert, almost unwilling response to events which deny earlier ideas, primarily intellectual in approach but "understanding" comes through feeling. |

¹The Marshall actually has two persons paralleling him in the "horsethief" episode. The owner represents his wealth and power as high rank in the closed society, and the lawyer

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|---|
| Quartermaster | Sutterfield | reliance on hope for condition of man placed in false "savior," share guilt through influence of "false" savior |
| Levine | Turnkey | romantic glory-seeker, faith in an abstract code, failure, comic |

Since no real contrast can exist between the similar representatives of structures which are themselves static and fixed, the contrasts as they exist between the episodes must reveal themselves through the characters who function as the representatives of the intuition, or some expression of it. Contrasts appear between the main action and the "horsethief" episode when we consider the Corporal and the Groom within the larger frame of the relationship of the total episodes to each other. Contrast is expressed mainly through techniques employed in each episode. The following tables may serve as an illustrative outline.

Contrasts

Corporal

mystic, intuitive, calm, acceptance of "defeat," wins world by "passing through" desire for particular object, action in the large resembles the Christian Agape (non-desiring love)

Groom

practical, sensual, instinctive, non-acceptance, contained rage, bitter over loss, desires particular object, flees world action resembles eros of Greeks (desiring love)

represents his complete reliance on intellect. The lawyer's role has been stressed since he is the more prominent and important in terms of the basic "dialectic," and since the Marshall's power is manifested in more ways than simply wealth in the main action.

Techniques by Which Contrast is Effected

Main Action

whole action in terms of "descent," emphasis on "human qualities of noble legendary action --contrasts to legend owing to exaggerated parallels to outside structure (Passion)

main character overpowers and "wins" over historical "legendary" counterpart, most complete manifestation of man

Horsethief Episode

whole action in terms of ascent, emphasis on non-human qualities, little obvious resemblance between "base" action and "noble" legend, linkage effected by intrusions pointing to it

main character gets absolved by legend incomplete man-- becomes misanthropic

The contrast is pointed up more vividly when the Groom is lifted out of his original context and placed in the main context where he must function as a misanthropist.

Internal parallels between the main section and the exhumation scene are faint, since the environment in this section is the absolute opposite of the implications the Corporal represents in the main action. But certain rough parallels do exist between the main characters and those in the exhumation scene. The following table may serve as a rough guide to these resemblances.

Main Action

Exhumation Scene

Parallel Relationship

Corporal

Picklock

"mutinies" through a refusal to obey orders; initiator of "meaningful" action; reliance on concrete experience rather than abstractions--outlaw

Marshall Sergeant in Charge essentially static in outlook concerned with abstractions over concrete experience--embodiment of society's values--order

Contrasts are evident in the utter reduction of all the elements which comprise both opposing factions. Intuition in the Corporal, is reduced to appetite in Picklock. The grandeur of the Marshall is reduced to the pettiness of the sergeant. The mutiny is reduced to the wordless extraction of the brandy over his protest from the sergeant.

The exhumation scene is the nadir of the novel, both literally and thematically, but it is also the context which reintroduces the Corporal into the "main" action, or more specifically the human condition.

The parallels and contrasts within the main action occur primarily through character relationships. The following table will illustrate.

Parallels

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Corporal-Marshall | father-son, supreme examples of opposing conditions, orphans, character based on mythical-historical figure |
| Runner-Quartermaster | place hope in a man, weep for man, modified by shock of recognition during bombardment of troops by their own army; "articulations" modified in the last scene |
| Corporal-Gragnon | executed by military; both "sacrifices," orphans, "martyrs" |
| Marthe-Marya | sisters of Corporal, both endure |
| Levine-priest | suicides--believers in abstract code, betrayed by it |

ContrastsCorporal

intuition
 son
 mystic
 dynamic

Marshall

intellect
 father
 rationalist
 static

Runner

progresses from despair to
 qualified belief

Quartermaster

Progresses from facile
 belief to qualified belief

Corporal

willing sacrifice
 executed with ritual
 meaningful martyrdom

Gragnon

unwilling sacrifice
 executed in secret
 falsified hero

Marthe

primarily intelligent
 in determining
 experience

Marya

primarily untuitive in
 determining experience

Little contrast that is significant occurs between Levine and the priest, since both of the characters are clearly within the context of the closed society, and undergo little change in their outlook as a result of their new knowledge (their "betrayal") except to react in parallel negative fashion and commit suicide.

The funeral scene is the last episode in the novel and recreates the main action, only here the environment is slightly altered. The Corporal and the Marshall again confront each other, both in the flesh and the spirit, and the original conflict reoccurs in modified form.

| <u>Main Action</u> | <u>Parallel</u> | <u>Funeral Scene</u> |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|
| Corporal | spirit of dynamism, open society | (Corporal) |
| Marshall | spirit of the "mundane earth," static society | (Marshall) |
| Corporal | "mutiny" | Runner |
| Marshall | re-establishment of previous condition | Quartermaster |

Where the funeral scene contrasts to the earlier action is in the linkage between the Runner and the Quartermaster. The Runner has progressed from complete skepticism into a belief in man; the Quartermaster has progressed from an unqualified belief in man into a degree of skepticism, at least in terms of a "savior" who represents men's hope. Each has gravitated toward the other's position, and each has finally arrived close to the other's position as a result of the same incident, the bombardment. The Runner and the Quartermaster are not the antagonists that the Corporal and the Marshall are. They exist in a sort of complementary relationship. The one's laughter complements the other's tears. Conditions have altered ever so slightly. Neither will attain the level of existence upon which either of their prototypes dwelt. The Corporal, especially, remains paradoxical in his nature, denying any attempt by the intelligence to neatly categorize him.

The condition which finally exists is not necessarily

"better" or "worse." Those like Taylor who wished to see A Fable as a description of the possibility of salvation for man, and were subsequently disappointed, were not careful in recongizing what the limits were which Faulkner as artist had set for himself. A clue to Faulkner's overall view as expressed in A Fable is evident again in his conversation with Bouvard. Faulkner had stated that "Art is not only man's most supreme expression; it is also the salvation of mankind." Bouvard immediately asked Faulkner if he meant that the artist offered man salvation. Faulkner's reply goes to the heart of the problem of reconciling the events of A Fable with the Nobel Prize speech.

"No. The artist is the one who is able to communicate his message. In doing this he has no intention of saving mankind. On the contrary, the artist speaks only for himself."²

Faulkner was certainly not the optimist that Bergson was, but neither was he the pessimist that some critics have made of him. A belief in the invincibility of man, that he will ultimately prevail, need not be expressed in the manner by which we generally recognize "prevailing." Certainly the events which occur in A Fable do not lend themselves to an easy optimism. Yet they do not describe despair by any means.

²Bouvard, op. cit., 363.

Faulkner reveals the human condition in terms of conflict and within the knowledge that man is "doomed to failure," but within this stern recognizance of the conditions which life imposes upon man is an affirmation also. Perhaps the best description of the world view which finally emerges from A Fable, when we consider all of its internal dynamics, is described by Bergson when he explains the operations of the laws of two-fold frenzy and dichotomy.

"Doubtless, looking from the outside at these comings and goings we see only the antagonism of the two tendencies, the futile attempt of the one to thwart the other, the ultimate defeat of the second and the revenge of the first: . . . But the struggle is here only the superficial aspect of an advance. The truth is that a tendency on which two different views are possible can put forth its maximum, in quantity or quality, only if it materializes these two possibilities into moving realities."³

Faulkner, by the very structure of A Fable, reinforces his belief that the true index of man's worth and his existence on earth is not to be found solely through the mind, but also through the "inner" view, which is the view through the human heart. Isac McCaslin knew how one must read the Bible in order to finally understand it. We may also, in attempting to determine the final implications of an affirmation seemingly

³Bergson, Morality and Religion, p. 286.

couched in defeat, see A Fable, in some respects, not as a book
"written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the
heart."⁴

⁴William Faulkner, Go Down Moses (New York, 1942)
p. 260.

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Philip Edward Pastore was born on October 9, 1928, in New Haven, Connecticut. He attended West Haven High School. After a tour of duty in the United States Army he attended Rider College and the University of Connecticut, where he received a B. A. degree in 1958 and an M. A. degree in 1960. He entered the doctoral program at the University of Florida in 1960 as a part-time assistant in the Comprehensive English Department. He has also taught in the Comprehensive Logic Department.

He is married and has one son.

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

June 17, 1969

E. Ruffin Jones

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Dean, Graduate School

Supervisory Committee:

Harry R. Warfel

Chairman

J. C. Byrd

H. W. Paul

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