THE MASK NOT TRAGIC . . . JUST DAMNED:
THE WOMEN IN FAULKNER'S TRILOGY

An Honors Thesis
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Since the publication of *The Mansion* in 1959, the question of "Snopesism" has been the central issue in critical material dealing with William Faulkner's Snopes trilogy. Consistently, critics approach the theme of ubiquitous evil through the character of Flem Snopes in attempt to define "the exact nature of that economic dislocation of man known as Snopesism."\(^1\) Another group of critics has examined Snopesism through its "opposition": "Love," as it is personified in Eula and Linda Snopes, is seen as the natural force that ultimately counteracts the "evil" of Flem's malignant economic system. Clearly this critical polarity is in agreement with the thematic polarity which Faulkner establishes in *The Hamlet* as he titles the first section "Flem" and the second section "Eula." But the polarity of forces in the trilogy is hardly as simple as the glib juxtaposition "Love and Money in the Snopes Trilogy"\(^2\) would imply. Perhaps it is possible to see money as the epitomizing symbol for Flem, for certainly this suggests the rapacity and artificiality which characterizes his nature and the very "respectability" that he seeks, but to see the women of the trilogy as merely personifications of "love" is to persist with a severely narrowed interpretation of their role in the trilogy, glossing over all but an elemental significance. Rather, the trilogy should be viewed as a saga of the violation


\(^2\)The title to Paul Levine's article in *College English*, 23 (December, 1961), 196–203. Basically, this is a development of Olga Vickery's observation in *The Novels of William Faulkner* that *The Hamlet* and *The Town* were concerned with the relationship "between man's sexual and economic activity."
of nature in which Flem's unnatural rapacity sets in motion a "powerful chain
reaction of natural forces that will attempt continually to restore the balance." In such a context we see that the women are not the force of "love" per se, but instead that Eula, embodying all the primal fertility and potential for love of the feminine archetype, becomes a representation of the force of nature, and that Linda, the daughter of that potentiality and an agent of the final restoration, represents the redefinition of the love element in nature, extending its scope from its primal capacity to a "humanistic" love.

With the opening of The Hamlet, the legend of Snopesism emerges in the
tone of Ratliff's embroidered tale, in Faulknerian terms a characteristic
"mythologizing of the human condition." Preceding the introduction of Eula,
Faulkner presents, in broad strokes and almost indirectly, the character of Flem,
the invader of the pastoral, Varner-dominated world of Frenchmen's Bend. Early
in the novel physical description prefigures the aura of cold rapacity which characterizes Varner's new clerk; he is the "thick squat soft man of no established age between twenty and thirty, with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth stained slightly at the corners with tobacco, and eyes the color of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk . . .

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3Norman Farmer, Jr., "The Love Theme: A Principal Source of Thematic Unity in Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy," Twentieth Century Literature, 8 (Oct., 1962), 111.


perhaps. . . clap into the center of the face as a frantic and desperate warning." Thus we are not surprised by the mechanized quality of Flem, the man who "eschews all personal relationships and moral obligations in favor of contracts" and in whom we see only the ethics of the ledger, not of people: ethics which prohibit cheating but not exploitation—quite the man who "answered Yes and No to direct questions and who apparently never looked directly or long enough at any face to remember the name which went with it, yet who never made mistakes in any matter pertaining to money."(H. p. 57) This man of mercenary exactitude, who demands that even Will Varner pay for tobacco from his "own" store, shortly becomes the personification of usury from whom "any amount between twenty-five cents and ten dollars could be borrowed. . . at any time, if the borrower agreed to pay enough for the accommodation."(H. p. 62) Hence we see his operations epitomized in the conversation between the fireman of Quick's mill and "another nigger": "Go to Mr. Snopes at the store. . . . He will lend it to you. He lent me five dollars over two years ago and all I does, every Saturday night I goes to the store and pays him a dime. He ain't even mentioned that five dollars."(H. p. 71)

The rapacity which first displaces Jody Varner and then dethrones old Will Varner himself is seen, by contrast, in more vivid relief as the narrative

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7 Vickery, p. 170.

8 Ibid.
changes to focus on Eula. Immediately we are confronted with the mythic element which pervades all description of her; appropriately, she is bigger than life, at thirteen years old "bigger than most grown women," her entire appearance suggesting"some symbology out of the old Dionysic times--honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat hoof."(H. p. 95) Throughout the novel Eula, possessing the "weary wisdom heired of all mammalian maturity,"(H. p. 95) is associated with fertility and the forces of nature, and is always "evoked in terms of repeated allusions to pagan dieties, to Helen, Venus, Persephone."9 Yet this "rustic Aphrodite" as Brooks describes her, is not the "mere eruption, a beautiful passive eruption of animal process. . .so passive as to be almost vegetable,"10 as some critics suggest. Were this true, if Eula had been, in Waggoner's terms, only a "being moved by nothing at all except the process of her own organic chemistry,"11 Labove's attempted rape would have been successful. Instead, Eula fights off the unnatural man who "a thousand years ago" would have turned his back upon the world with actual joy. . .for whose sufferings he would have had nothing but contempt, but with his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites."(H. p. 106)


10Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p.184. Waggoner reduces Snopesism to "avarice married to pure animality,"(184) then goes on to contend, as above, that Eula is "more vegetable than animal. . .not only incapable of sin, she is incapable even of desire."(184) He also contends that Flem is more "human" than Eula because of his "ability to sin--to commit and scheme. . ."(184) an interpretation hardly consistent with the subsequent events of the trilogy. Paul Levine in "Love and Money in the Snopes Trilogy," College English, 23 (December, 1961) 196-203, makes a similar accusation in stating that Eula "is depicted as a grossly inadequate symbol of love, representing not the act of passion but the unconscious object of it. . ./a ludicrous symbol for unconscious and overblown sexuality."(198) This too seems at odds with both the trilogy itself and with the general thrust of criticism.

11Ibid.
Although Eula is capable of attracting "anything in long pants," according to Jody, the fecundity which characterizes her does not demand that she accept just "anything in long pants." Clearly, Labove's response to her muliebrity is not an attempt to unite with the Venus that he did not want as a wife, but wanted "one time as a man with a gangrened hand or foot thirsts after the axe-stroke which will leave him comparatively whole again" (H. p. 119); it is an assault for the sake of exploitation. Labove's failure to seduce or even rape this figurative earth-goddess represents the first in a series of defeats in which nature resists violation; Labove can never consumate this lust, for his action is by definition antithetical to the spirit of procreation in nature.  

The essential indifference that characterizes Eula's response to Labove once she escapes—apparently not "bothering" to tell her brother what has happened—characterizes her attitude toward the numerous suitors which constitute the circle of activity that surrounds her. She proceeds unmoved until after the ambush while returning from the party with McCarron. Apparently Ratliff's "preferred" version of the story—his confessed "ought," with respect to events, which is not necessarily "actual"—does have some validity as he later tells it in The Town and again in The Mansion; his contention that the love-making with McCarron was "not just her first time but the time that she got that baby" (T. p. 100) is supported in The Hamlet as we are told that Varner, after setting McCarron's arm and going upstairs to bed, did not hear "his daughter mount the stairs to remove this time the dress which had her own blood on it." (H. p. 140) The blood implies a loss of virginity, an end, much in keeping with the fecundity which Eula represents, for as Mr. Compson counsels Quentin in The Sound and the Fury,

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12 Farmer, p. 112
virginity is a negative state and contrary to nature. Furthermore, the passion, the love, evident in this union is not an "embroidered" part of Ratliff's tale; even in The Hamlet we are told that the union was consummated with Eula actively participating, supporting, "with her own braced arm from underneath, the injured side."(p. 114)

With the discovery that Eula is pregnant, in "what everyone else but her, as it presently appeared, called trouble" Labove's insight concerning "the husband which she would someday have"(H. p. 119) becomes reality as Varner marries her to Flem in a strictly commercial bargain to preserve respectability. Labove's prophesy that the husband would be "a dwarf, a gnome without glands or desire,... would be no more of a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the fly-leaf of a book"(H. p. 119) prefigures the description in mythic terms of "the sacrifice of the symbol of fecundity upon the alter of respectability to a man who is the negation of all that nature represents." As he envisions the marriage of "the crippled Vulcan to that Venus, who would not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money... as he might own... a field,"(H. p. 119) Labove establishes the image of the "fine land rich and fecund and impervious to him who claimed title to it"(H. p. 119) which foreshadows what is to come: the "ownership" of the "wife," the harvest not sown by the owner of the field, the impotence, the adultery.

Because of the sterility which characterizes it, the marriage which Levine terms "the unhappy wedding of the power of money with the titanic fecundity of the eternal womb and the mother earth" not only constitutes an unnatural linking

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14Farmer, 113.
15Levine, 198.
but also prefigures, by concretizing the contrast of "natural" and "unnatural," Ratliff's fable of Flem's reversal of the devil. Trimmer cites the fable as "one of Ratliff's most telling aesthetic creations because it summarizes all we really need to know about Flem. Flem may change his tactics, he may even change his goals as he does in The Town and The Mansion, but his character is essentially changeless. It is that character that Ratliff renders in the fable."  

The fable shows the man who swapped his soul "in good faith and honor"(H. p. 151) and who has now come to hell to redeem it according to the law, oblivious to the stigma of evil. But the paradox is that the servants of the "Prince" cannot redeem him into eternal torment without his soul, and they "can't find it;" not "no big one to begin with nohow," it has become a "little kind of dried up smear under one edge"(H. p. 151) of a matchbox. Isolated by his incapacity for emotional response, his heart is a dollar sign, his goal the accumulation of money (and respectability), his tools the human beings whose emotions he does not share and therefore can manipulate for profit.  

He is the "mechanized man; the emotional zero...the man who cannot be dealt with because he is beyond the pale of humanity." 

Cleanth Brooks summarizes this polarity, stating that Flem and Bula "stand at the extremes of the human situation and bound on either hand the world of human relationships." Citing Flem's "naked aggression, undeluted acquisitiveness,"

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16 Trimmer, 455.  
18 Trimmer, 455.  
Brooks contends that Flem is "so very close to being a quintessence and therefore scarcely human,"\textsuperscript{20} that he possesses an aura of myth. In contrast to this inhumanity, this complete unnaturalness, Eula is juxtaposed, the feminine principle, at once "caricature and goddess,"\textsuperscript{21} a mythic representation of the natural force.

Faulkner gives further emphasis to this contrast of extremes by mirroring variations of the antithesis through the three pairs of lovers presented in the succeeding sections of the novel. The first of the three "love" stories is that of Ike and the cow, a tale of "pure adoration, pure love of nature, pure responsiveness, without inhibitions, responsibilities, or self consciousness,"\textsuperscript{22} a tale which is saved from both incredibility and grotesqueness by the sheer beauty of the poetry in which it is presented. The narrative is an imaginative vision of love which presents its "intact and escaping shape"(\textsuperscript{H}, p. 169) in terms of the "flowing and immemorial female," nature herself "blond among the purpling shadows of the pasture, not fixed amid the suppurant tender green but integer of spring's concentrated climax, by it crowned, garlanded."(\textsuperscript{H}, p. 171) Again feminity and nature are steeped in allusions to classical fertility, and the idiot's pursuit, oblivious to the surroundings and "seeing nothing but the cow,"(\textsuperscript{H}, p. 169) is both an evocation of human love and a symbol of the human being's unity with nature.\textsuperscript{23} The "gallantry" which prevades the episode, Ike's rescuing the cow from the flames, his stealing food for her, and his eating of the cow feed with her, sets off a graver, deeper perversity, that of Flem Snopes.

\textsuperscript{20} Brooks, p. 190
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Volpe, p. 311.
In Snopes there is no "poetry," certainly no "love" at all, only the unnatural "graceless acquisitiveness, untrammeled by honor and unredeemed by love";\(^{24}\) Flem is totally devoid of the values of gentleness, love, devotion which pervade the episode of Ike and the cow, values the lack of which makes Snopesism the evil that it is.\(^{25}\)

Lacking this poetic element yet pervaded with its own essence of "indomitable fidelity" is the second "love story," that of Jack Houston and Lucy Pate. We are given the second story almost as a digression, as it serves the dual purpose of providing the background of Houston's bitter isolation and fierce pride which precipitate Mink's shooting him from ambush, and providing a second variation of contrast to that marriage of human extremities, Flem and Eula. Immediately we see a reversal of roles, even in comparison to the story of Ike and the cow; here it is the woman who chooses the man. Although far from a capitulation to respectability, the choice is not a romantic one, but one based on stability, "as though she had elected him out of all the teeming earth, not as one competent to her requirements, but as one possessing the possibilities on which she would be content to establish the structure of her life."\(^{(H. \ p. \ 210)}\) Nor is Lucy the Venus figure, the archetype of feminity that Eula is. Instead, Faulkner tells us that "the woman Houston married was not beautiful"; having "neither wit nor money," she is "an orphan; a plain girl, almost homely and not even young. . .," yet possesses an "infinite capacity for constancy and devotion."\(^{(H. \ p. \ 208)}\) It is to this latter that Houston responds, completing the new house "exactly in time to catch the moon's full of April through the window where the bed was placed."\(^{(H. \ p. \ 219)}\) In comparison to the dramatic images of classical fecundity

\(^{24}\) Brooks, p. 181.

\(^{25}\) Waggoner, p. 187.
which dominate the sections about Bula, the fertility images which surround this love story are subtle but forceful: the April moon, echoing Mrs. Varner's mythic ritual at the conception of Bula, and the stallion, the symbolic representation of Houston's own "polygamous and bitless masculinity which he had relinquished." (H. p. 218) The tragedy here is not of cold, snopesian sterility, nor of opposed forces, for there is a distinct quality of warm devotion and the suggestion of imminent fertility, conception. But there is not time for fruition; the love becomes despair as Lucy is trampled by the stallion and Houston, bereft, plunges into the grief of "four years in black, savage, indomitable fidelity." (H. p. 208)

The story of Mink Snopes, whose murder first of Houston and ultimately of Flem constitutes a major portion of the trilogy, provides as a secondary theme the contrast of a third "love story." In The Hamlet Mink is developed rather one dimensionally; he is the man who treats his wife and children as chattel, who winters his cow in Houston's lot in hope that she will return fat and bred free of charge, the man who after shooting Houston from ambush would have liked to have left "a printed placard on the breast itself: This is what happens to men who impound Mink Snopes cattle, with his name signed to it." (H. p. 222) Further we see him in the grossly comic scene in which he manages to bury Houston in a tree, later, with an ironic conviction of principle, refusing to rob Houston, ultimately at the trial scene in which he waits anxiously and in vain for the arrival of Flem as the source of clan based intervention. Essentially he constitutes a figure of violence, self-centeredness, and obscure principle which acknowledges murder, but not robbery, and certainly not the money his wife obtains to aid his escape by prostituting herself to Varner.

In this context is placed the final "love story" of The Hamlet, the story of the union of the man bred "to believe invincibly that to every man, whatever his past actions, . . . there was reserved one virgin, at least for him to marry;
one maidenhead, if only for him to deflower and destroy," (H. p. 242) and the
logging camp prostitute, the woman who was "not a nympholept but the confident
lord of a harem," who inhabited "not the hot and quenchless bed of a barren and
lecherous woman, but the fierce simple cave of a lioness—a tumescence which
surrendered nothing and asked no quarter, and which made a monogamist of him for­
ever, as opium and homicide do of those whom they accept." (H. p. 242) As a
result of Mink's belief in 'every man's heritage of a virgin,' he is extremely
sensitive to the "inexpugnable shades" of the embraces of the prostitute's thirty
or forty past "lovers," yet he is "addicted" to her, to follow the opium metaphor, to
such an extent that with the collapse of her father's logging camp which leaves
her homeless, he marries her. The unplanned event which "never at any time . . .
had been no scheme or even intention of hers" (H. p. 242) comments on Flem's
marriage from a third, different perspective. Mink's marriage to the nymphomaniac,
a union in which her insatiable passion contrasts with the "rank poison" of his
hot seed, grotesquely mirrors Flem's marriage to the village symbol of fecundity.
There, it is Bula's daughter, "fathered by her first lover Hoake McCarron, who
unconsciously ridicules Flem's own impotence daily in the same way that the mocking
shadows of his wife's former lovers push Mink into the impotent rage in which he
constantly lives."26

Despite the spectre of jealousy which pervades the relationship, "the old
hot quick invincible fury as strong and brief and fierce as on the first time,
in which he would think, By God, they better be mine," (H. p. 243) Mink's love
persists through years of degrading poverty and is fertile. Unlike Flem's sterile
marriage, Mink's has produced children, the binding force which "served to shackle
her too, more irrevocably than he himself was shackled, since on her fate she had

26 Levine, 198.
put the seal of a formal acquiescence by letting her hair grow long again and
dying it." (H. p. 243).

In the last sections of The Hamlet Faulkner returns to the themes of exploi-
tation and money in the episodes of the spotted horses and the "salted gold
mine." These schemes of economic manipulation are prefigured by a description
of the wasteland which has been occasioned by the loss of Helen. With the exodus
of Flem and Eula to Texas for the honeymoon of respectability, Frenchman's Bend
lapses into the "thick dust of the spent summer," suffocating in the motionless
dry-dust-laden air which smelled of the lint that "clung among the dust stiffened
roadside weeds . . . where small gouts of cotton lay imprinted by hoof and wheel
marks into the trodden dust." (H. p. 162). Ratliff extends this wasteland metaphor
of dust and weeds to the predicament of Eula herself, seeing the marriage of
this nature goddess, whose child "ain't going to look no more like nobody this
country ever saw than she did," to the "cold and frog-like victor" as a
"waste, . . . a useless squandering, . . . a situation intrinsically and in-
herently wrong by any economy, like building a log dead fall and baiting it
with a freshened heifer to catch a rat . . . ." (H. pp. 161-162). The wasteland
image is applied consistently to the village as long as the personified force of
nature is absent. With the passing of the dust-laden summer, Frenchman's Bend
is wrapped in an early December "iron cold which locked the earth in a frozen
rigidity, so that after a week or so the actual dust blew from it," existing
beneath the "salt colored sky" where the snow "stopped finally and the windless
iron cold came down . . . without even a heatless wafer of sun to preside above
a dead earth incased in ice." (H. pp. 255-256). With the return of Eula and
the child, the freeze which "could not last forever" (H. p. 268) passes.
Metaphorically, it is the return of Helen, the return of the personification of
nature, which marks the return of life to Frenchman's Bend, bringing the rain,
"not cold rain but loud fierce gusts of warm water washing out of the earth the
iron enduring frost, the belated spring hard on its heels and all coming at once, pell-mell and disordered, fruit and bloom and leaf, pied meadow and blossoming wood and long fields shearing dark out of winter's slumber, to the shearing plow."

(H. p. 269)

Placed in contrast to the imagery of the wasteland-becomes-Eden sequence are the episodes of the spotted horses and the "salted gold mine." In the first we see an expansion upon the character of the "generous" appearing loan shark portrayed earlier: here Flem's extreme rapacity reveals itself capable not only of selling a herd of wild horses, about any of which Ratliff speculates will "turn out to be a painted dog or a piece of garden hose" (H. p. 283), to willing townsmen, but also of taking the bank note which constitutes Mrs. Armstid's total savings, even though the Texan, realizing the Armstids' poverty, has the integrity to refuse to sell Armstid one of the worthless beasts. Despite the Texan's promise that Snopes will return the money, since the horse cannot be caught, Snopes does not return the note. With Flem excusing himself with the claim that the "Texas man" "forgot it . . . and took all the money away with him when he left," (H. p. 321) the incident ends pathetically as Flem buys off Mrs. Armstid with a five-cent bag of "a little sweetening for the chaps"—when he knows they "never had no shoes last winter." Mrs. Armstid's reply of "you're right kind" underscores Flem's total lack of "kindness," human feeling, or even a sense of justice; his all dominating rapacity exploits even the unfortunate—in addition to those who can "afford" it—while giving the transparent appearance of appropriate concern.

Armstid is again the victim of the "salted gold mine" episode, but this time in the company of Bookwright and Ratliff who have joined him in searching for buried money on the Old Frenchman's place. Flem accomplishes the duping of Ratliff, Armstid, and Bookwright by a scheme in character for a man who has "grazed up the store and . . . has grazed up the blacksmith shop, . . . [before] starting on the school." (H. p. 71). By spending nights digging for a "treasure"
he apparently "knows" is there, he plays upon Armstid's and Ratliff's belief that there must have been something buried in the garden which made Will Varner buy the place originally. Their ritual of divining money through the use of a forked peach branch, from the end of which a tobacco cloth containing a gold-filled human tooth dangled by a length of string, culminates in the discovery of three buried sacks of coins. The discovery precipitates the purchase of the Old Frenchman's place, Ratliff by giving a "quit deed" to his half of the side street lunch-room in Jefferson, Armstid by the mortgage on his farm, and Bookwright with cash. Not until days of unsuccessful digging later do Ratliff and Bookwright think to examine the contents of the bags, only to discover that their gold mine had been salted with last year's coins. While examining the "treasure," Bookwright, after realizing "we ought to knowed wouldn't no cloth sack . . . after thirty years . . ." asks appropriately "But how did he know it would be us?" Ratliff's answer emphasizes the undiscriminating nature of Flem's exploiting rapacity: "He didn't. He didn't care. He just came out here every night and dug for a while. He knowed he couldn't possibly dig over two weeks before somebody saw him." (p. 368).

Although in the final scene of The Hamlet we return to a variation of the life bringing effect of the nature goddess on the world around her, the novel has essentially ended with "money" as opposed to "love." As Eula and Flem prepare to leave Frenchman's Bend for Jefferson where the deed to Ratliff's half of the restaurant has given him a foothold, this last exodus juxtaposes again the antithetical forces contrasted throughout the novel: the natural and the unnatural. Here we see Eula as the mythical figure of fertility carrying the child "too large to have been born only at seven months but which certainly had not waited until May," standing, Olympus-tall, a head taller than her mother or her husband either, in a tailored suit despite the rich heat of summer's full maturing, whose complexion alone showed that she was not yet eighteen since the unseeing
and expressionless mask face had no age." (H. p. 369). In juxtaposition, beside the Venus bride, is the image of cold rapacity—Flem as he stops to watch Armstid digging insanely in the salted gold mine for the nonexistent treasure, then spits over the wagon wheel before he moves on to Jefferson. With the archetype of nature linked to the archetype of evil, the unnatural, the scene clearly provides a final thematic summary of the novel, and further establishes for the entire trilogy the conflict between unnatural rapacity and the force of nature which ultimately restores the balance.

In The Town we are quickly immersed in a world which has become the scene of Flem's process of "fanning Snopeses" as the "whole rigid hierarchy [moves] intact up one step as he vacated ahead of it . . . ." (T. p. 31). Here the legend of Snopesism is in both a state of preservation and promogulation as the narrators, Ratliff, Gavin Stevens, and Charles Mallison, together convey "the completed past, the developing present, and the incipient future of the legend of Flem and Eula."27 Involved in the "sacred task" of resisting Snopesism, the trio becomes a part of that archetypal pattern which Faulkner sees in society and its history: the resistance of evil in the name of human values28 of which Flem is the walking antithesis.

The contrast between Flem and Eula so clearly drawn in The Hamlet is sustained in The Town, but sustained in a modified form as the mythical archetypes

27Vickery, p. 184.

28Ibid., p. 185.
are scaled to a more human proportion which admits impotence for one, suicide for the other. Initially we see that Flem is no longer presented as sheer acquisitiveness which is almost elemental in character. Beginning with his portracted effort to gain control of deSpain's bank, a quest not for power, but for respectability, Flem appears to be less of an abstraction. He becomes more real, more human as he becomes more despicable, for he has also become more vulnerable in that he is aware of what others think of him. As we see in the brass stealing episode, Flem's rise to respectability is marked, appropriately, by a series of "footprints." Mallison's distinction that "it was not a monument ... a monument only says at least I got this far while a footprint says this is where I was when I moved again" (T. p. 29) characteristically summarizes the spirit of exploitation which pervades Flem's economics of human manipulation.

Flem's rise in the Jefferson community constitutes one half of an antithesis established by the two central actions in the novel: Flem's effort to gain control of deSpain's bank and to thereby gain respectability, and Eula's prolonged adultery with deSpain, the banker and ex-mayor of Jefferson. In The Town, Flem's rapacity is implemented by his hypocritical assumption of a facade of respectability through which he supports the social code. Essentially it is a hypocrisy of camouflage in which Flem acquires the outward signs of respectability, the soft, black felt hat and the house on the outskirts of town, while he undermines the "social code" to work to his own advantage. Thus he persists in a studied obliviousness to the adultery while turning to his own advantage the fact that "respectability is not necessarily identical with morality, that the popular ex-mayor, the president of the bank, the warden of the Episcopal church, can also be an adulterer without losing his position in the town."29 After the stolen brass incident Flem's civic

29Vickery, p. 185.
conduct is impeccable, and his sensitivity to the socially embarrassing antics of Byron, I.O., and Montgomery Ward Snopes emphasizes the fact that Flem is "totally unconcerned with the moral qualities of his own behavior except as it impinges on public opinion." 30 Hence he is able to establish the public image buttressed in the communal institutions of the church and the bank while privately manipulating evidence to ensure Montgomery Ward's departure to prison, to dupe Mink—via Montgomery—into attempting an escape from prison thus ensuring the addition of twenty years to his stay, and to partly bribe, partly threaten I.O. into leaving Jefferson. This cold manipulation which effects the elimination of the relatives who potentially may tarnish his reputation illustrates that Flem's once elemental rapacity has become at once more contemptible, more formidable, and more evil.

As Flem's rapacity becomes more pronounced, Eula emerges more emphatically as the living archetype of natural feminity. It is this intense femininity which Mallison describes as "just too much of what she was for any human female package to contain . . . too much of female, too much of maybe just glory" (T. p. 6); it is a femininity which produces "despair because you knew that there would never be enough of anyone male to hold and deserve her . . .," (T. p. 6) and produces the adultery, "the fate of which both she and Mayor deSpain were victims." (T. p. 14) In contrast to Flem's appearance of respectability and public morality, Eula's behavior is equated with the amoral world of nature, "the submerged world of impulses and desires which civilized man has either eliminated, suppressed or channeled into socially innocuous undertakings." 31 In terms of principles,

30Vickery, p. 186.

31Ibid., p. 181.
we see that again Flem and Eula are totally antithetical, living in mutually exclusive worlds.

With respect to the social order, the affair which "Gavin called the divinity of simple unadulterated uninhibited immortal lust" represents disorder, an indifferent moral affront to the community. Yet almost ironically this illicit 'lust' acts as a life-giving force to the town, much as Eula's presence occasioned the life producing spring rains in Frenchman's Bend. The community becomes the "allies and confederates" of the lovers; "[not] really in favor of adultery, sin, . . . simply in favor of deSpain and Eula Snopes," the whole town becomes an accessory to that cuckolding—that cuckolding which for any proof [they] had, [they] had invented [themselves] out of whole cloth . . . [the] same cuckoldry in which [they] would watch deSpain and Snopes walking amicably together while . . . deSpain was creating, planning how to create that office of power-plant superintendent which [they] didn't even know [they] didn't have, let alone needed, and then get Mr. Snopes into it." (T. p. 15) Thus the "conspiracy" becomes a vicarious participation in the adultery, and deSpain becomes the symbol of the town's response to the nature goddess who is allowed to live discreetly beyond the dictates of conventional morality.

Posed in opposition to this communal aiding-and-abetting of the natural world and in opposition to Flem Snopes' obliviousness to it is Gavin Stevens, the lawyer who is both public defender and quixotic hero in his relationship to Flem and Eula. The "defender of the old established order by virtue of his family background and champion of civic morality by virtue of his office,"32 his is a dual role of character "which combines elements of the poet and the lawyer, the romantic and the conventional moralist, the rebel and the conformist."33 From

32Vickery, p. 183.
33Ibid., p. 183.
this dual perspective Stevens sees Eula not as the symbol of nature's fertility and potential for love, but as a destructive, dangerous force. In his own words, she is "not Helen, nor Semiramis: Lilith: the one before Eve herself whom earth's creator had perforce in desperate and amazed alarm to efface, remove, obliterate, that Adam might create a progeny to populate it . . . ." (T. p. 44). He attempts to make her respectable, to save her, he admits, not only from Manfred deSpain, but also from the town, "the best people, the pure, the unimpugnable." (T. p. 49). Thus he ultimately fights deSpain at the Cotillion Ball to defend her non-existent honor, unappropriately, as Mallison says, because after that show of "splendid unshame" "it should have been Mr. Snopes of course because he was the husband, the squire, the protector in formal ritual. But it was Uncle Gavin and he wasn't any husband or squire or knight or defender or protector either except simply and quickly his own . . . ." (T. p. 75)

In contrast to Gavin's effort to "[defend] forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not," (T. p. 76) and the absurd antics of Gavin and deSpain which satirically illustrate the effect of muliebrity upon the virile male is Maggie Stevens Mallison, sister to Gavin and mother to Charles. In her we see a loving wife, sister, and mother so secure in that love that she is not afraid to violate convention by calling on Mrs. Snopes. Maggie, however, embraces more than a healthy instinct for respectability that gives her the security in which she can afford, upon occasion, to deny it. She tells Gavin and her husband that women are not interested in morals, nor even in unmorals: "the ladies of Jefferson don't care what she Eula does. What they will never forgive is the way she looks. No: the way that Jefferson gentlemen look at her." (T. p. 48) Maggie possesses a healthy, balanced perspective which can understand Eula's femininity and her own husband's response to it, for when he argues that "I never looked at her Eula in my life," Maggie counters "then so much the worse for me, with a mole for a husband. No:
mole have warm blood; a Mammoth Cave fish--." (T. p. 48) Thus natural, yet safe, feminine yet respectable, Maggie comes to represent normal womanhood in the familiar world--the humanly acceptable maliebrity that lacks the disturbing, mythic qualities which surround Eula.

Throughout the trilogy it is difficult to estimate Eula's behavior simply because, as with Flem, we have almost no evidence of what goes on in her mind. Although the reader sees her from several perspectives, he sees her almost entirely from the outside, and as a result is forced to infer her motives. This is precisely the reader's predicament in the instance in which Eula secretly meets Gavin in his office, apparently to offer herself to him because he is "unhappy"—and, according to her, unhappy people are a "nuisance"; he is forced to accept this as the only reason for her presence, for there is no other explanation given. The somewhat harsh nature of Eula's direct behavior which provokes Gavin to protest "so you came just from compassion, pity, ... Does it mean that little to you?" (T. p. 94) emphasizes the disparity between Eula's natural world and Gavin's romanticized one. The extreme vulnerability here which frantically desires escape from the confrontation is the result of Gavin's romantic attempt to "save her," to make her respectable; in doing so he has idealized her, surrounded her with virtues which she does not have. Thus, because his romanticism demands that sex must be the expression of pure love, Gavin rejects her "offer," for she obviously bears no semblance of love. Clearly, Gavin's attempt to enforce—or create—the "social respectability" which could only be gained at the expense of her potency as a human being,"34 is a response to an ideal, not to the reality of the woman whose naturalness places her beyond the dictates of conventional morality.

We see here, as we see later in Gavin's visit to Eula in behalf of Linda, that Eula is the least romantic person in the town. Behind the numinous haze,  

34 Wickery, p. 183.
the "quick" unhasting blue envelopment," the special aura of divinity, lies the
philosophy which epitomizes an acceptance of and submission to the natural
forces: "Don't expect. You just are, and you need, and so you do. That's
all." (T. p. 94). Such a perspective allows her an uninhibited capacity for re-
sponding to experience on its own terms which cannot be matched by Gavin's
romanticism—nor by the community which, although it vicariously participates
in the adultery for a time, resides in conventional respectability.

In Linda we see a muted version of Eula, portrayed in her adolescence
(in The Town) as the offspring of Eula's sexuality yet distinguished by the
romanticism that in adulthood makes her the agent of restoration which returns
the dislocated natural world to balance. Even initially she does not come forth
as a duplicate of Eula, for "very Nature herself would not permit that to occur,
permit two of them in a place no larger than Jefferson." (T. p. 133) Instead,
she is distinct in herself, "walking, striding, like a young pointer bitch, the
maiden bitch, of course, the virgin bitch immune now in virginity, not scorn ing,
spurning the earth, because she needed it to walk on in that immunity . . .
immune in intensity and ignorance and innocence . . . ." (T. p. 132). This
virgin femininity is not evoked in the terms of lush Dionysic fertility which
pervades the descriptions of Eula, but instead has a subdued, mythic quality of
its own; the "quick unhasting blue envelopment" (T. p. 90) of Eula's eyes becomes
the "blue so dark as to be almost violet," (T. p. 204) "the darkest hyacinth,
what I have always imagined," says Gavin, "that Homer's hyacinthine sea must
have had to look like." (T. p.  )

Although it is Gavin who occupies himself "forming her mind" as Maggie
somewhat sardonically phrases it, chatting with her in the best elderly-uncle
fashion, buying her sodas, advising her about her reading, presenting her with
books of poetry, Linda's romanticism is to a great extent her own. This is
evident particularly in her outburst against Matt Levitt which culminates the
confrontation resulting from the "rivalry" between Gavin and Matt, as she rejects with curses the "clumsy ignorant stupid son of a bitch," whose gestures of courtship have become acts of violent jealousy, and turns to Gavin in tears with the confession: "I don't want to marry anybody! Not anybody! You are all I have, all I can trust. I love you! I love you!" (T. p. 193)

It is this same romanticism which Gavin appeals to as he tries to persuade Linda to go to school, to get out of Jefferson. His motive is not merely to save her from Snopesism, but to give her an opportunity to fulfill the romantic dream. His attempt to convince Eula of this "necessity" occasions her more elaborate statement on feminine realism which pervades the remainder of the trilogy: "Women aren't interested in poets' dreams. They are interested in facts. It doesn't even matter whether the facts are true or not, as long as they match the other facts without leaving a rough seam." (T. p. 226) For all the harsh pragmatism here, Eula's reasoning reflects a natural harmony with things as they are, a coherency which maintains the false fact of Linda's parentage simply because, as she tells Gavin, "She wouldn't even believe you. She wouldn't even believe him if he were to tell her. She would just hate you both—you most of all because you started it." (T. p. 226) Apparently it is this desire to maintain for Linda a world without rough seams which prevents Eula from eloping with deSpain; to do so would be to destroy the world of appearances which Linda has believed in for so long. Thus she does not leave Flem, but lives in his house as his wife, enduring not because of cowardice or habit but out of love and concern for her daughter—any lesser reason would have precluded the ultimate suicide.

This willingness to spare Linda by maintaining the "facts" contrasts sharply with Flem's willingness to use and manipulate others in order to attain the bank presidency, the epitome of respectability. Ratliff summarizes this complete failure to recognize or respect the integrity, needs, or feelings of others,
even those presumably "closest" to him: "'when it's jest money and power a man wants, there is usually some place he will stop; there's always one thing that at least ever--every man won't do jest for money. But when its respectability he finds out he wants and has got to have, there ain't nothing he won't do to get it and then keep it . . . . there ain't nothing he will stop at, ain't nobody or nothing within his scope and reach that may not anguish and grieve and suffer." (T. p. 259) It quickly becomes obvious that this indifferent, amoral usery of human beings—which, in a sense, is more evil than any immorality—is totally corrosive. Because Flem apparently has no intimation of human values, he merely persists in terms of profit and loss for the sake of advantage; thus he is capable of trading an appearance of love for money. By offering Linda the chance to go to the University at Oxford, he makes a gesture which she can interpret only as meaning that he really loves her. Playing upon her affections to the point that she spontaneously "clutches him around the shoulders, her face against his collar, crying, saying, 'Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!'" (T. p. 326) Flem has become humanly wicked, manipulating the girl, who believes she is his child, to the point that she signs over her inheritance to him in a spontaneous gesture of gratitude.

It is almost ironic that in the relation of these events to Gavin, Eula also reveals Flem's impotency, thereby pointing out his unnatural isolation and the vulnerability and weakness which humanizes him to the point of being pitiable. Although this additional perspective on Flem's character suggests that he too

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35Warren Beck (Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy, pp. 78-79.) elaborates further on this "dark minor theme, that beyond immorality is a worse end toward which it drifts, amorality" as he contends that "unlike Mink and even more unlike Montgomery Ward, Flem seems the ultimate of the amoral, so much that he can scarcely be accounted cruel, being merely insensitive, literally ruthless." This analysis of Flem's position on the moral spectrum is in keeping with his role as the antitheses of Eula and nature; his amorality is a violation of even the immorality which is a "natural" part of the real world.
is a victim of a "Maniacal Risibility" and more than a mere symbol, it does not negate the "anguish and griev[ing] and suffer[ing]" that his manipulated transaction to gain the bank ultimately causes. Vickery summarizes this final, most deadly scheme of manipulation as an ultimate necessity, for Eula and Linda who have "served him well as hostages, giving him a hold not only over Will Varner but Manfred deSpain and Gavin Stevens as well" are not controllable elements in his world of mercantile respectability. As representatives of the natural world, they both have a personal integrity, a basic honesty, which endangers his scheme in that they cannot be "trusted to play the parts he has created for them." Hence it is "necessary" for him to manipulate Linda, by playing upon her affections, into a declaration of love which precludes any further rebellion. But as evidenced by her almost immediate suicide, it is not possible for Flem to thus control Eula; with her "steady indifference" to public opinion, he can force her into his design only by destroying her.

This symbol of the "victory" of Flem's ruthlessness, his triumph, which can only be accomplished by the sacrifice, through suicide, of his wife, emphasizes the facade of respectability which has been maintained—and which allows Flem's success. Respectability has maintained the mockery of marriage which Flem could not consummate yet which is socially acceptable; it is respectability as well—as Flem controls it—which forces deSpain to deny the relationship which was a marriage of constancy, fidelity, and devotion in all but name. Hence the ironic hypocrisy of the morning after the suicide: the loveless "husband" Flem mourns

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36 Vickery, p. 187.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
publicly while desSpain must follow routine to maintain the facade, for eighteen years of "illicit" fidelity have not given the right to show his grief.

The suicide, however, is not a mere submission to public opinion as one critic suggests, a conventional response of a woman who, for her daughter's sake, would prefer to be branded a suicide rather than a whore.\(^{39}\) It is possible to contend that Eula is merely a bored Helen, but if we are to continue to see her as a human representation of the natural forces, then this explanation ceases to be adequate, even as Gavin embellishes it in *The Mansion.*\(^{150}\)

It is evident in her effort to persuade the unsuspecting Gavin to swear to marry Linda if it should ever become "necessary" that Eula's suicide is a response of concern for her daughter. Brooks contends that this concern relates to her daughter's "respectability" only in a limited and special way: "she is doubtless aware that most of the town knows about her relationship with Manfred desSpain. She may even suspect that a great many people think that Flem is not actually the father of her child. Even so Linda still has a name and social position which are not jeopardized by people knowing these things...\(^{\text{[but]}}\) Linda will clearly suffer if the fact of her mother's adultery is proclaimed and the public is forced to take cognizance of it.\(^{40}\) The suicide is completely in character with her statement to Gavin about the feminine concern for the facts which fit together without a rough seam, false though they may be. The suicide is not a

\(^{39}\)Volpe, p. 328. On this point Volpe rhetorically questions Eula's suicide which he sees as the response of the "convention-conscious mother," pointing out the inconsistency between what he sees as "convention" and the apparent greatness which Ratliff attributes to her. His contention is that it would have been more in the character of a "bored Helen" for Eula to leave Jefferson, with or without desSpain, when Linda was still a child, if she were really too great for the small town. The fallacy here is that a polite exodus would have been totally "conventional"—devoid of even the heroics evident in the suicide upon closer analysis.

quixotic gesture of romantic idealism, but the response of forced, pragmatic expediency; it is based on what Eula sees as the realities of feminine nature. As a natural response—graced with all the heroics of "a female panther protecting her young"—it is practical and premeditated, its goal being not personal honor but the prevention of suffering by maintaining the "facts"—or at least the way in which the "facts" fit together.

Linda's inability to respond with tears to her mother's death until Gavin lies, swearing that Flem is her father, substantiates Eula's reasoning that the facts must be maintained in order to avert suffering; because Linda desperately wants a father, she needs to believe in the apparent reality of her parentage. The tears and confession which follow mark her as the child of Eula's first love, first passion, deserving of Gavin's description: "that girl (woman now . . .) who simply by moving, being, promised and demanded and would not have just passion, not her mother's fierce awkward surrender . . . but love, something worthy to match not just today's innocent and terrified and terrifying passion, but tomorrow's capacity for serenity and growth and accomplishment and the realization of hope . . . ." (T. p. 288) Although this description is the product of Gavin's own romanticizing, we see a basis for his essential contention that Linda embodies a redefinition of love that extends beyond passion. This is especially evident as Linda tells Gavin: "When I thought that he [Flem] wasn't my father, I hated her and Manfred both. Oh yes, I knew about Manfred: I have . . . seen them look at each other, . . . I couldn't bear it, I hated them both. But now that I know he is my father, it's all right. I'm glad. I want her to have loved, to have been happy—I can cry now." (T. p. 346) Here, as in the confrontation with Matt Levitt, Linda's vision of love is idealistic, but at this point the idealism is marked by an intense alliance with the natural world, represented by Eula's

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"illicit" love.

There is a symbolic as well as a "personal" significance to Eula's death, however. Not only does her suicide become the ultimate sacrifice to save her daughter from suffering, but it also constitutes nature's final effort to stand up against society's internal enemy who callously and hypocritically "invokes its norms only that he may contravene their moral intent for his own ends." By her own nature, Eula is at odds with Flem's malignant system of economics, and at the symbolic level it is as nature that she makes a final revolt against the force of exploitation. It is in this context that Mallison grows to understand that the crepe wreath which once signified only "waste" to him was "the laurel of victory . . . the eternal and deathless public triumph of virtue itself proved once more supreme and invincible." (p. 337) Although the "victory" implied, apparent, is indeed Flem's—he has successfully manipulated himself closer to the top, gaining control over all of the variables—the victory is also Eula's in another sense; as the feminine archetype which embodies all nature's potential she is destroyed, but not defeated.

Near the end of the novel we see the self-erected monument to Flem's rapacity: the marble column, with the image of Eula at the top, on which is carved Flem's chosen inscription:

A Virtuous Wife is a Crown to Her Husband
Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed

It is appropriate that the marble medallion face on the monument does not look like Eula "at first," "never looked like nobody nowhere you thought at first, until you were wrong because it never looked like all women because what it looked like was one woman that ever man that was lucky enough to have been a man would say 'Yes, that's her. I knowed her five years ago or ten years ago or fifty

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42Vickery, p. 190.
years ago and you would a thought by now I would a earned the right not to have to remember her any more." (T. pp. 354-355) The artistic failure reemphasizes her potency as the embodiment of nature; just as she is beyond Flem's power, so mythically she is beyond the confines of the concrete—or marble—world; the best the artist can do is capture some suggestive likeness which has the quality of universality.

There is a further irony to the obvious marble lie of the inscription: it is in one sense true. Eula has been Flem's crown; through her he has obtained his longed-for respectability, initially securing through his marriage to her the old Frenchman's Place, ultimately "swapping" her to obtain deSpain's bank, a "swap" which eventually gets him deSpain's mansion as well. Another statement of false facts, it ironically serves, like the communal institutions of bank and church, to further instantiate his "crown," his public respectability.

 Appropriately, the "monument" is again a "footprint," marking where Flem "was" "before he moved again." The scene is but a variation of the one in which Flem leaves Frechman's Bend; for the second time, juxtaposed to the embodiment of the natural world, this time represented by Linda, he spits before sitting back in his seat to move on.

In The Mansion we find a world unlike that of either The Hamlet or The Town; it is still a world of a specific time and place, but now placed against a panoramic vision of the times caught in transition between two world wars, full of historical and social commentary. Yet this worldliness is only the backdrop; as Faulkner indicates in a prefactory note, this third volume of Snopes is still

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43Levine, pp. 199-200.
essentially a chronicle of "the human heart and its dilemma." As the "final chapter of and summation of, a work conceived and begun" thirty years before, *The Mansion* gathers together, through narrated present, recapitulated past, and fulfilled prophesy, the "forces" of Mink, Linda, and Flem for the final confrontation in which the saga of the violation of nature is completed, and the destroyed balance is restored.

With the opening of the novel, "Snopesism" is again defined through its opposition. This time, however, the opposition is not Eula, the feminine archetypal representation of nature, but Mink, the direct victim of Flem's economic exploitation and inhumanity. That we see Mink clearly as an opposing force to "Snopesism" depends heavily upon an altered, or at least additional, perspective: he is no longer presented as the one-dimensional figure of violence, self-centeredness, and obscure principle that we see in *The Hamlet*. Instead, he is the circumstantial victim of outraged honor and his own tricks of survival in an economically deprived world. After his scheme to winter his cow on Houston's farm fails, Mink stoically agrees to work out the payment set by law. But the addition of the one-dollar pound fee constitutes an insult which his pride cannot endure, and as such precipitates the grim, principled violence after which Mink says over the dead or dying man: "I ain't shooting you because of them thirty-seven and a half four bit days. That's all right; I done forgive that . . . . That ain't why I shot you. I killed you because of that-ere extry one-dollar pound fee." (M. p. 39) His statement reveals his position from his own point of view, "that of the deprived man, conscious of his weakness, conscious of his poverty, and fiercely resenting any insult to his dignity."  

It is his defense of his "honor" which ultimately sends Mink to Parchman as
a betrayed man. The betrayal is not a lack of justice—for Mink acknowledges, takes responsibility for, killing Houston—but a betrayal of assumed loyalty. As Mink has been brought up to believe in the clan virtues he possesses, Flem's refusal to help his "kin" violates one of the few principles for which Mink has any respect. The intensity with which he feels this betrayal, finally giving up his "quenchless expectation and hope" is reflected in his thoughts: "He ain't coming. Likely he's been in Frenchmen's Bend all the time . . . . He might even been hid in the back of that room all the time, to make sho wouldn't nothing slip up before he finally got rid of me for good and all." (M. pp. 42) Mink sees Flem's silence, his refusal to appear, as an inhuman and purposeful betrayal. Thus he immediately dedicates the rest of his life to destroying Flem with the same detached conviction that he tells his lawyer after his prescription for discharge, "I don't trust nobody, I ain't got time to waste twenty or twenty-five years to find out whether you know what you're talking about or not. I've got something to do when I get back out." (M. 44)

The simplicity with which Mink sets in action his plan to "get back out" in order to execute his revenge—before he even gets in—is a combination of the grim principled violence in which he ambushed Houston and the natural childishness attributed to him through description, depicting him first as "looking as small and frail and harmless as a dirty child while lawyers ranted and wrangled, until . . . the jury said Guilty and the Judge said Life . . . quiet and still and composed . . . in quenchless expectation and hope," (M. p. 42) and later, in Montgomery's description of the "escape": the damn little thing looking like a little girl playing mama in the calico dress and sunbonnet he believed was Flem's idea . . . as forlorn and lonely and fragile and alien in that empty penitentary compound as a paper doll blowing across a rolling mill . . . ." (M. p. 85) His adamant, repeated questioning—despite the answer "Didn't you even hear him? For the rest of your life. Until you die."—How long will I
have to stay?" (M. p. 43) is no surprise; his combination of simplicity and primitive, clan-based values do not recognize the possibility of no revenge, but only reduces the lawyer's discourse to a formula which will equal discharge: "Not try to escape. Not get in fights with nobody. Do whatever they tell me to as long as they say do it. But mainly not try to escape . . . ." (M. p. 44)

The alacrity with which Mink adheres to this prescription emphasizes a singleness of purpose which is not un-Snopesian in nature. Despite the overtones of child-like appearance, Mink cannot be idealized as "admirable," only recognized as having a sense of honor. It is this preoccupation with honor which binds him so entirely to the pursuit of vengeance that all else ceases to exist, that the claims and needs of family cease to have meaning for him. As a result, he reduces living itself to waiting, expectantly devoting his life to the one moment of revenge, much in the same manner that Flem, oblivious to all else, pursues his respectability. Accordingly, contends Vickery, because of his singlemindedness of purpose, Mink becomes the "only possible nemesis for Flem. For what is needed to destroy him are certain characteristics which he himself possesses."45

This is not to say, however, that Mink is merely an equally forceful and equally destructive variation of Flem. Montgomery Ward's commentary on the escape ruse in which Mink shuns the idea of escaping in the calico dress "disguise" because "he still wanted to believe that a man should be permitted to run at his fate, even if that fate was doom, in the decency and dignity of pants . . . ." (M. p. 85) implies a natural dignity in keeping with his own comment on Flem after the "escape" has "failed": "they told me. I was warned . . . . He hadn't ought to fooled me to get caught in that dress and sunbonnet, I wouldn't a done that to him." (M. p. 89) There is also a continual emphasis on the individual

45Vickery, p. 204.
in Mink's character which contrasts sharply with Flem's social preoccupations. This extends to a contrast between honor and profit; while Flem's designs, manipulations, center on self-advancement toward respectability, Mink's single purpose is much simpler, "not justice; I never asked that; jest fairness, that's all." (M. p. 106) It is in the spirit of this simplicity that Mink, appropriately disguised as a woman, replaces Eula as the antithesis of all that Flem stands for; as the "man whose own bad luck had all his life continually harrassed and harried him into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights," (M. p. 7) he finds—as she did—his values in himself and not in society. Although the degree of difference is a difference of extremes, both share a common element which centralizes the potency of the individual within them through which they have repudiated the social and economic definitions of man. Thus sustained by his "natural" values, Mink endures thirty-eight years in Parchman, waiting for his chance, for he believes that there must be "a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs, or else a man might just as well quit." (M. p. 6)

The second section of the novel effects a thematic shift which returns us to the heretofore major characters of the trilogy. At the opening we are made aware of a great lapse of time as the Linda that Gavin sent to Greenwich Village at nineteen returns, now as Mrs. Kohl, widowed and deafened by the Spanish Civil War. Through Ratliff's remembrances we learn the story of her love affair with the sculptor Kohl, her subsequent marriage to him just prior to their departure for Spain, and the dream of the Revolution, but Ratliff's retold stories serve another purpose as well; through his recapitulating narrative of the major events in the trilogy, the thematic antithesis of Flem and Eula, of unnatural exploitation and nature itself, is reasserted. The retelling also evokes a memory of Gavin's prophesy in The Town concerning Linda, already a victim of Flem's manipulation: "It will be difficult for her. She will have to look at a lot of them, a long time. Because he will face something almost impossible to match himself against.
He will have to have courage, because it will be doom, maybe disaster too. That's her fate. She is doomed to anguish and bear it, doomed to one passion and one anguish and all the rest of her life to bear it ... ." (p. pp. 350-351)

Ratliff's account of the trip to New York for Linda's marriage to Kohl and his telling of the events which followed provide the fulfilling of the prophesy: the tale of passionate love, bereavement and injury for a lost cause. The fact that the love affair endures for several years before Linda consents to marry Kohl provides a touch which links her closely to the natural world of Eula, in which love does not have to be bound by social ties to be enduring. Mallison's later description of Kohl strengthens this image of natural love; he is "a big man, ... virile, alive; a man who loved what the old Greeks meant by laughter, who would have been a match for, competent to fulfill, any woman's emotional and physical life too." (p. 218) As Ratliff quotes Gavin saying that "she was doomed to fidelity and monogamy--to love once and to lose him and then to grieve," (p. 163) we see that Eula's mythic fecundity and capacity for love have been metamorphosed, reappearing as Linda's enduring love and fidelity, the intensity of which is archetypal.

But Linda has not followed only in terms of love the dream, or fate, which Gavin has moulded for her; her marriage to the young artist-idealista-activist Kohl and their decision to fight in the Spanish Civil War is an appropriate response to the "essence of that dream is that the world is composed of absolutes, and the absolute good must do battle with the absolute evil." But the values are not merely Gavin's. As Ratliff describes them: "young enough and brave enough at the same time, ... hate intolerance and believe in hope ... and act on it" (p. 161) their actions become not absolutists'
responses to the opposing absolute, but the significant act superior to the
abstract words of dreams, the act in which life is given to say No to a Hitler
or a Mussolini. (M. p. 218)

As Linda's relationship with Kohl provides a redefinition of the natural
principle manifest in Eula, moving beyond fecundity and the capacity for love
to a spontaneous love which endures in years of fidelity, so her relationship
with Gavin provides a further redefinition and expansion of the love element in
nature, extending its scope from its primal passionate capacity to an undemanding,
"humanistic"47 love. Although Linda—as Eula has before—also offers herself
to Gavin, once the offer is refused, she is able—unlike Eula—to find a new
basis for the expression of that affection, the humanistic love which involves
no sexual possessiveness, which fuses the moral and the emotional. The love is
distinctly not a platonic love which by denying the physical denies life itself,
for as in the scene of their final meeting in the novel, there is obvious physical
attraction between them. Instead, it is a relationship in which Linda can ask
Gavin to marry someone else for the sake of his "having that too," a love in
which two people "can always be together no matter how far apart either one . . .

happens to be or has to be," (M. p. 252) in which they can "love each other
without having to." (M. p. 239)

Mallison's contention that Linda is "free, absolved of mundanity . . . /having/
the silence, that thunderclap instant to fix her forever inviolable and private
in solitude . . . ." (M. p. 211) suggests that she, in her deafness, has become only
a symbolic manifestation of principle, detached from life. But her participation,
interest in life—working in the Pascagoula shipyards, trying to improve the Negro

47Vickery, p. 206.
school, making Gavin promise to marry—belies this implication. Although she does not "participate" in the fecund sense by having children, she is nonetheless involved—nonetheless human, requiring her weekly supply of liquor—employing her energy and high ideals in a town from which she is alienated by its suspicion of her beliefs and, somewhat, by her own deafness. Despite her deafness which has reduced her voice to the "quacking duck's voice," however, Linda continues to communicate, to understand, because as a woman, according to Mallison, she has communicated even before she begins to speak. (M. p. 217)

The pervasive presence of the "duck voice," the voice which has "no passion, no heat in it," marks the change in Linda's role in the trilogy; without the "passion," the "heat," she is no longer the extension of nature's fecundity and capacity for love, no longer nature's manifestation in which sex, passion, and fidelity are fused. Although physically Linda is a muted version of the Dionysic abundance of nature we see in Eula, she is also a more forceful, more effective emissary of the natural world. Mallison's descriptions of her note precisely this difference; although he sees in her a definite lack of feminine softness—which is attributed to the fact that she "had left the south too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit-rite of a cavalier's unflagging constancy" (M. p. 358)—he also sees in her the force and dignity of "the collapsed plume lying flat athwart her skull instead of cresting..."(M. p. 350) again suggesting the Diana image associated with her throughout the trilogy. Thus Flem is capable of destroying the Dionysic Venus, but not nature's second emissary who returns to Jefferson to restore the balance by putting an end to the malign force of exploitation. It is nature's daughter, not Venus but Diana, the "maiden warrior," who by releasing Mink aids in the destruction of Flem, accepting the responsibility not for the sake of revenge against her own betrayal, but to affirm those values embodied by Eula and herself.

The trilogy's antithesis is evoked again as we see Flem in contrast to these
two figures allied with nature, Linda and Mink. As Ratliff's retold legend of
Snopesism brings us closer to the present, we see that Flem's social migration
upward has been completed, the third monument-footprint established as he assumes
residence in the mansion once belonging to deSpain. The narrative shows him
detached from all but the bank, no longer concerned with removing his relatives,
nor with exploitation, except in terms of foreclosure. He has now become the
man who disappears "into the house ... about four p.m. every evening until
about eight a.m. tomorrow," (M. p. 154) to sit "in another swivel chair like the
one in the bank, with his feet propped against the side of the fireplace: not
reading, not doing nothing: jest setting with his hat on chewing that same little
mouthsized chunk of air ..." (M. p. 155) This isolation of the non-living
contrasts sharply with the vital masculine force we see in Kohl, the "virile,
alive" man to whom Linda has been both wife and lover. Antithetical to all
associations with the natural world, Mallison thus describes him: "the capitalist
himself who owned the parlor and the house, the very circumambience they dreamed
in, who had begun life as a nihilist and then softened to a mere anarchist and
now was not only a conservative but a tory too: a pillar, rock-fixed, of things
as they are." (M. p. 222)

As the narrative moves to its dramatic close in the novel's final section,
the stories detached from the main events—the story of Clarence Snopes' unusual
staying power, the story of Essie Meadowfill, the construction of Bula Acres—play
off the central action in which Ratliff and Gavin, realizing the imminent tragedy
set in motion by Linda's signing for Mink's release, frantically try to avert it.
As Mink journeys to Memphis for the pistol and Linda waits, living in the house
with Flem, the archetypes scaled to human proportion through the middle of the
trilogy reemerge in their mythic fullness, the edges only slightly blurred by
the humanness of the natures which underlie them.
The "action" of the murder of Flem may be viewed as principled re-action, the feminine, natural world's response to the ubiquity and persistence of the evil capable of violating all human bonds, emotions, values. Although Mink himself believes that he should be "permitted to run at his fate . . . in the decency and dignity of pants," (M. p. 85) the child-like quality attributed to him as he waits for morning in Memphis, huddling up his knees into the buttoned jumper, looking no larger than a child and no less waif, abandoned . . . " (M. p. 287) reevokes the child-like and feminine image we see as he tries to escape from Parchman in the calico dress. The metaphor associating him with the feminine world is not extended, nor does it suggest any "weakness" in Mink as an individual, but it serves to link him effectively into the "alliance"—unrecognized by him as it is—with Linda in the distinctly feminine, natural, individual world which repudiates "Snopesism."

As a character and as the representation of the potency of the individual, Mink is entirely believable; hardly idealized, he possesses but two things: his identity and the savage pride to defend it. Significantly, Mink's singleminded vengence is inseperable from his belief in "Old Moster's" fairness, that there must be some final justice. Thus after finally emerging from the pawnshop with the pistol "swollen of cylinder and rusted over, with its curved butt and flat reptilian hammer," (M. p. 291) we see him concerned with the abstract force as he tries the pistol to see if it will fire, saying to himself, "It's got to shoot . . . It's jest got to. There ain't nothing else for hit to do. Old Moster jest punishes; He don't play jokes." (M. p. 398)

Mink commits the murder in the same temperament of detached vengence. As he stands before Flem, the "toad-shaped iron-rust-colored weapon in both hands and cocked," (M. p. 415) he sees himself not as the perpetrator of the murder, but the agent, thinking "Hit's got to hit his face; not I've got to but it's got
to . . ." (M. p. 415) and again as he recovers from the shock of the gun's failure and fires again, "Hit's all right . . . Hit'll go this time: Old Moster don't play jokes." (M. p. 415)

As Flem, who has sat unmoved, convulses dead onto the floor and Mink runs, scrambling blindly to escape, we are suddenly made aware of the confederacy of the action as Linda picks up the pistol he has thrown at her in defense, "holding it toward him, saying in that quacking duck's voice that deaf people use: Here. Come and take it. That door is a closet. You'll have to come back this way to get out." (M. p. 416) Clearly, Mink's previous plan that he would have "to find a stick of stovewood or a piece of ahm somewhere" to deal with Linda if she should somehow hear has been unnecessary. Although we know early in the novel that Linda has signed the petition for Mink's release from Parchman, not until the murder scene itself do her motives become unquestionably clear. The element of premeditation is further evidenced by the arrival of the white Jaguar, in which she intends to leave Jefferson, ordered two months before. Gavin's reflection is that Linda had deliberately "let him discover the circumstances of her purchase of the new car and what it implied in the circumstances of her so-called father's death." (M. p. 425)

Characteristically, there is little evidence in the text to offer an explanation of why the murder is executed without resistance from Flem, why he "appeared to sit immobile and even detached too, watching" (M. p. 415) while Mink prepares to fire again after the gun has failed once. Ratliff offers Gavin a facetious repetition of explanations as he tells him "Maybe he was jest bored. Like Eula. Maybe there was two of them. The pore son of a bitch." which Gavin counters with the statement of Flem's impotence. Ratliff's more serious metaphysical hypothesis of the boy's game of "gimme lief" poses a problem as well, for it attributes to Flem's acceptance of Mink's--or Linda's--"returning blow, obeying the rule of the "game," an elemental
sense of honor which is previously unsubstantiated in the trilogy. Brooks offers a further possibility, that "perhaps Flem waited in sheer resignation, sensing that when Linda came back, she was going to see to it, one way or another, that her mother was revenged." But perhaps. With respect to the hollow "man" who has at one time or another betrayed everyone, it is difficult to speculate.

Brook's speculation is in keeping with Ratliff's hypothesis concerning Linda's role in the murder. Realizing, as Gavin does, that "she could a waited two more years and God His-self couldn't a kept Mink in Parchman without he killed him, and saved herself not jest the bother and worry but the moral responsibility too . . .", (M. p. 431) he also knows that "she had a decision to make," that "someday her maw would be saying to her, 'why didn't you revenge me and my love that I finally found it, instead of jest standing back and hoping for happen-so? Didn't you never have no love of your own to learn you what it is?" (M. p. 431) Although Ratliff's explanation of her motives seems hyperbolic, there is an essential element of truth there: the necessity for Linda not to revenge, but to affirm those natural principles which she and her mother embody.

The narrative description of Gavin and Ratliff hunting for Mink after the murder notes almost incidently that "the sun had crossed the equator, in Libra now . . . there was a sense of autumn after the slow drizzle of Sunday and the bright spurious cool which had lasted through Monday . . . ." (M. p. 417) The imagery clearly unites nature and justice; the balance scales of Libra are one with the autumn cool. The imagery which has in variation been attributed to Linda throughout the novel, the rich blue of Homer's hyacinthine sea, evokes her in the same mythological terms, allowing her to become the "warrior maid," holding the golden scales, the final dispenser of justice in the saga of Snopesism. Yet

\[^{48}\text{Brooks, p. 240}\]
it is not only as the mythic principle of nature that Linda acts; she responds also as the wounded individual whose affections have been used and betrayed, as the child who has seen her mother used, and sacrificed. Thus as an individual woman whose role has evolved to mythic proportions, she accepts the "moral responsibility" to affirm the feminine, natural values by "contributing to the destruction not of a specific Snopes but of Snopesism itself—the destroyer of life, love, human values, and human dreams." (M p. 207) She does not, as Ratliff hypothesizes, take "revenge" only in the name of love, but in the name of all that is natural in life which FLEM has systematically violated.

The astrological imagery which asserts the unity of nature and justice pervades the final pages as we see the escaped Mink in the "hole in the ground . . . in the old cellar—the cave, the den where on a crude platform he had heaped together, the man they sought half-squatted half-knelt blinking up at them like a child interrupted at its prayers . . . ." (M. p. 432) Mink is a part of the world of small animals, a part of the natural world. It has been observed that at this point Mink has triumphed as a human being, and therefore can come to terms with the female earth, can rest upon it without fear of being pulled down, no longer forced to hold himself in "rigid agony" above it. Consequently, his principled vengeance permitted because "Old Moster don't play jokes" and pursued in defense of his individual honor becomes, with the accomplice actions of Linda, a part of the "powerful chain reaction of natural forces that . . . attempt to restore the balance." 50

Thus the legend of "Snopesism" ends, its characters not allegorical figures

49 Brooks, p. 242
50 Farmer, p. 111.
but human beings inextricably part of the "mythologized" human predicament.

The final litigation of the estate which Flem has usurped, returning the mansion to the deSpain family, marks the literal restoration of things to their proper order, to a balance accomplishable only with the removal of the soulless man who perpetuates exploitation, the outrage against the natural world. As a whole, the trilogy becomes a "comprehensive, comprehending"\textsuperscript{51} tale of the effectiveness of humanity beyond—or despite—its social dimension, successful even when existing only in minimal proportions as in Mink. Although the tale is told in terms of individuals, through the heavy overtones of myth Faulkner makes it evident that this is as well a story of the cyclic continuance of the wholeness of experience as Ratliff sardonically comments to Gavin: "I don't know if she's already got a daughter stashed out somewhere, or if she jest ain't got around to one yet. But when she does I jest hope for Old Lang Zyne's sake she don't never bring it back to Jefferson. You done already been through two Eula Warmers and I don't think you can stand another one." (M. p. 434)

\textsuperscript{51}Volpe, p. 343


