8-1980

A Kierkegaardian reading of three novels by Faulkner

Francine Marilyn Hall

A KIERKEGAARDIAN READING OF THREE NOVELS BY FAULKNER

BY

FRANCINE MARILYN HALL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

IN CANDIDACY

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

AUGUST 1980

Approved for the Department of English and the Graduate School by

John C. Boggs, Jr.
(Thesis Advisor)

Alan S. Patterson
(Committee Member)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner and Søren Kierkegaard, although separated in time by almost a century, possess a common concern: both are deeply interested in the numerous ways in which individuals live out their lives in either hope or despair. Exploring the avenues which might alleviate this despair and providing a basis for hope are tasks both authors have accepted as theirs.

This paper relates three novels by Faulkner to the stages of existence set forth by Kierkegaard in much of his philosophical writing. I intend to show that Faulkner's characters serve as illustrations of different ways in which an individual may exist in these stages. The result of a juxtaposition of these characters with Kierkegaard's stages of existence is a greater insight into the motivations, the obsessions, and the successes and failures of Faulknerian characters.

The three novels I have chosen for this task are *The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, and Absalom, Absalom!* In each of his novels, Faulkner presents different characters who cope with life in very different ways. The novels I have selected, however, provide the same diversity with which Kierkegaard himself illustrates

his stages. Although many of the major characters in the selected novels dwell in the same stage of existence, the various ways in which they inhabit the same stage are illuminating.

Chapter one is a discussion of the three stages of existence set forth by Kierkegaard. This chapter provides the background upon which the following chapters are based. The subsequent chapters show how the characters in each novel exemplify Kierkegaard's stages. Chapter two, a discussion of *The Sound and the Fury*, illustrates that most of the characters in this novel dwell in Kierkegaard's aesthetical stage, but not in identical ways. One character reaches a slightly higher stage: the aesthetic-ethical; and there is one character who reaches the religious stage, a phenomenon which both Kierkegaard and Faulkner consider rare, but which Kierkegaard considers absolutely necessary for the most meaningful existence. Chapter three is a discussion of *Light in August* and the ways in which two of the major characters in this novel exist in either the aesthetical, the aesthetic-ethical, or the ethical stage. Chapter four is a discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!* and Thomas Sutpen, the character who dominates the book. In his personality, characteristics of both the aesthete and the ethicist are evident; therefore, he inhabits the aesthetic-ethical stage. The conclusion brings together

the characters who exist in the same stage and compares and contrasts those characters as they exemplify different ways of dwelling in the aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious stages. The result is the creation of a Kierkegaardian structure using the individual characters previously discussed.

CHAPTER I

STAGES OF EXISTENCE

Søren Kierkegaard is considered the forerunner of existential philosophy. To exemplify what he calls "stages" or "spheres" of existence, he presents numerous characters who represent diverse attitudes which individuals may assume toward their own being. The characters in Faulkner's novels illustrate further these same stages of existence. More important, however, is the illumination a Kierkegaardian reading provides in the understanding of Faulkner's characters. When Kierkegaard's stages are used to classify Faulkner's characters, the reader begins to see more clearly why so many of these characters seem doomed to failure. Similarly, those characters who manage to succeed manage to do so because of the higher stage of existence which they have reached.

Kierkegaard presents his stages through various pseudonymous characters. These characters are either reputed to be authors of entire books by Kierkegaard or publishers of books which include the works of other pseudonymous authors. Ronald Grimsley explains the significance of the pseudonymns in this way:

> By the use of pseudonymns . . . Kierkegaard was depicting certain aspects of existence which, though bearing some resemblance to the imaginative possibilities of his own being, never corresponded exactly to his true self and were, in any case, intended primarily as objective descriptions and typical examples of particular stages of human existence. As such, they had an absolute and "ideal" quality lacking in any ordinary individual. In this way Kierkegaard was able to set a certain distance between himself and his work, and to consider it as something with which he was not personally identified in any narrow sense, but which none the less contained some of his deepest convictions about the meaning of human existence. . . .By means of his pseudonymous authorship Kierkegaard was also hoping to forestall the objection that he was parading before the public as a teacher who ought to be heeded in his own right; by concealing his identity, he made his own personal involvement or lack of it irrelevant to the validity of his message.[1]

According to Kierkegaard, there are three distinct stages of existence in which a man might dwell: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The first of these, the aesthetic, is the stage of sensuousness and objectivity. Judge William, one of the pseudonyms, sees the sensual as momentary and transient.[2] The person who dwells in this stage seeks instant gratification; consequently, this stage is correctly associated with lust. In fact, Judge William's discussion of the aesthete is addressed to a young man who pursues a life of eroticism. An important consideration, however, is the fact that the aesthete characteristically finds meaning for his existence in external stimuli and depends upon

these stimuli for making sense out of his environment. Granted, the external stimulus is often in the form of a beautiful woman and has erotic associations, but this is not the only kind of appeal to which the aesthete responds. The pleasures of Kierkegaard's aesthete are not restricted to physical pleasures. As George Bedell observes, "They may include the highly sophisticated objectivity of a philosopher as well as the sensualism of a Don Juan."[3]* It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard uses the terms sensual and aesthetic interchangeably and restricts neither to the erotic. Speaking of the reluctance of a man to be torn away from the delusion of happiness and shown the truth, he explains the reluctance in this way: "The reason is that the sensuous nature and the psycho-sensuous completely dominate him; the reason is that he lives in the sensuous categories agreeable/disagreeable, and says goodby to truth, etc.; the reason is that he is too sensuous to have the courage to be spirit or to endure it."[4] *Sensuousness, immediacy,* and *aestheticism* are all terms Kierkegaard uses to denote the individual who lives for the moment and finds meaning for his existence outside himself.

An essential characteristic of the aesthete, per-

---

*The philosopher, who thinks about life without making choices, thereby maintains an objective detachment from life—an aesthetic characteristic discussed in the next paragraph.

haps as important as sensuousness, is objectivity. Although the terms seem to imply a contradiction, none exists as Kierkegaard uses them. The aesthete wants to maintain a detachment from other people and from life. He has no objection to being loved, but he avoids giving love in return. Friendship, according to "A" (an aesthetic pseudonym), is to be strictly avoided, and one must never enter into the relationship of marriage. Furthermore, "A" believes that one only enjoys that which one can control. It is important, then, that one always control his moods and avoid sentimentality.[5] This reasoning leads the aesthete to think of other people and his own body as objects, both to be controlled and manipulated. Because of his dependence on the sensuous and on the moment, which is continually vanishing, his choice of his body is neither serious nor permanent. His body is important only in an uncertain way. As Kierkegaard puts it, "The *immediate* man . . . is merely soulishly determined, his self or he himself is a something included along with 'the other' in the compass of the temporal and the worldly, and it has only an illusory appearance of possessing in it something eternal. Thus the self coheres immediately with 'the other,' wishing, desiring, enjoying, etc., but passively. . . . Its dialectic is: the agreeable and the disagreeable; its concepts are: good fortune, misfortune, fate."[6]

The aesthete puts himself at the mercy of fate. He considers events either fortunate or unfortunate, depending on how he is affected by them. He never assumes responsibility for his actions and usually thinks of himself as the one things are done *to* rather than as the one who *does*. "He is not in control of his destiny; something else is."[7]

The aesthete may respond to suffering in several ways. He may cherish suffering as a way to avoid choosing the person he will be; he may turn his back on suffering and pretend it does not exist; or he may allow himself to be overcome by and thus determined by it. But no matter which attitude he assumes, he will consider suffering as an effect caused by something external to himself and accidental to his true nature. Suffering or not suffering becomes a matter of fortune or misfortune, a matter over which he has no control.

Kierkegaard believes that if one dwells in the aesthetical mode of existence, the only possible result is despair. The ability to choose is of major importance. But the aesthete avoids making decisions; indeed, he believes that he has no choice and is thereby himself responsible for his inability to choose and for his despair. Above all, the aesthete wishes to maintain a detached view of life; and, because of this dissociation, he finds life empty and meaningless. He tries to evade

the demands of time and concentrates instead on the pleasures of the moment. Despair results when the present moment is considered all there is. Or, as Kirkegaard puts it, "To despair is to lose the eternal."[8]

The second stage of existence in Kierkegaard's classification is the ethical. The person who exists in this stage is governed by the demands of universal law. He believes that he can choose his best or ideal self. The ethical person has great confidence in his ability to choose—he chooses the good because he knows what is good. His life is shaped in keeping with the demands and principles of society. "The paradigm of this modality is marriage and especially the marriage vows. . . .the ethical person believes he can choose his partner with complete and absolute ingenuousness. He also believes that marital sex is the basic symbol of the conjugal alliance; his relationship to his body is therefore entirely instrumental."[9]

The aesthete objects vigorously to the ethicist's claims for marriage. According to "A", the promise couples make to love each other eternally has no meaning: if love will end in time, it will also end in eternity. He thinks the promise might be valid if the couple promised "until Easter, or until May-day comes" instead. But his major objection is that one loses his freedom in marriage. "Marriage brings one into fatal

connection with custom and tradition, and traditions and customs are like the wind and weather, altogether incalculable."[10] The aesthete will have nothing whatever to do with the demands of society or with duty.

The ethical person, like the aesthete, considers the source of suffering to be fate, but his attitude toward it is different. He struggles to overcome suffering in some way. He will deliberately choose suffering as a way of confirming himself. Suffering becomes an integral part of his basic self.

Since the ethical incorporates the attempt to recognize human potentiality, it is considered the most humanistic of the stages. Self-realization is the goal of the ethical man, and he must seek this realization within himself. His search for self-realization and the ethical stage must be based on an obedience to the dictates of duty. In order to progress beyond this stage, he must eventually reach a point of resignation, for "to resign oneself is to make the final choice, and in doing so, to pull the fangs of despair. Resignation is, therefore, the act in which the absolute self is chosen absolutely; it is created; it comes into being."[11] This is the resignation of absolute choice, the choice to pursue life regardless of its flaws. It is an absolute choice as far as Kierkegaard is concerned because it leads to the "leap" into religiousness. In other words,

although it is an ethical choice, it is a means of releasing oneself from ethical despair.

Obviously, then, the ethical stage, though more satisfactory than the aesthetic, is not to be considered the highest aim. With its emphasis on human capability, it has no place for the concept of sin; and because it has no place for this concept, it ultimately fails. Johannes de Silentio, pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, explains this way:

> The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone . . . . Conceived immediately as physical and psychical, the particular individual is the individual who has his telos* in the universal, and his ethical task is to express himself constantly in it. . . .As soon as the individual would assert himself in his particularity over against the universal he sins, and only by recognizing this can he again reconcile himself with the universal.[12]

But the ethical individual, unless he is willing through resignation to choose the religious stage, cannot accept the concept of sin. His duty is to society; whereas the idea of sin requires a duty to God. Anti-Climacus, pseudonymous author of *Training in Christianity*, is even more emphatic than Johannes: "Only the consciousness of sin is the expression of absolute respect . . . because Christianity requires absolute respect . . . only consciousness of sin is the way of entrance [into Chris-

---

*End or fulfillment.

tianity]. . . ."[13]

The third and final stage of existence is the religious, which is related to the absurd and the paradoxical, both of which are related to the fact that the eternal has been embodied in time. In Kierkegaard's words, "The eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox. . . .the eternal essential truth is not behind him but in front of him, through its being in existence or having existed, so that, if the individual does not existentially and in existence lay hold of the truth, he will never lay hold of it."[14] Kierkegaard explains further by defining the absurd in similar terms: "The absurd is—that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, has come into being precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals."[15]

Kierkegaard cites two ways of dwelling in the religious stage: "religiousness A" and "religiousness B." In religiousness A, the individual is "self-consciously a part of history but allows himself to be destroyed as an existing individual in order that God may have his way in the world. . . .Because he finds his own selfhood as obstruction to a relationship with God, the self must be annihilated. He sees a complete identification of time with eternity and worships an immanental God."[16]

In this type of religiousness, nature and history are especially important, and sacraments and ritual become highly significant. Religiousness A does not represent Kierkegaard's mature view of religion. He later came to understand the paradoxical religion of religiousness B as the heart of Christianity.[17]

In religiousness B, the individual is not destroyed. He is in the world but not of it. The world no longer controls him, but "he does not feel compelled to remove himself from the world in order that God may appear."[18] He understands fully that the eternal is embodied in time, and this understanding gives new meaning to the relationship of time and eternity. Existence becomes a process of working toward God while discovering at the same time that God has already come.

The religious person deliberately chooses suffering and considers it something worthwhile in itself. Although the ethical individual also chooses suffering deliberately, his motives are different. He chooses it because he considers a choice of suffering a heroic choice, a way of affirming his worth. In making this choice, he hopes to wipe out the accidental quality inherent in fate, the cause of his suffering. His choice is therefore a resistance, not an acquiescence. The religious person, on the other hand, considers suffering an essential part of his lot in life. The choice of

suffering is a part of his choice to accept life with all of its flaws. "He has passed through the strenuous stage of resignation and ideality and has once more been able to choose the finite (suffering) by virtue of the fact that the Eternal has made itself known to him in the midst of the finite (and, incidentally, in the form of suffering). Suffering . . . is part and parcel of finite existence where God is known."[19] Existence becomes a matter of assuming a new posture before suffering rather than of learning to cope with suffering. The important thing is not the immanental or direct relationship to God emphasized in religiousness A, but "becoming edified through a new kind of eternality—putting oneself at the disposal of the Infinite who appears as the finite. Which means, very simply yet deceptively, to serve one's fellows. One suffers because that is the way it is; one suffers because God was made flesh."[20] Suffering is worthwhile for the person in religiousness B because in serving one's fellows, one also serves God.

Resignation, the final step necessary before the "leap" into religiousness, requires both courage and fortitude. It is not, however, a result of faith. It is dependent upon what is within the individual, not upon a sovereign power beyond him. It is the will to choose and thus prevents the ethical individual from

slipping back into the aesthetical stage. Faith, on the other hand, is something that the individual receives; it is not necessary to renounce anything in faith. Courage is required, but not the kind of courage that requires an act of the will. It is the courage to accept graciously that which is bestowed upon one, whether he deserves or desires it or not. The individual is again at the mercy of the external, but this time the external is in the form of God.

Kierkegaard does not specifically outline the relationship between the three stages; however, certain conclusions may be drawn. Walter Lowrie, in his introduction to *Stages on Life's Way*, has made several observations:

> We need in fact to be warned not to regard the three stages as a prescribed curriculum which one must pass through in advancing from youth to age. Such is not S.K.'s meaning. He is not so foolish as to think that one must be an unhappy exception . . . in order to attain the religious stage—any more than one must first be a seducer in order to become a proper married man like the Judge. Neither does he represent that one stage must be definitely left behind before a man enters upon the next. He affirms in fact of the aesthetic that it is never superseded but only "dethroned" . . . . .S.K. defines the three spheres only in the briefest and most general terms, but he is copious in depicting the characters who exemplify them. They do not exemplify any stage purely, as a logical system would require, for they represent the existential possibilities which lie between immediacy and spirit. The logical delimitation of the spheres is confounded by the movement

> in which each individual is involved, the direction of this movement is the prime consideration, and this is aptly indicated by the word "stages." "There are many ways which lead to the same truth, and each man takes his own." So said S. K. in the first of the *Three Discourses* which accompanied this book.[21]

Frater Taciturnus, another of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, enlightens us further by explaining that the ethical stage is one of transition, but that one does not necessarily pass through it only once.[22] An individual might therefore vacillate between the aesthetical and the ethical stages several times before reaching the religious stage; he might never reach the religious stage; or he might live in either the ethical or the aesthetical stage without ever moving to the other. Moreover, though the ethical and the aesthetical are necessarily preliminary to the religious stage (one is not created in the religious stage from birth), it is impossible to reach another stage by mere development. Only through the Kierkegaardian "leap" can the movement to another stage be accomplished. A logical progression from the aesthetical through the ethical to the religious stage is possible, but this type of progression is neither necessary nor preferable.

For Kierkegaard, existence is a state of becoming. The task of every individual is to become himself, and he can perform this task only by means of a relationship to God. If he fails, he is in despair, whether

he knows it or not. Kierkegaard puts it this way: "... a self, every instant it exists, is in process of becoming, for the self . . . does not actually exist, it is only that which it is to become. In so far as the self does not become itself, it is not its own self; but not to be one's own self is despair."[23] The paradoxical nature of this statement is explained by Kierkegaard's belief that the self is a synthesis of two factors, one of which is constantly the opposite of the other. This synthesis consists of the finite, which is the limiting factor, and the infinite, which is the expanding factor. Thus, because of the finitude inherent in man's nature, he must <u>be</u> himself; and because of the infinitude inherent in his nature, he must <u>become</u> himself. Kierkegaard is therefore convinced that the individual who has reached the religious stage, though he feels no impulse to go further <u>than</u> becoming a Christian, feels an impulse to go further <u>in</u> becoming a Christian.[24]

It is clear that, according to Kierkegaard, the ultimate end of living in the aesthetical or the ethical stage is disappointment at the least or, more likely, despair. Specifically,

> Every human existence which is not conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence which is not thus grounded transparently in God but obscurely reposes or terminates in some abstract universality . . . or which, in obscurity about itself, takes its faculties merely as active powers, without in a deeper sense being conscious whence it has them, which regards itself as an inexplicable something

> which is to be understood *per se*—every such existence, whatever it accomplishes, though it be the most amazing exploit, whatever it explains, though it were the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically—every such existence is after all despair.[25]

Those who live satisfactory lives are those who have managed to reach the stage of religiousness.

Although a comparison of the beliefs of Faulkner and Kierkegaard is not the primary concern of this study, there are certain parallels which are relevant. Both writers are concerned with the problem of alienation. There is evidence in Faulkner's works that this alienation is caused by a failure to establish meaningful relationships with God and with other people, while at the same time maintaining one's individuality and one's freedom. Quentin Compson, Jason Compson, Joe Christmas, and Thomas Sutpen are all examples of characters who are alienated from their surroundings through a failure to relate themselves meaningfully to God and to other people. Dilsey is an example of the reverse: she does not experience alienation because she manages to establish meaningful relationships.

Kierkegaard's view is similar to Faulkner's. He also extols the worth of the individual: "I broke with the public not out of pride and arrogance, etc., . . . but because I was conscious of being a religious author and as such was concerned with 'the individual' ('the individual'—in contrast to 'the public'), a thought in

which is contained an entire philosophy of life and of the world."[26]

As for alienation, Kierkegaard attributes it primarily to man's failure to relate himself properly to God. Alienation is eliminated through love: "If anyone . . . will not learn from Christianity to love himself in the right way, then neither can he love his neighbor; he may perhaps . . . 'for life and death' cling to one or several other human beings, but this is by no means loving one's neighbor. To love one's self in the right way and to love one's neighbor are absolutely analogous concepts, are at bottom one and the same."[27]

In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author,* Kierkegaard asserts that he was always a religious author, even when he wrote his most aesthetic works.[28] The aesthetic works were written because he believed that, in order to instruct men and bring them into contact with the religious stage, he must first get in touch with them by beginning where most of them are. In other words, he must begin with aesthetic achievement.[29]

Religion is important to Faulkner also: "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 both in eternity and the now. . . .There is only the present moment, in which I include both the

past and the future, and that is eternity."[30] Faulkner's view here is essentially the same as Kierkegaard's assertion that the eternal is embodied in time. A parallel exists also in the fact that Faulkner, in refuting a personified God, does the same thing that Kierkegaard does in refuting the immanental or direct relationship to God:

> All paganism consists in this, that God is related to man directly, as the extraordinary is to the astonished observer. But the spiritual relationship to God in the truth, i.e., in inwardness, is conditioned by a prior irruption of inwardness, which corresponds to the divine elusiveness that God has absolutely nothing obvious about Him, that God is so far from being obvious, that He is invisible. It cannot immediately occur to anyone that He exists, although His invisibility is again His omnipresence.[31]

Another parallel can be seen in Faulkner's attitude toward suffering. This parallel is evident in Faulkner's works: "Faulkner's noblest characters," Cleanth Brooks has noted, "are willing to face the fact that most men can learn the deepest truths about themselves and about reality only through suffering. Hurt and pain and loss are not mere accidents to which the human being is subject; nor are they mere punishments incurred by human error; they can be the means to the deeper knowledge and to the more abundant life."[32] If many of Faulkner's characters fail to achieve the more abundant life, it is partially because they do not

assume the proper attitude toward suffering. Those characters who accept suffering as their lot in life without allowing it to plunge them into despair are the ones who are able to reach the highest stages of existence.

In *The Sound and the Fury,* in *Light in August,* and in *Absalom, Absalom!* the appearance of the essentially religious character is either rare or nonexistent. The infrequent appearance of the religious character in Faulkner is not in contradiction to Kierkegaard's view of the situation of mankind. According to Kierkegaard, most people who call themselves Christians are not Christians at all: "If then . . . the greater number of people in Christendom only imagine themselves to be Christians, in what categories do they live? They live in aesthetic, or at the most, in aesthetic-ethical categories."[33] In Faulkner's novels also, the aesthetic and the aesthetic-ethical categories predominate.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

The Sound and the Fury, a study in "the fragmentation of modern man,"[34] presents characters who, for the most part, dwell in Kierkegaard's aesthetical stage. Both Quentin and Jason inhabit this stage, but not in the same manner. Mr. and Mrs. Compson, also, have their particular manners of dwelling in the aesthetical stage; and, to a certain extent, so does Caddy. Just as there are various ways of dwelling in the aesthetical stage (and in the ethical),[35] the effects upon different persons dwelling in this stage will be somewhat diverse. For example, Quentin, Jason, and Caddy have problems with their attitudes toward time. Quentin's problem is the past; Jason's, the future. Caddy inhabits the present, concentrating on the pleasures of the moment. Each attitude is an aesthetic one in that not one of these characters sees the eternal embodied in time.

Quentin's problem is that he never makes a fundamental choice regarding his own being. He allows external circumstances—the past of childhood and youth in general and his sister Caddy's loss of innocence in that past specifically—to dominate and even possess

every act in the present. Reality is the enemy. Quentin will go to any lengths to deny the validity of life as it is, and the lengths to which he will go are illustrated in his relationship to Caddy. In reference to their "incest" he thinks, "Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us."[36] The following is also pertinent: *"If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame"* (p. 135). He wants to wipe out the reality of Caddy's loss of innocence, to deny that Caddy is "bad," as she says. But more than that, the ideas of the "clean flame," of things finishing themselves, and of being "more than dead" indicate a desire on Quentin's part to become an object and to make an object of Caddy also. The ideas are counter to meaningful existence because, to Kierkegaard, existence is by nature a state of <u>becoming</u>. The aesthete in effect denies existence by refusing to exercise his ability to choose. One cannot become anything without making a choice. Quentin's refusal to exercise this ability assures his alienation from God and from himself.

The aesthete, according to Judge William, wishes above all to remain outside himself.[37] Quentin's inwardness is the quality necessary to leap into the ethical stage, but he refuses to exercise the power of choice which would make the leap possible. He wants to avoid the choice between aesthetic and ethical existence by avoiding himself, and becoming an object would accomplish both purposes. His sense of guilt, whether well-founded or not, makes inwardness too painful for him. Getting outside himself (in effect, becoming an object) would eliminate the pain he now feels; and if he could make an object of Caddy also, both would be safe from the guilt and unpleasantness suggested by his expression "the pointing and the horror" of life.

Quentin is not actually sexually attracted to his sister. The world the two of them inhabited as children is established in his memory as an idyllic place where things are perfect and good. The reality of the present is too much for him to bear, but he realizes (though dimly) the impossibility of an actual return to the past. What he longs for is the innocent Caddy, and he wants her to belong to him alone. Since the innocent Caddy no longer exists, his only alternative is to have her belong to him in sin—<u>if</u> he could have committed incest. But since this act is as repulsive to him as what Caddy has done, perhaps <u>saying</u> it will be enough.

When his father asks if he tried to get Caddy to consummate the act, Quentin replies, "i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldnt have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and the world would roar away" (p. 195). This then is the importance of incest in his mind: it would isolate the two of them from everyone else, and Caddy would belong to him.

Not only has Quentin "lost touch with the eternal," he has also lost touch with both present and future. His mind is permanently fixed on the past. Although the individual who inhabits the aesthetical stage is commonly in touch only with the present and maintains a detached view of life, the important characteristic is that he avoids decisions and choices. Actually, though, even the aesthete is forced to make one choice, and that is the choice <u>not</u> to choose.[38] Everything that happens to Quentin, including his suicide, has its direct relationship to the past. The past does not blend with his present and color it; he <u>has</u> no present, or at most, his past <u>is</u> his present. Even the act of suicide does not seem to occur in the present, for it is a foregone conclusion from the beginning of Quentin's section in the book. Regarding life or death, he has no choice, since a life concentrated on the past is not a life anyway. In effect, he died on the afternoon Caddy's loss of innocence was

discovered.

When Kierkegaard speaks of the eternal being embodied in time, he speaks of a phenomenon which has far-reaching implications for the existing individual. The person who inhabits the religious stage understands and accepts this phenomenon without question. He therefore has no problem with the concept of time. The ethical individual believes that he also understands this phenomenon; however, his understanding of the eternal has no connection with God. Judge William, one of Kierkegaard's ethical pseudonyms, has this to say: "The married man, being a true conqueror, has not killed time but has saved it and preserved it in eternity. . . .He solves the great riddle of living in eternity and yet hearing the hall clock strike, and hearing it in such a way that the stroke of the hour does not shorten but prolong his eternity. . . ."[39] Eternity for the ethicist is not grounded in Christ but in human potentiality. Although he does not grasp the significance of time and eternity according to Kierkegaard's religious viewpoint, the ethicist <u>believes</u> that he understands; therefore, like the religious individual, he has no problem with the concept of time. The aesthete, on the other hand, has no concept of the eternal being embodied in time; and because he cannot grasp this concept, time becomes his enemy. Grimsley explains this way:

> The *Diapsalmata* [a section of *Either/Or*] indicate one of the main problems of the "aesthetic" life: its failure to deal satisfactorily with the question of time. Although the aesthetic individual lives in one "natural" dimension, in a single mood or colour . . . he can establish no genuine temporal continuity: his life lacks unity because it consists only of separate discrete moments, as he passes from one feeling to another without remaining permanently identified with any. Consequently, complaints about the meaninglessness of his existence form a characteristic refrain in these reflections. The diapsalmatist seems to exist in a void, with time flowing ceaselessly past him; on other occasions, time seems to have the opposite effect of standing still. . . .It is characteristic of the "aesthetic" individual that he should seem incapable of development.[40]

The ultimate symbol of reality for Quentin is time. Time is what has destroyed the innocence and peace he experienced as a child. Time has ruined his relationship with Caddy. It has made her, as Jason would say, "a bitch." No matter how we as readers interpret Caddy's actions, what essentially troubles Quentin is his conviction, whether he admits it to himself or not, that Caddy really is a bitch. This is what he cannot bear about Caddy, and what has made her a bitch is time. Early in his section of the book, Quentin breaks his watch in a symbolic attempt to stop time. But the watch continues to tick, and throughout the day, he intermittently hears the ticking of this broken indicator of time. Chimes mark the hour, the half hour, the quarter hour, accentuating his inability to escape time.

Finally, he stops time in the only way that it is possible to do so: he commits suicide.

Section II of *The Sound and the Fury* is, as Edmund Volpe says, "a heartfelt cry of despair, one of the most moving expressions of disillusionment and suffering in literature. It dramatizes that state of mind and soul that existentialists have described and that Sartre has termed *l'angoise*, when man knows absolute despair and either commits suicide or develops a vision that gives meaning to existence."[41] Quentin can find no meaning for his existence without Caddy. He allows himself to be overcome by suffering, as the aesthete is very likely to do, and this results in what George Bedell calls "existential paralysis." There is, in effect, no course open for Quentin. Perhaps he has taken the words of his father too literally: "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said" (p. 123). Time is indeed Quentin's misfortune, and his attempt to efface this misfortune leads to his death. For Quentin "its not despair until time its not even time until it was" (p. 197). In Kierkegaardian terms, Quentin's despair is the despair of weakness, a passive suffering of the self. Unlike the purely immediate man, Quentin does have some conception of what it means to have a self, but "he has no consciousness of a

self which is gained by the infinite abstraction from everything outward, this naked, abstract self . . . which is the first form of the infinite self and the forward impulse in the whole process whereby a self infinitely accepts its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages."[42]

Jason, like Quentin, is trapped in the aesthetical stage, but his manner of dwelling aesthetically is quite different from Quentin's. Jason is remarkably successful at doing what Quentin subconsciously wanted to do but could not: he looks upon all people, himself included, as objects. Both Caddy and his niece Quentin are used for the money he can extort from them, and his mother is important to him only because of the part she plays in making this extortion possible. His relationship to Lorraine, the Memphis prostitute, has its basis only in sensuousness. But the erotic quality of this sensuousness lacks the strength of a seducer's relationship with a woman. Not once does he speak of Lorraine in a manner that would indicate even a temporary feeling of desire or affection. She is just someone else to be manipulated: "I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you can't think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw" (p. 211).

Jason maintains, through his treatment of others as objects, the detached view of life common to the aesthete. His alienation is complete: he loves no one, trusts no one. Other people are important to him only in so far as he can manipulate them for gain. As Bedell says, "He stood in no ethical relation to anyone or even to himself. . . .He would attempt to shore-up his existence by acquisition."[43]

Jason, although he appears to be self-assured and confident, has actually placed himself at the mercy of fate and external forces. For every misfortune in his life, he has someone or something else to blame. What he spends most of his time doing is whining and complaining: "I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father. I had to work" (p. 199). His having to stay in Jefferson and work as a clerk in someone else's store is attributed to the failure of Herbert Head, Caddy's husband, to set Jason up in his bank as he had promised. "Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that's right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me . . ." (p. 214). Bitterness regarding this broken promise is one of the few things from the past that troubles Jason, and it surfaces during his most hateful actions toward others. The first time that Caddy returns to see Quentin, he allows her to do so

only for a second (for which Caddy has to pay him one hundred dollars). Then, when he learns that Caddy did not take the next train out of town, he threatens to make it impossible for her ever to see Quentin again and thereby gets her to leave. Immediately afterwards he says, "I reckon you'll think twice before you deprive me of a job that was promised me. I was a kid then. I believed folks when they said they'd do things. I've learned better since" (p. 224). Jason accepts no responsibility for his own life. He cherishes suffering as a way to avoid making choices. He tells himself his family is to blame for his predicament when in fact it is he himself who is the problem. He does not realize that he can choose his own being and therefore is trapped in despair.

Although Jason does see some events in the past as significant—Herbert's promise to get him a job, his father's alcoholism, the selling of Benjy's pasture to pay for Quentin's schooling and Caddy's wedding—his mind is fixed mainly on the future. He has, for the most part, cut himself off from both the past and the present in his search for the money which he believes will serve as a reinforcement for himself. The present is important only in that this is the time in which he must accumulate that money. According to Kierkegaard, "The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life,

the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being, in some manner outside himself. He is always absent, never present to himself."[44] Jason is doomed because of this absence. He never becomes reconciled to time.

Caddy seems almost to dwell in two stages at once, a phenomenon Kierkegaard says is not possible. But according to Bedell, "Kierkegaard admits that categories may overlap. That is to say, although one cannot indwell two modalities simultaneously, one may indwell a modality that combines characteristics of two or more categories. Thus, we often hear Kierkegaard speak of 'the ethico-religious' individual, 'the aesthetic-ethical' person, aesthetical religiousness,' and so forth."[45] Caddy dwells in the aesthetic-ethical stage. As is characteristic of the aesthete, she lives for the present moment. In fact, she is the only Compson who does live in the present. Eroticism is her dominant characteristic, but this is not a trait she has chosen, at least not at first: *"There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces it's gone now and I'm sick"* (p. 131). She seems to have chose her body, but the number of lovers she has indicates a lack of permanence in her relationships with others; consequently, there is no choice at all. The Kierkegaardian

choice is more than a whim. It involves both inwardness and commitment. Caddy's choices of lovers involve neither of these. The choices she makes are not even choices to manipulate others; if anything, she is manipulated by them. When Quentin wants to know if there have been very many lovers, she replies, "*I dont know too many . . .* " But in the next breath she asks, "will you look after Benjy and Father" (p. 134). Although she lives for the present moment, she also possesses an ethical sense of duty. Even as a child, she is the one who looks after Benjy and tries to keep the family running smoothly. When her mother cries in exasperation over not being able to quiet Benjy, Caddy, aged seven, says, "Hush, Mother. . . .You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I'll go get Dilsey" (p. 83). Years later, she pleads with Jason to show her daughter Quentin some kindness, to see that she has the kinds of things other girls have. In contrast to the other members of the family, Caddy does make some choices. It is her choice to give Quentin up, although she seems to feel driven to do so. It is not, however, something someone else forces her to do. It is a choice she makes because of a sense of duty, because she believes the remaining Compsons can rear the child better than she.

Mr. and Mrs. Compson, both completely withdrawn from life, are also aesthetes. Mrs. Compson is in love

with suffering. She cherishes it as only an aesthete can. It is her excuse to avoid making any decisions or choices and allows her to remain shut up in her room, away from the world, reveling in her interminable illness. Mr. Compson does nothing except mete out his philosophy to those who will listen. Bedell characterizes Mr. Compson as well when he says of Jason, ". . . the person who 'thinks about' life without making the either/or decision (the metaphysician) dwells in the most refined form of aestheticism."[46] Whereas Mrs. Compson has her "illness" to keep her apart from the rest of the world, Mr. Compson has alcoholism. Both are completely alienated from reality.

Of the entire household, Dilsey is the only character able to deal with reality. "Only Dilsey," Bedell says, "who lives in time as though it contains eternity, is able to 'endure' or 'prevail.'"[47] Religiousness is the stage which she inhabits. Time is never wrong for her, even when she has to decipher it by means of a clock possessing only one hand and always three hours slow: "On the wall above a cupboard . . . a cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times. 'Eight oclock,' Dilsey said" (p. 290). She has not removed herself from the world in order that God may appear, as the individual who dwells in religiousness A would do; instead, she is "in the

world but not of it." God has come, as far as she is concerned, and she is able to accept herself because she knows that she has been accepted by God:

> *Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.*
>
> *How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.*
>
> *It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.*
>
> *Can you read it, Caddy said.*
>
> *Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here.* (p. 77)

Suffering to Dilsey is a way of life, but not in the wame way that it is for the Compsons. She accepts it as an integral part of life. She neither allows it to govern her life nor revels in it. It is for her, as for Kierkegaard's religious individual, a way of serving her fellows. She usually manages, although she suffers, to create a sense of order where none actually exists. In the face of her suffering and that of others, religiousness is a force that makes all beings equal. In Kierkegaard's words, "The Christianity of the New Testament is infinitely high; but . . . it is not high in such a sense that it has to do with the difference between man and man with respect to intellectual capacity. . . .No, it is for all. Everyone . . . if he absolutely wills it . . . will absolutely put up with everything, suffer everything . . . then is this infinite height attainable

to him."[48] While Benjy does not possess the mentality to choose the religious stage, he too is one of God's creatures as far as Dilsey is concerned. When Frony complains about her bringing Benjy to church because people are beginning to talk, she replies, "Den you send um to me. . . .Tell um de good Lawd dont keer whether he smart or not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat" (p. 306).

We must assume that Dilsey has previously experienced resignation and has subsequently made the "leap" into the religious stage. She clearly possesses faith, and Kierkegaard says that an individual cannot receive faith without first experiencing resignation: "The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith, so that one who has not made this movement has not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then can there by any question of grasping existence by virtue of faith."[49] Although we do not see the actual act or process of resignation within the novel itself (because we meet Dilsey as a religious character and she remains in the same stage throughout the book), it must necessarily have taken place. One does not become religious without first accepting (choosing) himself and accepting life as it is, which is essentially the meaning of resignation.

The characters in *The Sound and the Fury* are, in one way or another, representative of each of Kierke-

gaard's three stages. In Faulkner's world, as in Kierkegaard's, the religious individual is a rarity. Most of the major characters in *The Sound and the Fury* dwell in the aesthetical stage. Only one progresses to the aesthetic-ethical stage, which is only slightly more satisfactory than the aesthetic, and only one reaches the religious stage.

Jason and Quentin, although both aesthetes, are in some ways almost exact opposites. Quentin suffers because he cannot achieve the personal detachment that he thinks will ease his suffering, while Jason manages to maintain a detachment from everyone, including himself. Quentin's problem with time is the past; Jason's is the future. But both Quentin and Jason are aesthetes in that neither is able to make fundamental choices and neither is in touch with the eternal.

Mr. and Mrs. Compson are also aesthetes, but their existence in the aesthetical stage is manifested in a different manner from that of either Jason or Quentin. They retreat from life in illness and in alcoholism, neither participating in nor actively concerned with the real business of living. What sense of duty either possesses is buried beneath the crutch each uses as a means of escaping life. The fact that they are married makes no difference. The ethical person holds marriage in high esteem, but it does not follow that marriage makes a person ethical. Judge William informs us that certain

aesthetes are quite willing to accept marriage, but that they attach no real significance to it. For the aesthete, marriage is likely to be a mere civil arrangement.[50] It is quite possible that this is the kind of marriage the Compsons have; on the other hand, it is just as possible that they entered into the marriage as ethicists and later became aesthetes. We have no way of knowing from the novel itself. We see them throughout as aesthetes who make no choices, who place themselves at the mercy of fate, and who avoid inwardness and duty.

Caddy differs from the other Compsons in that she possesses a sense of duty. Her category, the aesthetic-ethical, combines qualities of both the aesthetic and the ethical stages. While she is unable to make an ethical choice (for the most part) and lives primarily for the moment, her sense of duty places her in the realm of the ethical. Her attitude toward time is different also: she is the only Compson who lives in the present.

In reaching the religious stage, Dilsey achieves a serenity and an ability to cope with life's problems that the Compsons lack. Although she too suffers, she is quite capable of enduring whatever life has to offer. She also differs from the Compsons in her attitude toward time. She is the only member of the household who is in

touch with the eternal.

In the characters examined so far, we have seen that each of Kierkegaard's stages is adequately exemplified; yet still other possibilities exist for the aesthete and the ethicist, as will be seen by examining two other novels. In reading Kierkegaard, we find that there are numerous existential avenues open to the aesthete, all of which fail. There is also more than one existential possibility for the ethicist, though not as many as for the aesthete. These too ultimately fail. But there is only one possible way of life for the purely religious person, and perhaps this is why so few reach the religious stage. This is not to say that those who inhabit the religious stage are not individuals. They naturally have their particular individuality and selfhood. But all religious individuals must assume the proper attitude toward suffering; they must all understand and accept the paradoxical idea of the eternal being embodied in time; they must all experience resignation (the choice of selfhood and the pursuit of life regardless of its flaws); and they must all ultimately attain faith. As aesthetes and aesthetic-ethicists, Faulkner's major characters in *The Sound and the Fury* also exemplify diverse existential possibilities for individuals in these stages. Only the religious character stands apart as pursuing one particular way of life.

CHAPTER III

LIGHT IN AUGUST

Light in August has been referred to as "a study of the attempts of alienated people to flee into some sort of solidarity."[51] Joe Christmas epitomizes the alienated person who craves solidarity; but because he does not actively seek this solidarity, because he does not even know what it is that he seeks, he remains in the aesthetical stage of existence, alienated from his surroundings and lost in the world.

No one, not even Joe himself, knows what his background is. Because he was called "nigger" by children at the orphanage where he spent his first five years, he thinks there might be a black person in his ancestry, but he is not certain of this. When he appears in Jefferson, he is described in this way: ". . . there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And . . . he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud."[52] Not only is he homeless, he is nameless as well:

> "His name is what?" one said.
> "Christmas."
> "Is he a foreigner?"
> "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?" the foreman said.
> "I never heard of nobody a-tall named it," the other said. (pp. 28-29)

Christmas is the name he was given when he was found on the doorstep of the orphanage when he was an infant, but, for him and for the people with whom he associates, it is worse than no name at all because it gives no indication of who he is or what his roots are.

Joe is to remain in this state of not knowing who he is for the duration of his life. He is like the young aesthete that Judge William describes in *Either/Or*. Life for the aesthete, according to Judge William, is a masquerade. No one succeeds in really knowing him. The revelations he makes are only illusions, for he must preserve his enigmatical mask at all costs. The aesthete who assumes this attitude loses his own sense of self. Judge William states it this way: "In fact you are nothing; you are merely a relation to others, and what you are you are by virtue of this relation."[53] Joe Christmas is this type of aesthete. Throughout the book we see him, for the most part, only as others see him. Very little is told from his point of view. We get the details of Joanna's murder, of Joe's subsequent capture, and finally of his "crucifixion" through the eyes of other characters. He emerges, therefore, as less than human, as simply a

thought in somebody else's mind.[54]

Whether consciously or not, Christmas works to prevent others from knowing him. He does not make the choice between black and white and will not allow anyone else to make it. Whenever he begins to be accepted as a white man, he takes obvious steps to deny the label, while at the same time maintaining a doubt that will not allow others to classify him in any definite way. An example of this is his answer when Joanna questions him about his background:

> "You dont have any idea who your parents were?"
> If she could have seen his face she would have found it sullen, brooding. "Except that one of them was part nigger. Like I told you before."
> She was still looking at him. . . ."How do you know that?"
> He didn't answer for some time. Then he said: "I dont know it." Again his voice ceased. . . .Then he spoke again. . . ."If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time." (p. 222-23)

Christmas' masquerade is only part of the larger picture of his detachment and alienation. He follows scrupulously "A's" command to avoid friendship and marriage. Lucas Burch is simply someone he can manipulate. The relationship between the two has none of the comaraderie of friendship. Neither trusts the other, and Burch is actually afraid of Christmas. Judge William would not be surprised at their relationship. He describes the young aesthete as one who must constantly be in opposition with

"the other." Because he is afraid of inwardness, the opposition must be kept alive; otherwise, he might be forced into the very thing he fears. His opposition to others allows him to remain outside himself.[55]

Christmas has kept this opposition alive from the time he was a child, but nowhere is it more apparent than in his relationship with Joanna Burden. Their liaison from the beginning is one of reciprocal struggle. Their first sexual encounter is described in this way: "There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last. It was as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone" (p. 205). Each treats the other as an object, and their involvement with each other makes no progress toward a meaningful relationship. For Christmas it is nothing more than a way to avoid inwardness. He thinks, "I better move. I better get away from here" (p. 228), but he does not go. He is trapped in the opposition that allows him to avoid himself. Even when he refuses to see her for long periods of time, he cannot free himself: ". . . when he first went to work, he would not need to think of her during the day; he hardly ever thought of her. Now he could not help himself. She was in his mind so constantly that it was almost as if he were looking at her, there in the house, patient, waiting,

inescapable, crazy" (p. 135).

Ultimately, Christmas finds that he cannot escape an inward look at himself, but he is so accustomed to a life governed by externals that it does no good. He attributes his situation to fate, another external: "And as he sat in the shadow of the ruined garden on that August night three months later . . . he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe. He was saying to himself *I had to do it* already in the past tense; *I had to do it. She said so herself"* (p. 245).

Because he is an aesthete, Joe cannot choose; and because he cannot choose, he must acquiesce to fate. Judge William states the aesthete's predicament in this way: ". . . there comes at last an instant when there no longer is any question of an either/or, not because he has chosen but because he has neglected to choose, which is equivalent to saying, because others have chosen for him, because he has lost his self."[56]

Joe Christmas lives out most of his life in despair, which Kierkegaard defines as "the disrelationship in a relation that relates itself to itself."[57] Christmas is not conscious of the despair, but according to Kierkegaard, "the fact that the man in despair is unaware that his condition is despair, has nothing to do with the

case, he is in despair all the same."[58] The individual who is unconscious of despair is furthest from the consciousness of himself as spirit.[59] This is Joe Christmas' problem. His is what Kierkegaard calls "the despairing unconsciousness of having a self and an eternal self."[60] Since Joe lacks consciousness of his despair, Kierkegaard would classify this despair as minimal. When consciousness is least, the feeling of despair is least. But, paradoxically, the person who is unaware of his despair is in despair in the most dangerous way, because through unawareness, the individual is securely in the power of despair.[61] The person who is aware of his despair can strive to eliminate it, but the person who is unaware of despair is virtually trapped in it.

Joanna Burden is one of the few characters who can be observed to move from one stage to another. When she meets Joe Christmas, we can assume that she has previously lived ethically. She is a virgin spinster who considers it her duty to help black people to rise above their "condition," an idea instilled in her by her father. She carries out this duty meticulously. We learn also that she has made an ethical choice to live near Jefferson, although the people there shun her. It is clear that she has no entanglements that keep her in Jefferson. She therefore has <u>chosen</u> to be the outcast that she is. She has chosen, as is characteristic of the

ethicist, to suffer.

With the arrival of Christmas, Joanna moves into the aesthetical stage, but not entirely. For Joanna the ethical has not been "dethroned"* by the aesthetical. The two stages combine in her and become the aesthetic-ethical. Her work with the black schools continues, but her relationship with Joe becomes one of sensuousness or, to be more specific, eroticism:

> At first it shocked him: the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed to the fire of the New England biblical hell. Perhaps he was aware of the abnegation in it: the imperious and fierce urgency that concealed an actual despair at frustrate and irrevocable years, which she appeared to compensate each night as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth. She had an avidity for the forbidden wordsymbols; an insatiable appetite for the sound of them on his tongue and on her own. She revealed the terrible and impersonal curiosity of a child about forbidden subjects and objects; that rapt and tireless and detached interest of a surgeon in the physical body and its possibilities. (pp. 225-26)

This eroticism is dominant only at night: ". . . by day he would see the calm, coldfaced, almost manlike, almost middleaged woman who had lived for twenty years alone . . ." (p. 226). During this period, which Joe refers to as "the second phase," Joanna seems to be an ethicist during the day and an aesthete at night.

---

*See p. 15.

The phase does not last, however. She returns eventually to the ethical stage. All sex activity is terminated, and her business with Joe is now strictly related to duty. She tells him of a time when she told her father that she must escape the shadow cast by the black race: 'You cannot,' he said. 'You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. . . .you can never lift it to your level. . . . But escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen because He once cursed Him' (p. 222). Joe comes to represent a means by which Joanna can "raise the shadow." She therefore asks that he declare himself black, attend a black college, and study law under a black lawyer. But Joe, being trapped in aestheticism and therefore having made no real choice between black and white, will not cooperate. Joanna resorts to prayer and thereby seals her fate: "She ought not to started praying over me. She would have been all right if she hadn't started praying over me" (p. 93). Joe's resistance is the typical aesthetic resistance of a shift toward the ethical or the religious in any relationship. Joanna becomes the burden from which he must inevitably free himself, and the only way that he can be free of her is by killing her.

The aesthetic in Joanna is "dethroned" when she

returns to the ethical stage: it does not disappear totally, but it is no longer a motivating force of her existence. In attempting to use Joe in order to "raise the shadow," she denies his humanity, but she does not do so consciously. Her intention is just the opposite. She believes she is doing the only thing that will give Joe humanity; thus, before she explains to him what she wants him to do, she asks, "Do you realise . . . that you are wasting your life?" (p. 234). Her motivation is her ethical sense of duty, but her aestheticism is still evident in that she manipulates Joe for her own ends.

Joanna clearly reaches toward the religious stage during the last months of her life, but she never attains it. At first she actively resists the impulse. Toward the end of the period in which she inhabits the aesthetic-ethical stage, we read,

> What was terrible was that she did not want to be saved. "I'm not ready to pray yet," she said aloud, quietly, rigid, soundless, her eyes wide open, while the moon poured and poured into the window, filling the room with something cold and irrevocable and wild with regret. "Dont make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while." She seemed to see her whole past life, the starved years, like a gray tunnel, at the far and irrevocable end of which, as unfading as a reproach, her naked breast of three short years ago ached as though in agony, virgin and crucified; "Not yet, dear God. Not yet, dear God." (p. 231)

When she does give in to the impulse, after her return

to the ethical stage, her resignation is evidenced by a search for the immanental relationship to God and the destruction of selfhood which are emphasized in religiousness A:

> She prayed again. She spoke quietly, with that abjectness of pride. When it was necessary to use the symbolwords which he had taught her, she used them, spoke them forthright and without hesitation, talking to God as if He were a man in the room with two other men. She spoke of herself and of him as of two other people, her voice still, monotonous, sexless. . . . (p. 245)

The religiousness Joanna seeks, according to Kierkegaard, is not religiousness at all: "The immediate relationship to God is paganism, and only after the breach has taken place can there be any question of a true God-relationship."[62] Furthermore, "a direct relationship between one spiritual being and another, with respect to the essential truth, is unthinkable. If such a relationship is assumed, it means that one of the parties has ceased to be spirit."[63] For Kierkegaard, the only true spiritual relationship is one of inwardness: "Within the individual man there is a potentiality (man is potentially spirit) which is awakened in inwardness to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere. The sensuous distinctions of the great, the astonishing, the shrieking superlatives of a southern people, constitute a retreat to idolatry, in comparison with the spiritual relationship of inwardness."[64]

When Joanna seeks to destroy her selfhood in order to have a relationship with God, as she implies when in her prayer she speaks of herself and Joe as two other people, she annihilates the quality necessary for inwardness and a real spiritual relationship. Thus she never attains religiousness because she is looking for it outside herself.

In a Kierkegaardian hierarchy, Joanna emerges as a much more complicated individual than does Joe Christmas, and she attains a higher level of existence. She is able to achieve ethical inwardness, which leads her to seek God; but in seeking God, she denies her own selfhood, thus destroying the inwardness she needs in order to find Him. She is just beginning the throes of resignation, but she does not realize that in order to choose God, she must first choose herself. In Kierkegaard's words,

> For the act of resignation faith is not required, for what I gain by resignation is my eternal consciousness, and this is a purely philosophical movement which I dare say I am able to make if it is required, and which I can train myself to make, for whenever any finiteness would get the mastery over me, I starve myself until I can make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love to God, and for me this is higher than everything.[65]

Christmas is much simpler to classify than Joanna. He remains the same throughout his life, never gaining the necessary sense of self to make the leap out of the

aesthetical stage. He is trapped in the despair which results from a failure to recognize the self as spirit.

But there is a kinship between Joe and Joanna. Although Joanna is just the opposite of Joe in her attitude toward blacks, she is just the same in the position in which she finds herself because of this attitude. Joe considers being black a kind of damnation. Joanna, on the other hand, has the idea that her salvation lies in helping blacks. Both are caught midway between two extremes: black and white. Joe is caught in the middle because he can identify with neither; Joanna, because she believes that her father was correct in his assessment that both races are cursed. It is clear that Faulkner intends us to see a similarity in their characters, and he insures the recognition by giving the two of them similar names. In the Kierkegaardian scheme, the kinship between Joe and Joanna places both in despair because they both "obscurely repose or terminate in an abstract universality,"* namely, race consciousness.

One other similarity in the personalities of Joe and Joanna must be mentioned. Both find that life is unbearable and decide to end it. We have seen that Joe's resistance of Joanna's attempt to release him from aestheticism leads him to murder her. But a closer look shows that Joanna's murder is a kind of suicide as far

---

*See p. 17.

Joe is concerned. He knows that he will be caught, but even more important is the fact that he does not try very hard to avoid being caught. The fact that he eludes the sheriff and the hounds for a week is largely due to their own ineptitude. He puts forth no real effort to stay away from them. For a while it is almost a game to him, but then he gets tired of running and walks into a town where he is sure to be recognized. He wants to be caught and punished just as he wanted to be punished when he ate the dietitian's toothpaste as a child; and he certainly knows what the punishment will be. He will have to undergo a modern-day crucifixion, which is what he thinks he deserves.

Joanna has also decided on suicide. When Joe refuses to pray with her on the night before her death, she draws an old pistol and fires at him. The gun does not fire, however. We learn her purpose when Joe stops to examine the pistol he took with him when he left her bedroom:

> The match burned down and went out, yet he still seemed to see the ancient thing with its two loaded chambers; the one upon which the hammer had already fallen and which had not exploded, and the other upon which no hammer had yet fallen but upon which a hammer had been planned to fall. 'For her and for me,' he said. (p. 250)

For both Joanna and Joe, despair leads (though in a roundabout way) to suicide. But to Kierkegaard, suicide

is not a satisfactory solution because it is a rebellion against God.[66]

CHAPTER IV

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

The presence of Thomas Sutpen pervades every page of *Absalom, Absalom!* Not for one moment is the reader allowed to lose himself in details of another character's life. Although he has been dead for forty-one years when the novel opens, he is the character who really lives in the book. Perhaps the reason is that even after his death and the passage of time, he still remains an enigma to those who know and know of him.

As difficult as it is to think of the word ethical in terms of Stupen, he dwells in the aesthetic-ethical stage. Although the aesthetic characteristics outnumber the ethical, they do not dominate. Both are present in him throughout the book, and we never see him as more one than the other. Sutpen possesses none of the erotic qualities characteristic of the aesthete. Instead, his aestheticism is seen through his detachment, his identification of himself through externals, his treatment of others as objects, and his attitude toward time. The ethical aspects of his character are seen only through the choices he makes and his attitude toward fate.

Sutpen's aesthetical detachment is posited in the opening pages of the book. As far as the people of Jefferson know, he has no roots. He is to them as to Miss Rosa, "a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts . . . ."[67] They know nothing of his background and therefore do not trust him: "He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own any more than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself . . ." (p. 15).

The people of Jefferson are never to learn very much about Sutpen's background. He tells his story to only one man, Quentin's grandfather, and even in telling the story, he maintains his aesthetical detachment: ". . . he was not talking about himself. He was telling a story. He was not bragging about something he had done; he was just telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would have been the same story if the man had had no name at all, if it had been told about any man or no man over whiskey at night" (p. 247). It is this detachment which leads Rosa Coldfield to say, forty-one years after Sutpen's death, "He was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow. He was the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment cast by the fierce demoniac

lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse. . ." (p. 171).

Like Kierkegaard's immediate man, Sutpen recognizes that he has a self only through externals.* The most obvious example of this characteristic in Sutpen is his "design." Sutpen was innocent when his family came down from the mountains of West Virginia and settled in Tidewater. At ten years old,

> . . . he had never even heard of, never imagined a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them; he did not even imagine then that there was any such way to live or want to live, or that there existed all the objects to be wanted which there were, or that the ones who owned the objects not only could look down on the ones that didn't, but could be supported in the downlooking not only by the others who owned objects too but by the very ones that were looked down on that didn't own objects and knew they never would. (p. 221)

Into this strange, new universe, Thomas Sutpen is cast; and, according to Quentin's grandfather at least, he never loses his innocence. He soon learns, however, that not only is there a difference between white men and black men, but that there is also a difference between white men and white men. And shortly after he gains this knowledge, something happens that is the

---

*See p. 7.

beginning of his design. His father sends him to the plantation on which they work to deliver a message. He approaches the front door: ". . . and he never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was the nigger told him, even before he had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back" (p. 232).

Years later, when Sutpen tells the story to Quentin's grandfather, he insists that the incident did not anger him, but "he knew that something would have to be done about it: he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life . . ." (p. 234). He is not fighting against the black man who sent him to the back door but against the system, the system represented by the man who owns the plantation. He finds himself compelled to combat in some way both this plantation owner and the others of his kind, and in order to do so he must gain the same material things that they have: land, slaves, and money.

Thus begins Sutpen's design, and it is to govern his life until he dies. He has no time for inwardness because the entire meaning of his life exists in this external plan.

Obsession with the accomplishment of his design leads Sutpen to use other people as objects, which is typical of the aesthete. Because a wife is essential

to his plans, he marries: ". . . and he told grandfather . . . how he had put his first wife aside like eleventh- and twelfth-century kings did: 'I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside'" (p. 240). This wife, Eulalia, can play no part in Sutpen's design because he discovers that she is not racially pure, that one of her not so distant ancestors was partially black.

All individuals are objects to Sutpen and are important only in so far as they are adjunctive to his plan. Ironically, it is partly because of his inhumane treatment of these others whom he considers necessary to his design that his plan fails. Eulalia is driven to her desire for vengeance because in putting her aside, Sutpen denies her humanity. Miss Rosa Coldfield's outrage stems from the same kind of treatment. Shreve is correct in classifying Sutpen as less than human: ". . . if he hadn't been a demon . . . she wouldn't have had to go out there . . . and find instead of a widowed Agamemnon to her Cassandra an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her eager though untried Thisbe who could approach her in this unbidden April's compounded demonry and suggest that they breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry" (p. 177). His final attempt to reestablish his dynasty

is yet another example of his denial of another person's humanity. He is no longer concerned with a suitable wife; all he wants now is a son. The young granddaughter of Wash Jones will serve the purpose. But when she bears a daughter instead of a son, he says, *"Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a stall in the stable"* (p. 185).

Sutpen's mind, for the most part, is fixed on the future. There is a brief period when his design seems to be working during which he inhabits the present, but as soon as something threatens his plan, his mind becomes fixed on the future and the reestablishment of his design. He is therefore constantly fighting against time, as the aesthete commonly does. Even as a young man, he shows evidence of this fight against time: ". . . he was at this time completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience, his conviction gained from whatever that recent experience had been . . . of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him, which was to drive him for the next five years . . . roughly until about nine months before his son was born" (p. 34). Later, the fight is more desperate: ". . . *he realized that there was more in his problem than just lack of time, that the problem contained some super-distillation of this lack: that he was now past sixty and that possibly he could get but one more son, had at best but one more*

son in his loins, as the old cannon might know when it has just one more shot in its corporeality" (p. 279).

In his fight against time, Sutpen shows that he is not in touch with the eternal. He thinks that he can posit the eternal in himself through having sons, but in Kierkegaard's scheme, one can gain the eternal only by recognizing himself as spirit. Although Sutpen's fight against time is an aesthetical characteristic, his means of seeking the eternal is typical of the ethicist. It is a matter of human potentiality and has no connection with God. But for Kierkegaard, gaining the eternal is impossible without first attaining paradoxical religiousness. In fact, attainment of the true God-relationship and attainment of the eternal occur simultaneously.[68]

For Kierkegaard, neither the aesthetical nor the ethical stage of existence is satisfactory, although the ethical is a higher stage than the aesthetical. The highest end is attainment of the religious stage, and for Kierkegaard, attainment of this end is the only possible way of living a satisfactory life. Sutpen's desire to project himself through posterity resembles an ethical resignation: he does seek to "choose himself absolutely,"* but this is only half of what Kierkegaard means by resignation. The other half is God: "This

---

*See p. 10.

movement [resignation] I make by myself, and what I gain is myself in my eternal consciousness, in blissful agreement with my love for the Eternal Being."[69]

So far we have seen, for the most part, only Sutpen's aesthetical characteristics. The ethical traits, though less numerous, are no less convincing. The ethical individual, as we have seen, is involved in making choices. Because he believes that he knows the right choice, he chooses with a kind of permanence. The ethical choice is marked by its seriousness. (So the ethicist believes at least.) Judge William explains this way:

> When a man deliberates aesthetically upon a multitude of life's problems . . . he does not easily get one either/or, but a whole multiplicity, because the determining factor in the choice is not accentuated, and because when one does not choose absolutely one chooses only for the moment, and therefore can choose something different the next moment. The ethical choice is therefore in a certain sense much easier, much simpler, but in another sense it is infinitely harder. He who would define his task ethically has ordinarily not so considerable a selection to choose from; on the other hand, the act of choice has far more importance for him. If you will understand me aright, I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses.[70]

The major choice that Sutpen makes is the one that initiates his design. Once made, nothing ever happens

that alters this fundamental choice. Instead, all of the other choices he makes have their direct relationship to it. After his first wife is put aside because of a trace of black blood in her veins, he does not give up. He puts this wife aside, moves from the West Indies (where he had gone to become rich and had begun to succeed) to Jefferson, swindles a hundred square miles of land from an Indian, builds a huge house on it, furnishes it by shady means never explained, and chooses another wife. He chooses another wife—not falls in love or even becomes infatuated with—simply chooses because she is not rich enough to look down her nose at him but well-bred enough to be a suitable mistress for his house.

The ethical aspect of Sutpen's nature is not evidenced by the fact that he marries but by the quality of the choices he makes. Marriage is simply a choice that is necessary to the success of his design. We have no problem understanding that Eulalia would not have been cast aside except for the black blood he learns that she has. Almost any woman will serve in his design as long as she is lily white, respectable, and able to bear children—sons, that is. His choice of marriage is an ethical one because of the sense of finality with which he makes it each time.

Sutpen's attitude toward fate is another aspect of his ethical character. He does not acquiesce to

fate, even when he discovers at age fifty-nine that his design has for a second time been destroyed. When he returns from the Civil War, he begins immediately to try to restore "Sutpen's Hundred." Although he is unsuccessful (his hundred square miles of land being reduced to approximately one), it is not because he refused or was afraid to fight. Failure of another part of his design is evident at this time also. Because of his repudiation of his first wife (who does not simply disappear into his past but seeks and attains vengeance), the son (Henry) in whom he has trusted to perpetuate his dynasty is lost to him. He fights against fate this time by seeking to father a son by Wash Jones' young granddaughter. These methods of resisting fate are typical of those he has used throughout his life, and he dies still resisting fate. Wash Jones cannot forgive the insult inflicted upon his granddaughter and kills Sutpen because of it, but not without a fight. Sutpen does not exit life with a whimper that indicates defeat. The midwife who attended Milly hears Sutpen resist Wash's assault: "'Stand back, Wash!' sharp now, and then she heard the whip on Wash's face . . ." (p. 286). Sutpen resists the doom that fate seems to have reserved for him until his life is over.

It is important to note here that the sense in which Sutpen possesses ethical characteristics is not to

be confused with the sense in which ethicism denotes morality. He merely possesses some of the characteristics common to the ethical individual. Granted, the direction in which he takes his ethicism would hardly be considered moral, particularly in the manner in which he chooses his wives or mates; but Kierkegaard himself, in speaking of the ethical principle of choice, has stated that ". . . if a mistake is to be made, it is worse to become a fickle-minded waverer than resolutely to carry out what has been decided upon; for a habit of vacillation is the absolute ruin of every spiritual relationship."[72]

Sutpen's aesthetic-ethical qualities are evident in all of the major events of his life. His design is both aesthetic and ethical at once, and both the aesthetic and the ethical are evident in the choices that are related to this design. It is impossible to say that he is aesthetical at one time and ethical at another; the two categories are intermingled so that both operate within him at the same time. Thus his design is aesthetical in that it is an external through which he gives meaning to his life, but at the same time it is ethical in that it is a serious choice to which he is bound as the purely aesthetic individual could never be. Similarly, Sutpen's choices of wives are aesthetical in that he uses these women as mere objects to further his design,

but at the same time they are ethical in that they are also serious choices which he never seeks to alter unless forced to for the good of his design.

One purely aesthetic quality Sutpen possesses in his detachment from others, but it is not a characteristic that can be seen to operate alone in him at any particular time. The design overshadows everything else in his life. He is ethically bound to it from his boyhood, and not one of his aesthetic qualities ever supersedes it for a moment. To classify him as purely ethical could not be considered, but to classify him as purely aesthetical would be just as serious a mistake.

CONCLUSION

Although Kierkegaard considers a step-by-step progression through the three stages neither necessary nor preferable, it is clear that the aesthetical stage is the lowest stage of human existence, that the ethical is higher than the aesthetical but not the ultimate, and that the religious stage is the highest attainable in an individual's quest for meaningful and satisfactory existence. The casting of the characters previously discussed into a Kierkegaardian framework or hierarchy will therefore not detract from Kierkegaard's concept of the three basic categories, but will enlighten us as to the reasons for the failures and successes of Faulkner's characters.

Let us begin, then, at the beginning, with a comparison and contrast of the characters who dwell in the lowest stage of existence, the aesthetical. Quentin, Jason, Mr. and Mrs. Compson, and Joe Christmas all inhabit this stage. Each character inhabits this stage in his own individual way, but the result is basically the same for all.

We have seen that Quentin never makes a fundamental choice regarding his own being. This is also true

of Jason, Mr. and Mrs. Compson, and Joe Christmas. Quentin cannot make this choice because the inwardness necessary in order to choose is too painful for him; Jason, because he is too involved in making money and blaming others for his misfortune to know that the choice exists. The older Compsons subconsciously use illness and alcoholism in order to avoid making any choices at all; and Joe Christmas, in almost total unawareness that he even has a self, is obviously unable to choose his own particular being.

Quentin possesses more inwardness than the other aesthetes, but this inwardness is so painful that it yields negative rather than positive results. Were he willing to accept life with the knowledge that it contains imperfections, his capacity for self-reflection would release him from the despair of aestheticism. As it is, he seeks to withdraw from life and deny its reality; but since he cannot completely do so, the only other alternative he can recognize is suicide.

Joe Christmas is also afraid of inwardness, whether he knows it or not. He avoids inwardness through the opposition he keeps alive between himself and others. In this way at least he is a little more successful than Quentin at dwelling in the aesthetical stage. He is able to avoid conscious despair, but it is a deceptive avoidance at most. He is in despair all the same.

On the surface his despair yields a different result than Quentin's. It leads to murder rather than to suicide. Joanna tries to bring him out of his aestheticism, but he is not conscious enough of his own selfhood to accept such a progression. He must therefore be rid of her in order to continue to dwell in the despair which holds him prisoner. But Joe's realization that fate has decreed that he must murder Joanna is the same as a realization that he must also destroy himself. His death is in actuality no less a suicide than Quentin's.

Although Jason is also a victim of despair, he is able to do what Quentin would like to do but cannot; he is a master at using people as objects for his own gain. In inwardness he stands above Joe Christmas but below Quentin; in the ability to actively participate in the process of living, he stands only slightly above both. Perhaps his ability to remain detached is responsible for his success at manipulating others and himself. There is no Joanna Burden in his life to threaten his detachment, and there is not enough self-reflection in his being to cause any reluctance or remorse regarding his treatment of others.

Mr. and Mrs. Compson, like Quentin and Joe Christmas, are both withdrawn from life; but instead of taking the option of suicide, as Quentin does and as Joe

Christmas does indirectly, they use alcohol and illness as a means of escaping life and inwardness. Jason uses money in a similar way, but what involvement he does have with life is a result of his drive for the acquisition of money. Money is still a means of escape, however, because his obsession with it helps him to avoid inwardness.

Mr. Compson is not entirely like his wife. He possesses at least as much inwardness as Quentin does, whereas Mrs. Compson possesses virtually none. But his inwardness does not lead anywhere in a quest for selfhood. He reflects about the world and other people; he concerns himself with philosophical questions and answers; he even touches on what it means to live a meaningful life. But none of his thinking about life is related strictly to himself; therefore, he is never led to make a choice that would release him from aestheticism. He possesses an inwardness that is actually void of subjectivity, and it leads nowhere.

All of the aesthetic characters discussed have a problem reconciling themselves to time. They cannot grasp the idea of the eternal being embodied in time, and thus their minds become fixed upon one temporal dimension. For Quentin and his parents it is the past; for Jason, the future; for Joe Christmas, it is the present. Kierkegaard sees this kind of existence as

divisive in contrast to that existence which recognizes the eternal as part of the finitude of time.[71]

As has been mentioned previously, existence to Kierkegaard is a state of becoming. Unfortunately, existing individuals are not always aware of this fact. They decide, if anything, to "be themselves" rather than to become themselves and thereby trap themselves in a stage that leads nowhere. Kierkegaard's view is decidedly pessimistic. He believes that most people, even those who believe they are Christians, exist in either aesthetic or aesthetic-ethical categories.* A survey of Faulkner's major works indicates the same kind of pessimism. Most of his characters dwell in the same two categories.

The aesthetic-ethical category is slightly more satisfactory than the purely aesthetic category. Individuals who dwell in this stage usually manage to convince themselves that there is some meaning for their existence, though to Kierkegaard the meaning they find is a misconception. Caddy, Joanna Burden, and Sutpen inhabit this stage.

Caddy emerges as somewhat better able to cope with life than the other Compsons. Although the fact that she lives for the moment is a characteristic of

---

*See pp. 20-21.

the aesthete, this characteristic does allow her to accept life as it is; and her acceptance of life as it is enables her to take an active participation in it. Part of this participation is evidenced in her sensuality, but another part is evidenced in her ethical sense of duty. Her sense of duty, like Joanna's, has its basis in universal concepts of right and wrong. Sutpen, on the other hand, erects his own ethical norm in his "design." His duty is faithfulness to that design rather than to the demands of society. His problem with racism is more easily handled than Joe Christmas' because he meets it head-on rather than avoiding the issue.

The aesthetic qualities of Caddy, Joanna, and Sutpen are similar in some ways but different in others. Both Caddy and Joanna have erotic characteristics, whereas Sutpen has none. Neither character is in touch with the eternal, although Joanna makes an attempt to gain it. Joanna lives most of her life in the past, while Sutpen's mind is fixed on the future. Their attitudes toward time are as aesthetic as Caddy's, although Caddy lives for the present moment. Both Sutpen and Joanna use people as objects, and both Caddy and Joanna (at times) use their own bodies as objects.

Joanna and Sutpen at one time or another ethically resist the suffering meted out by fate, but Sutpen is more actively involved in this resistance. Joanna

chooses suffering, as is characteristic of the ethicist, as a way of affirming herself. She does not make an active attempt to eliminate it; instead, she simply faces up to it by refusing to leave Jefferson. Sutpen does not really choose suffering, but he is constantly fighting to keep it at bay. Suffering to him is the destruction of his design. Fate is its agent; thus his fight is directed against fate.

Both Caddy and Sutpen are unwilling to make the leap out of the category in which they dwell. Joanna is willing, but not capable of doing so. When she cannot make the leap, she decides upon suicide, but she intends to take Joe's life first. The problem is solved for her when her attempt fails and Joe's succeeds.

For both Sutpen and Joanna, dwelling in the aesthetic-ethical stage results in despair. Joanna is more aware of her despair than Sutpen because she possesses more inwardness than he does, but Sutpen's despair is just as great as hers. The difference is that he does not stop fighting it long enough to reflect upon it.

For the most part, the characters in the aesthetical stage withdraw from life. They maintain a detachment from everything and everyone, sometimes including even themselves. The aesthetic-ethicists face the same kinds of problems that the aesthetes face, but usually their ethical characteristics allow them to participate

more actively in life and to communicate better with others.

Joanna Burden is the one character from the three novels who can be seen to inhabit the ethical stage. Although the aesthetical has merely been "dethroned," she now possesses more of the inwardness necessary for spiritual fulfillment. The ethical becomes the governing principle of her life, while the aesthetical is subordinate to that principle. Joanna thus inhabits a higher stage of existence than the characters discussed so far, but her preoccupation with the past and her consequent sense of guilt present problems which she cannot overcome. Joanna's renunciation of sex when she makes the leap from the aesthetic-ethical stage to the ethical stage is unavoidable because she believes she has committed some sin in cohabiting with one who is below her level. When she begins the act of resignation, she fails to progress beyond ethicism because she seeks to destroy her inwardness. The result is despair.

Kierkegaard cites two basic ways of being in despair. The first is "the despair which is unconscious that it is despair, or the despairing unconsciousness of having a self and an eternal self." The second—"the despair which is conscious of being despair, as also it is conscious of being a slef wherein there is after all something eternal"—is made manifest in one of two

ways: "in despair at not willing to be itself [the despair of weakness], or in despair at willing to be itself [the despair of defiance or self-assertion]."[73] Joe Christmas, Jason, Mr. and Mrs. Compson, and Caddy experience the first kind of despair. All are virtually unconscious of the fact that they are in despair. Quentin and Joanna are conscious of their despair and therefore experience the second kind. It is a despair of weakness because they do nothing to alleviate it, but they are conscious of it as despair. Theirs is the despair of not willing to be themselves, which is initiated either by something earthly, by a concern about the eternal, or by a concern about themselves. Sutpen is also conscious of his despair, especially toward the end of his life; but his is the despair of willing to be himself, or the the despair of self-assertion.

Above Joanna and all the other characters, we find Dilsey, a black woman who, in these three novels at least, is the only character who reaches the stage of paradoxical religiousness.* She is the only character who has no problem with the concept of time, the only one who does not let herself be overcome by suffering, the only one whose life is not governed by externals.

---

*Bedell goes even further: "The one figure in the Faulknerian canon who stands clearly within the category of paradoxical religiousness is Dilsey. . . (p. 244).

She is one of those individuals of whom Faulkner says, "They endured."

Faulkner seems to be saying that the simple people like Dilsey are the ones able to achieve religiousness. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, believes that religiousness is for all, regardless of intellectual ability.* At any rate, Faulkner is not nearly so serious about religion as Kierkegaard is. In his words, "The writer must write out of his background. He must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian's background. . . .It's just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there."[74]

If we look at the characters in his novels, Faulkner seems to be as pessimistic about the fate of mankind as Kierkegaard, who believes that only a few people attain the religious stage[75] and that therefore only a few people live satisfactory lives. But when we compare Faulkner's assertions with those of Kierkegaard, Faulkner emerges as the more optimistic of the two:"I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail . . . because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."[76]

Dilsey is not the only character in Faulkner who

---

*See p. 35.

"endures" or "prevails," but the others will not stand the test of Kierkegaard's religious stage. For Faulkner, the characters who prevail or endure are those who find meaningful relationships with others, those who see a spiritual kinship with the natural world, or those who, like Dilsey, accept themselves and life as they are and find meaning for their existence through faith.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Ronald Grimsley, Kierkegaard: A Biographical Introduction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 29.

[2]Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Bobert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 83.

[3]George C. Bedell, Kierkegaard and Faulkner: Modalities of Existence (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p. 104.

[4]Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, in Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death (Garden City and New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 176.

[5]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, pp. 28-32.

[6]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 184.

[7]Bedell, p. 82.

[8]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Until Death, p. 85.

[9]Bedell, p. 82.

[10]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, pp. 29-30.

[11]Bedell, p. 194.

[12]Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, in Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death (Garden City and New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 64-65.

[13]Søren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 412-13.

[14]Søren Kierkegaard, The Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the "Philosophical Fragments," in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 219.

[15]Ibid., p. 220.

[16]Bedell, pp. 82-83.

[17]A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 109. Robert Bretall points this out in his introduction to Two Edifying Discourses, which Kierkegaard published to accompany Either/Or. He also asserts that "there is nothing in them that he would have repudiated later. One must understand God as immanent in man and nature before one can understand Him as 'the absolute paradox.'" This seems hardly likely since Kierkegaard later classifies the immanent relationship to God as paganism. (See Postscript, in A Kierkegaard Anthology, p. 222 and elsewhere.)

[18]Bedell, p. 82.

[19]Ibid., p. 90.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Søren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way, trans. with introduction by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 9.

[22]Ibid., p. 430.

[23]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 163.

[24]Søren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 337.

[25]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 179,

[26]Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 329.

[27]Søren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 289.

[28]Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 336.

[29]Ibid., p. 332.

[30]Joseph Blotner, Faulkner, A Biography (New York: Random House, 1974), II, p. 1441.

[31]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 224.

[32]Cleanth Brooks, The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 43.

[33]Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 332.

[34]Brooks, p. 40.

[35]Bedell, p. 85. Bedell asserts that there are innumerable ways of existing in each category, including the religious, but he only gives examples of these various ways in the aesthetical and the ethical stages.

[36]William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying (New York: The Modern Library, 1946), p. 98.

[37]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 90.

[38]Bedell, p. 84.

[39]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 89.

[40]Grimsley, p. 30.

[41]Edmund L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964), p. 98.

[42]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 188.

[43]Bedell, p. 204.

[44]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 220.

[45]Bedell, p. 86.

[46]Ibid., p. 196.

[47]Ibid., p. 225.

[48]Søren Kierkgaard, The Attack Upon "Christendom," in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 467.

[49]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 57.

[50]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, pp. 84-85.

[51]Jean Kellogg, Dark Prophets of Hope—Dostoevsky, Sartre, Camus, Faulkner (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1975), p. 137.

[52]William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: The Modern Library, 1932), p. 27.

[53]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 99.

[54]Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of Light in August," in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Fredericks J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1960), p. 25.

[55]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, p. 93.

[56]Ibid., p. 103.

[57]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 148.

[58]Ibid., p. 177.

[59]Ibid., p. 178.

[60]Ibid., p. 175.

[61]Ibid., pp. 177-78.

[62]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 222.

[63]Ibid., p. 225.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 59.

[66]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 179.

[67]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1936), p. 16.

[68]Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 59.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Kierkegaard, Either/Or, pp. 105-06.

[71]Kierkegaard, Works of Love, p. 295.

[72]Kierkegaard, Postscript, p. 250.

[73]Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, pp. 175-180.

[74]William Faulkner, Faulkner in the University, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p. 86.

[75]Kierkegaard, The Attack Upon "Christendom,", p. 468.

[76]William Faulkner, Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, ed. James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p. 120.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

Bedell, George C. Kierkegaard and Faulkner: Modalities of Existence. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972.

Blotner, Joseph. Faulkner, A Biography. New York: Random House, 1974.

Brooks, Cleanth. The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963.

Faulkner, William. Absalom, Absalom! New York: The Modern Library, 1932.

Faulkner, William. Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: Random House, Inc., 1965.

Faulkner, William. Faulkner in the University. Ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner. New York: Random House, Inc., 1965.

Faulkner, William. Light in August. New York: The Modern Library, 1932.

Faulkner, William. The Sound and the Fury. The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying. New York: The Modern Library, 1946.

Grimsley, Ronald. Kierkegaard: A Biographical Introduction. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973.

Kazin, Alfred. "The Stillness of Light in August." William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery. New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962.

Kellogg, Jean. Dark Prophets of Hope—Dostoevsky, Sartre, Camus, Faulkner. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1975.

A Kierkegaard Anthology. Ed. Robert Bretall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

Kierkegaard, Søren. Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death. Trans. Walter Lowrei. Garden City and New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954.

Kierkegaard, Søren. Stages on Life's Way. Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945.

Volpe, Edmund L. A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964.