

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**  
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**SOUTHERN GOTHIC: THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE AND SPIRITUAL  
DEGENERATION IN THE WORKS OF  
WILLIAM FAULKNER AND CORMAC McCARTHY**

**M. A. Thesis**

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## Preface

The main aim of this master's thesis is a close analysis, with a special interest in and focus on the methods of conveying violence, of three early Southern Gothic novels – “Light in August”, “Absalom, Absalom!” and “The Hamlet” by William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) and three such novels – “Outer Dark”, “Child of God” and “Blood Meridian” by Cormac McCarthy (born in 1933). In connection with that task, an analysis of the earlier Gothic tradition of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and also of the main traits of Southern Gothic as a separate movement are included, which can be found in the Introduction. Chapter One presents the summary of the lives of Faulkner and McCarthy and also a survey of violence in their early work in general, as well as a short discussion of their stylistic means to convey violence. Chapters Two and Three are dedicated correspondingly to the above-mentioned three studies of violence and spiritual degeneration by Faulkner and McCarthy.

One more aim of the thesis is to ascertain in which directions the depiction of violence in these two writers further evolved. On the basis of a comparison of the results of Chapters Two and Three with the later works of these writers a generalization about their oeuvres is achieved, which is essentially that they evolved in a counterpointing manner, Faulkner turning shallower and McCarthy deeper in their late careers. While the general course of Faulkner's work is relatively well-known, the author hopes to contribute something especially to the interpretations of McCarthy, presently still a less known writer. In the Conclusion, the results of the overall research are presented.

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## Introduction

### **The Term “Gothic”.**

Although this thesis is basically about two Southern Gothic writers, it may be necessary to explain the history and background of the whole concept of “Gothic” as used in literary theory.

The term Gothic comes from the name of the Eastern Germanic tribe Goths. It first started to be used by Renaissance writers and theoreticians in Italy, and it was initially used to refer to a certain period of mediaeval architecture (the Gothic style) which these authors considered ugly and tasteless. For them, it meant something disharmonious, rough and uncultured. Later the same concept was used in reference to certain schools of mediaeval painting as well (as the pictures of Matthias Grünewald, notably his Isenheim altar painting which presents Jesus on the cross in the form of a cadaver, almost green with decomposition).

As a literary term, “Gothic” first appeared in the “Letters of Chivalry and Romance” by the Englishman Richard Hurd in 1762. Soon thereafter, the first Gothic novels appeared. They established the tradition of Gothic fiction as something dealing with ghoulish themes, with a mixture of colourful fantasy and horror scenes. It is characteristic of Gothic stories that they present either mediaeval or otherwise darkly clouded characters, vicious scheming, phenomena that look or indeed are otherworldly, and often also melodramatic recognitions of lost relatives. They are usually set in abandoned or ruined castles, monasteries or mansions with cryptic or hidden passageways, occasionally also in caves or deep forests. Evil and violence are always a factor in Gothic, incest or rape being common themes.

By some of these characteristics, elements of Gothic could be detected in much earlier literature, prior to the appearance of the genre proper. The strangling of

Laocoön by a sea-snake in “The Iliad”, the brutal murder of Cassandra and Agamemnon in Aeschylus’ “Oresteia” with the ominous signs and comments by the choir that lead to it, are certainly both horrible and fanciful. Vicious schemes and crushingly horrific crimes are also common in the plays of Seneca. Nevertheless, it would be extending the concept too far to speak of these scenes as Gothic, since the context around and the system of values underneath them are completely different, having to do rather with the Greek term “hubris” (arrogance) and the rage of gods. Likewise, although the Old Testament abounds in terrible violent scenes, all of them are tied up with a sense of the anger or favour of the monotheistic God, whereas in traditional Gothic evil rather emerges as a fully independent force, one whose origins are unknown and inexplicable.

It is more reasonable to try to detect the first truly proto-Gothic motifs in the literary heritage of ancient Germanic tribes. “The Song of the Nibelungs” of the ancient Germans and the Scandinavian “Elder Edda” also present terrible murders, as well as supernatural forces. Moreover, very often they focus on violent scenes that occur among family members or at least within a tribe, a trait also characteristic of the genre proper. And the settings in these works are naturally mediaeval, darkly clouded, as they indeed were created and written down in the middle ages. So, although nothing is known about the literature of the Goths who gave the term its name, it is among their kindred tribes that the first sense of Gothic appeared.

From a later period, the tradition that occasionally came very close to being proto-Gothic was the Elizabethan drama. Marlowe, Shakespeare (especially in “Titus Andronicus” and also in “Hamlet”) and other Elizabethan playwrights (such as John Webster whose “The Duchess of Malfi” includes motifs strongly reminiscent of Radcliffe’s “The Mysteries of Udolpho” (Grein 1995: 16)) created works abounding

in violence, murders and family conflicts, sometimes also having mediaeval settings (as the castle of Elsinore in “Hamlet”). But it should be said that the influence of these authors is generally even more detectable in Southern Gothic (whose characteristics will be discussed later) than in the traditional European Gothic.

As an immediate precursor of English Gothic fiction, the flourishing of the “Graveyard Poetry” in England in the early 1700s should be mentioned. Among its numerous representatives, poets such as Thomas Gray, James Thomson and William Collins, to name just a few, expressed the enthralling romanticism of death, mediaevalism and graveyards. Its influence was later felt among the early Romantic poets proper, such as Thomas Chatterton and William Blake, but it definitely also influenced the fiction writers.

In discussing the term Gothic further, two aspects should be brought out. Firstly, it should be kept in mind that even though Gothic is a type of horror literature, not all horror literature is strictly Gothic. For example, Gogol’s story “Viy” or R. L. Stevenson’s “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” are horrible, but they are not Gothic, neither is “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. Even if some critics have termed them Gothic, they are not typical of the genre. What differentiates them from the genre proper are mainly the settings, the atmosphere and the type of relations between the characters. Secondly, although all the traditional Gothic writers were Romanticists, they differ from the mainstream Romanticism by their literary method. Most Romanticists had a great faith in a spontaneous outpour of sentences, producing their work in ecstasy, as if inspired by a heavenly spirit. The Gothic writers, on the other hand, even though they pictured irrational situations and phenomena, based their work on fully rational calculations of the impact of their stories on the readers. Most of that fiction is composed according to strict principles. This rational trend of Gothicists was

carried the farthest by E. A. Poe who created the most calculated and the most artistically excellent works of the genre proper.

All Gothic writers present some kind of development of evil. As the genre evolved, the interests of the authors gradually shifted from the victims' side to the side of the villains, until the villains also became a kind of heroes. (Southern Gothic has kept the focus on the villain-heroes, while presenting them in a psychologically deeper way). Even though some Gothic writers use the figure and the influence of the devil, evil in Gothic in general is less related to the religious understanding of evil of earlier periods than to a modern view of evil arising as an independent, perhaps psychopathological force from somewhere in the Freudian unconscious. It can therefore be said that Gothic writers anticipated by about a century the modern interpretations of the reasons of people harming other people.

The flourishing of the Gothic genre falls between the 1760s and the 1820s in England. The main classical Gothic authors are:

Horace (Horatio) Walpole (1717 – 1797), son of a British prime minister, whose only novel “The Castle of Otranto” (1764) set the standards of the genre and proved a great financial success; he also wrote a tragedy about incest, “The Mysterious Mother” (1768);

Ann Radcliffe (1764 – 1823), called “the queen of terror”, who earned a fortune and became extremely popular with her Gothic novels “The Romance of the Forest” (1791), “The Mysteries of Udolpho” (1794) and “Italian” (1797);

Clara Reeve (1729 – 1807), the author of the didactic Gothic novel “The Old English Baron”;

William Beckford (1760 – 1844), the author of the Oriental Gothic novel “Vathek” (1786), blending cruelty, terror, and eroticism;

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775 – 1818), whose novel “The Monk” (1796) first introduces truly supernatural forces and includes seduction, incestuous rape, matricide, other murders and satanism, all set in mediaeval surroundings;

Charles Robert Maturin (1782 – 1824), whose novel in stories, “Melmoth the Wanderer” (1820) unites Gothic themes with the motif of an Irish Faust.

A late representative of Gothic writing is the Victorian author James Hogg (“Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner”). Sometimes also classified as Gothic writers are Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley with her “Frankenstein” and Bram Stoker with his “Dracula”. Direct influences of Gothic can be perceived, as to poetry, in Coleridge’s “Christabel” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, in Keats’ “The Eve of St. Agnes”, and in certain works of Byron and Shelley; as to prose, in Jane Austen (“Northanger Abbey”, 1818, a parody of Gothic novels), in E. T. A. Hoffmann, and, somewhat less directly, in some of the works of Goethe, Washington Irving, Walter Scott, Louisa May Alcott, Emily Brontë, William Cullen Bryant, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Ivan Turgenev, Oscar Wilde, and certainly, William Faulkner.

### **The School of Terror and the School of Horror within Gothic.**

The first major division within Gothic literature started with the differentiation of the concepts of terror and of horror and with corresponding trends in fiction. Ann Radcliffe, “the queen of terror”, has written in an essay called “On the Supernatural in Poetry”, published posthumously, about that distinction:

They must be men of very cold imaginations [---] with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning,

anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one [---]" (cited in: Grein 1995: 59).

Radcliffe thus clearly defined herself as a "terror writer". The main initiator of the opposing school was Matthew Gregory Lewis. The first chief distinction is that while the school of terror gave its "ghosts" ultimately natural reasons, the school of horror introduced actual otherworldly phenomena. Secondly, terror, as Birgit Grein writes, is understood "as a method of evoking anxiety, seen as connected with uncertainty, threat and guessing, while horror implies an actual confrontation with the object of anxiety (Grein 1995: 59 – 60)." As to the main objects of study in this thesis, the works of Faulkner and McCarthy, by their distancing their descriptions from the actual scenes of violence and by creating suspension through vague hints they generally apply the methods preferred by Radcliffe (characteristically of the whole of Southern Gothic), but McCarthy especially in his early works also uses straightforward conveyance of the ghoulish and the macabre and may therefore owe something to the school of horror. In general, the distinction between terror and horror is important only within the traditional Gothic fiction and is not very essential to the main topic of this thesis; however, Radcliffe's claim may help one understand why in telling about horrible things Faulkner and McCarthy have not created "horror literature" in any pure and strict sense.

#### **Charles Brockden Brown (1771 – 1810).**

C. B. Brown is sometimes called the first American novelist; in any case, he was one of the first ones. He was also the writer who introduced the Gothic tradition into American literature. With his novels such as "Edgar Huntly", "Wieland" (his most famous work) and "Arthur Mervyn" he continued the Gothic focus on emotional extremity. His innovation was, first, to shift the settings from Europe to American

locales – forests, towns, outlying estates, and second, to offer psychologically deeper insights into his characters and to analyze the reasons of irrational behaviour. His psychologization looks surprisingly modern and is a factor which connects him with Southern Gothic. Unconventionally for Gothic, he also used first person narrators (as did Poe later). Charles Brockden Brown was greatly admired by N. Hawthorne, himself a writer with Gothic traits, through whom his influence may have reached Southern Gothic writers.

### **Clarification of the Term “Southern Gothic”.**

The term “Southern Gothic” need not be treated and used uncritically. Southern Gothic is not a direct continuation of the classical Gothic tradition, differing from it in various ways (psychologization, more realistic character, absence of entertainment function). Nevertheless, there are also common traits in the two traditions (which will be brought out below). The transference of the term Gothic from the first tradition to the other may have occurred through the influence of such transitional figures as E. A. Poe, who was both traditionally Gothic and from the Southern U. S. states. If the later Southern Gothic classics were less influenced by the English Gothic, they were certainly all influenced by Poe. Even though the term Southern Gothic may be misleading to those who only know the original Gothic movement, since the term is widely used in literary theory, it will also be used in this thesis.

### **General Characteristics of Southern Gothic.**

Southern Gothic is a school of fiction writing in the Southern U. S. states dating mostly from the 20th century. It may be just to say that the tradition started with William Faulkner who has written some of the most classical Southern Gothic works. The most typical Southern Gothic writers beside Faulkner are Flannery O'Connor (1925 – 1964), Carson McCullers (1917 – 1967) and Cormac McCarthy. Sometimes also listed among Southern Gothic writers are Truman Capote (1924 – 1984), Tennessee Williams (1911 – 1983), and William Styron (born 1925).

What makes the school Southern is that most of its authors come from the Southern states and that they all write on Southern subjects. Among the aspects of Southern life typically depicted in the tradition are the racist heritage of its white population (which reached its peak in the exploitation of millions of Black slaves in plantations before the Civil War and has been later exemplified in the activities of such racist organizations as the Klu Klux Klan and others, and in the segregation of races in schools, churches and public transportation), the sense of loss and of deprivation of history because of the defeat in the Civil War, the Southern pride or arrogance, class conflicts, empty or deserted manor houses in former plantations, religious fanaticism in the form of harsh Calvinist doctrines and practices with their belief in fatalism (all Southern Gothic writers have been influenced by the existence of the so-called “Bible Belt”, an area of Ultra-Christian population in the South). Very often, religious fanaticism occurs together with racism.

What makes the school Gothic is its focus on violence, such as beating, rapes, other kinds of abuse, and murders, including, very often, one family member killing another, and also lynchings. Incest or incestuous feelings sometimes are a factor in the plot. Portraits of psychopathological, chronically depressive or otherwise gloomy or

angry characters are very frequent, the apparent omnipresence of evil raising acute questions about its origins. Sometimes these states of mind develop into having hallucinations. The settings are often former magnificent mansions now deserted. In historical Southern Gothic novels, these mansions are left masterless when the plantation owners go to the Civil War, a point which reminds one of a similar motif of men of nobility leaving their castles to go to Crusades in the traditional Gothic novels. A perversion of normal human psyche sometimes makes the characters look like ghosts or seems to give them supernatural powers.

### **Emphasis on Violence in Southern Gothic.**

Much of the essence of Southern Gothic is revealed in the title of Flannery O'Connor's second novel: "The Violent Bear It Away". It could stand as a key phrase also for the vision of Faulkner's and McCarthy's. A quotation from one of Jesus' sermons in the gospels, the phrase has produced some confusion among interpreters. In the Latin Bible the whole sentence reads as follows: "A diebus autem Ioannis Baptistae usque nunc, regnum caelorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud" (Matt. 11: 12). In Latin as well as in the Greek original, the verb used in the phrase suggests greater violence than "bearing away", meaning rather "to grab". As becomes clear from the sentence, the "it" refers to the Kingdom of Heaven. Most interpreters tend to think that with these words Jesus must have criticized the intolerant and the overly (or hypocritically) zealous among believers who "grab the Heaven" to themselves by making true faith look inaccessible or unattractive to potential converts to Christianity. It is thus with a pinch of irony that Jesus speaks here (for certainly if the Christian heaven exists at all, no mortal can really "bear it away"). O'Connor dedicates most of her pages specifically to the extremes an obsessive Christian

(Protestant) idea can lead people, while trying to retain her own moderate Catholic position. Her books are a direct illustration of the phrase, but in a more indirect way other Southern writers have echoed these accusatory words as effectively or even better. Although the rigorous Southern Calvinism is an important factor also in Faulkner and McCarthy, they less often choose to portray outright religious fanatics than people (usually poor people, outcasts), who, imbued with the harsh doctrines of their background, almost consciously and with a kind of vicious joy choose the path of crime or violence. Instead of finding a true haven of tolerance and serenity that faith should offer, they perversely create a pseudo- or counterheaven for their spoiled egos either out of their twisted sense of justice or of their lust and greed. That is almost universally true of all the significant characters of these authors: they never make a chief character out of a person truly at peace with himself. What ties the Southern Gothic fiction therefore with English Gothic is, more than a few separate common motifs, mainly the far-fetched study of both physical and spiritual violence and the almost ghostly, hallucinatory effect that the descriptions of it may attain.

#### **A Comparison of Traditional Gothic with Southern Gothic.**

Neither Faulkner nor Cormac McCarthy (nor Flannery O'Connor, for example) can by any strict standards be classified as belonging to the traditional Gothic school. By these standards, modern authors such as Stephen King are much closer to (though not identical with) the complex of motifs found in Horace Walpole or Ann Radcliffe. While the traditional Gothic is mainly an entertainment genre, the Southern Gothic is mostly highly intellectual fiction, very difficult to read, offering deep psychological or even philosophical insights and solutions. Nevertheless it is possible to draw parallels between the traditional Gothic and Southern Gothic, as at

least some of the classical Gothic novels also contain intellectually challenging elements and meet high requirements in the limits of their genre.

Of all the Southern Gothic novels, Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!" stands best for a comparison with the English Gothic. But it is likewise possible to find such connections in the early novels of McCarthy. The main common motifs are:

1) the existence of a villain-hero who is the main protagonist (omnipresent in virtually all of Southern Gothic fiction);

2) a complicated network of family connections, sometimes hidden, which produces instances of one family member endangering or harming another and also points of sudden recognition and rediscoveries (common throughout the English Gothic, as well as in "Absalom, Absalom!");

3) the figure of a pure maiden in some ways endangered by evil forces (a motif especially characteristic of Ann Radcliffe – also found in Faulkner (Judith Sutpen of "Absalom, Absalom!", also, in "The Sound and the Fury", the romanticized figure of Caddy Compson in her brother Quentin's consciousness; as an exception, in the figure of Temple Drake of "Sanctuary", Faulkner has used the same motif ironically, since even if she is a virgin at the beginning, she is, from the start, as morally corrupt as the criminal who abuses her);

4) dark ruins, castles or mansions that seem haunted by supernatural forces.

Not all these motifs necessarily appear in all Southern Gothic novels.

As to the fourth aspect, since the Southern Gothic writers never introduce real ghosts (merely creating coincidences that may be difficult to believe (an exception are some of Faulkner's less significant short stories depicting otherworldly phenomena, such as the stories "Beyond", "Black Music" and "The Leg")), they are more indebted to the Radcliffe tradition, the school of terror. But the dark building itself is a unifying

element of the vast majority of works of both traditions. As Birgit Grein writes (1995: 12), in Gothic fiction from Walpole to Poe the settings (mediaeval castles earlier and manor houses later) represent a crucial role in the narrative, functioning almost like a living character. The same is true of Thomas Sutpen's mansion in Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!": in a way Sutpen remains alive in a ghost-like state and does not die before his tremendous house, a personification of his dreams, has burnt to ruins forty-three years after his murder (Sutpen's mansion clearly echoes the House of Usher of Poe's short story).

In the following the most outstanding parallels between certain works of the classical Gothic writers and some of the Southern Gothic novels are brought out.

Charles Maturin's "Melmoth" can be seen as a precursor of "Absalom, Absalom!" in that like Thomas Sutpen, its title character lives under a Faustian predicament of his own choice (traits of the typical Gothic villain-hero also connect Sutpen with such later characters related to Gothicism as the monster of Frankenstein (of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley) or Dracula (of Bram Stoker) because it is with a superhuman energy that he twists the basic laws of humanity into a monstrous career). On the other hand, since some of the component stories of Maturin's novel tell about religious hypocrisy, excesses and fanaticism, it can be seen to have influenced the whole oeuvre of Flannery O'Connor and partly Faulkner in his depiction of Calvinist fanatics such as McEachern and Hines of "Light in August".

The sudden comical aspects that Faulkner and McCarthy occasionally give to their otherwise tragic or criminal characters may owe something, among other influences, to William Beckford's Oriental Gothic "Vathek", imbued with a comic and ironical tonality in the depiction of horrors (but it is worth noting that a

paradoxical mixture with comic irony is often characteristic of austere tragic works of art, such as some of Beethoven's symphonies).

Similarly to Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis' "The Monk" who rapes a fifteen-year-old girl, Thomas Sutpen satisfies his lust with an even younger girl in "Absalom, Absalom!", later criminally abandoning her. The scene of the abbess being torn to pieces by the enraged crowd in "The Monk" resembles the lynching scenes in Faulkner's "Sanctuary" and "Light in August". The feverish, delirium-like structure of the narrative and switches from darkness to light and back in Lewis' book are certainly a common point with "Absalom, Absalom!"

As to German literature, E. T. A. Hoffmann's Gothic novel "The Devil's Elixirs" ("Die Elixiere des Teufels") presents the wanderings of a vicious monk pursued by a *doppelgänger* who sometimes claims responsibility for the monk's crimes, sometimes performs evil in his name. Such a motif seems to be echoed in McCarthy's novel "Outer Dark" where incestuous Culla Holme remains followed by a murderous triad of men who may easily be seen as extended metaphors for the darker side of his own split, sin-laden personality. They finally murder his and his sister's son whom he had left behind to die at the beginning of the novel. Both Hoffmann's and McCarthy's novels should be seen as Gothic parables or fables, since the *doppelgänger* motif cannot be interpreted in a straightforwardly realistic way. But characteristic of "Outer Dark" as a Southern Gothic work is that the supernatural origin of Hoffmann's character's state of damnation (a drink offered by the devil) is replaced with a natural, merely culturally unacceptable and repulsive cause (incest).

### **General Characteristics of the Southern Gothic of Flannery O'Connor.**

It is the abundance of horrible and macabre details that makes Flannery O'Connor's two novels and thirty-one short stories Gothic. Her villains are religious fanatics, caught in some fierce restlessness and frenzy that makes them somewhat similar to the vicious monks of traditional Gothic. The main crime of those characters is the misinterpretation of the Christian faith; the avidness with which they murder or burn in the name of their factional convictions is clearly intended to shock the reader into some higher state of consciousness. In O'Connor's first novel, "Wise Blood" (1952), a young man Hazel Motes, a former soldier, founds a paradoxical Church Without Christ. After a rival prophet arises from the congregation, Hazel kills him by running him down with a car. Hazel then blinds himself with quicklime, falls sick and dies. In the second novel, "The Violent Bear It Away" (1960), an old, unmarried inhabitant of a backwoods region in the South, possessed of a prophetic drive, urges his grandnephew to find his call as a missionary of fanatical Puritanism. The youth, Francis Marion Tarwater, is after some resistance converted into his new role. As a test, the granduncle wants him to baptize in the biblical ways the weak-minded little son, Bishop, of the youth's uncle Rayber. As the fanatical granduncle dies (it happens at the breakfast table, while he is delivering the first spoonful into his mouth), Francis burns his body and his hut and hitchhikes to Uncle Rayber. The latter is an embodiment of rationalism and intellectualism, far removed from any sort of prophesying. Whereas Francis wants to give his son "a new birth" in baptism, the uncle tries to dissuade him. But when Francis nevertheless takes the imbecile boy to the river and presses him into the water, by this act of baptism he also drowns him. Towards the end of the book, while hitchhiking, Francis is picked up by a "pale, lean, old-looking young man with deep hollows under his cheekbones" and with lips "as

white as the cigaret” in his mouth (O’Connor 1988: 469). The man gives him liqueur to drink, and as he has dozed off, takes him into the forest and rapes him. This scene, characteristic of Southern Gothic, shows evil as an inexplicable force that just dwells in some people and may spring up unexpectedly. Recovering from the successive shocks, the youth becomes ever more convinced of his call as a man of a holy mission. It would be a mistake to think that the author’s sympathy is entirely or even mainly on the rational Rayber’s side. Even though the prophetic youth is a Protestant, not a Catholic (as O’Connor herself was), the novelist seems partly to affirm his act as a test of true faith (O’Connor attitude to Southern Calvinism was ambivalent; even though she as a Catholic severely criticized it, she made it into her central theme and, as a devout Christian, not only abhorred but also admired it).

Altogether, the impression of O’Connor’s works is contradictory. On the one hand, she was an independent artist, accurately and honestly conveying extreme behaviour and extreme states of mind, not preaching doctrines of any kind. Her depictions of violence and madness in people’s lives are as powerful and masterfully written as those of Faulkner and McCarthy. On the other hand, it is still perceivable that her parables were founded on her own ideas of a true conventional religion. Whereas for Faulkner and McCarthy, their art is their supreme religion (closest to the existentialist view of a solitary person confronted with an incomprehensible universe), O’Connor intended her works to serve as warning illustrations of faith gone astray for an ultimate reinstatement of true (Catholic, for her) religiousness. Subordinating her fiction to her faith, O’Connor therefore remains more factional and less universalistic than Faulkner and McCarthy. Still, by her use of grotesque, distorted characters she has unquestionably influenced McCarthy.

## Chapter One.

### The Lives of William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy.

#### A Survey of Their Early Works

#### **The Life of William Faulkner.**

William Cuthbert Faulkner was born on the 25th of September, 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi, the eldest of four brothers. When he was three, the family moved to the neighbouring university town of Oxford, which became the prototype of his fictional Jefferson and where he remained living to his old age. He attended the University of Mississippi at Oxford without graduating. During World War One, he was trained to be a war pilot in Canada, but he never actually went to the war. His first book, a collection of poetry, was published in 1924, his first novel appearing in 1926. With his first masterpiece, the novel “The Sound and the Fury” (1929), he became famous among literary and academic circles; however, he was initially more admired in France and elsewhere abroad (young French writers almost deifying him and Sartre using his motifs as illustrations to his philosophy) than in his native America. He married Estelle Oldham Franklin in 1929 and had two daughters with her in 1931 and 1933, the first daughter dying in infancy (Blotner 1974: 681 – 685). Although Faulkner had often quarrels with his wife and although he kept lovers, he and his wife never divorced. The years from 1929 to 1942 mark Faulkner’s first, great and tragic period in writing fiction. The majority of his works deal with his fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi, uniting peculiarly Southern problems with a universalist approach. His books had little commercial success; because of money problems, he also worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood. His fame in the U. S. was secured with the publication of “The Portable Faulkner”, edited by Malcolm Cowley, in 1946. In 1950, Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for the year

1949. His novel "A Fable" (1954) received the Pulitzer Prize. Other than writing, Faulkner was interested in and practised flying planes, riding horses and fox-hunting. He also used the material of these hobbies in his books. From the 1950s, he spent a lot of time at his daughter Jill's new home in Virginia. Throughout his life, he was a chronic alcoholic. He died on the 6th of July, 1962, while in a hospital receiving treatment for his alcoholic problems. Altogether, he wrote nineteen novels (one of which is partly a play) and over a hundred short stories. Faulkner as a writer was influenced by the English Romantics (Keats, Swinburne), Dostoevski, Nathaniel Hawthorne (with whom he shares an interest in Puritan extremism), Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Marcel Proust, to list only a few influences. He has in his turn influenced numerous Southern writers (including Cormac McCarthy), the French *nouveau roman* (especially Claude Simon (Ojamaa 1986: 191)), and the Latin American magic realism (especially Gabriel García Márquez (Talvet 1980: 8)). Less directly, his unique style and innovative methods have had an influence everywhere in the world. His works have inspired innumerable dissertations and theses at universities, and his best short stories have been frequently anthologized. He remains regarded as a great writer beyond doubt, arguably even the greatest American writer of all time, and one of the main classics of modernism in the world. Although he experimented with revolutionary literary techniques, he at the same time remained a story-teller much in the fashion of former traditions.

### **The Life of Cormac McCarthy.**

Cormac McCarthy (initially named Charles McCarthy, Jr.; he later legally changed his first name into Cormac) was born on the 20th of July, 1933, in Providence, Rhode Island, as the third oldest of six children. The family had an Irish background. When Cormac was four, the family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee.

Since he grew up in the South and has written about it, he is considered a Southern writer. He attended the University of Tennessee in 1951 – 1952 and then again in 1957 – 1960, without ever taking a degree. He served in the U. S. army in 1953 – 1957, half of the time in Alaska. He married a fellow student, Lee Holleman, in 1961, with whom he had a son, Cullen (who became an architect). They were divorced a few years later. He then married an English actress, Anne DeLisle, in 1966, from whom he was separated in 1976 and later divorced (there were no children). Frequently using alcohol in his youth, McCarthy later turned to a sober lifestyle. His first books tell about the life of poor people in the mountains and rural areas of Tennessee. His first novel, “The Orchard Keeper” (1965), was awarded the William Faulkner Award for the best first novel written by an American. McCarthy’s early novels, especially beginning with his second one, were full of such horrors and repulsiveness that they shocked the readers and had almost no financial success at all. The situation started to change with his sixth novel, “All the Pretty Horses” (1992), which became overnight a bestseller, making the author famous in the U. S. and all over the world and which won the National Book Award for fiction in 1992 and the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction in 1993. “All the Pretty Horses” was the first part of “The Border Trilogy” which was completed in 1998. McCarthy is an extremely modest person, avoiding public gatherings and having given only one interview in his whole life. He has a wide range of interests among which horsebreeding and the preservation of wildlife have a prominent place. In 1974, he moved from the South to the Southwest, the desert states of the U. S.. Although remaining a Southern writer, in his second period he has shifted his focus on the history and problems of his new home region (an attempt to widen and transform native Southern traditions by means of Southwestern topics is a widespread trend in

the whole of modern Southern literature). At the beginning of the 21st century he has continued leading a solitary life in Texas. He has promised to complete and publish his ninth novel by the year 2004 or 2005. As of 2003, he had written eight novels, one play and two screenplays.

The greatest influences on Cormac McCarthy have been Herman Melville (his favourite writer), Dostoevski, Faulkner, and Hemingway. He has expressed his dissatisfaction with the works of Henry James and Proust. "I don't understand them," he is reported having said, "to me, that's not literature. A lot of writers who are considered good I consider strange" (Woodward 1992: 4 – 5). Although McCarthy's works do have certain postmodernist traits (such as the occasional use of more or less metafictional methods), he hardly fits into the postmodernist mainstream. The factional qualities of much of postmodernist literature are alien to him. Avoiding Faulkner's open rhetoric, he very clearly writes not for or about any specific group, but about the general "old verities of the human heart" (a phrase from Faulkner's speech at the acceptance of the Nobel Prize).

### **A Survey of Violence in the Early Works of William Faulkner Not Analyzed in Chapter Two.**

Faulkner started his literary career as a late Romantic poet. When he turned to prose in 1925 it was first with short stories offering psychological portraits of the types of people in his neighbourhood. The most interesting story involving violence in his juvenilia is the story "Sunset". It gives a moving and tragicomic portrait of an uneducated Black man who goes aboard a ship in hope of travelling to his ancestral home in Africa, is given landing somewhere on a shore of the Mississippi river, being lied to that "this is Africa", and is accidentally killed in shooting in the darkness (Blotner 1974: 425 – 426). Faulkner's first novel "Soldier's Pay" (1926) was written

under the influence of Hemingway, in the “lost generation” fashion, and presented a wounded hero, a type of character that with the exception of “Sartoris” later disappeared from his fiction. The novel is written in an impressionist, freshly poetic style, dealing mainly with love and friendship, violence not being a central theme in it. His second novel “Mosquitoes” (1927), influenced by Aldous Huxley, is about artists and writers and has likewise very little focus on violence.

With his third novel, “Sartoris” (1929; in a longer version, “Flags in the Dust”, written in 1927, published in 1973), Faulkner started his cycle about the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, united by common characters and themes, and it is here that violence first has a role. The spiritually wounded hero Bayard Sartoris, a veteran of World War One, is driven by guilt because he could not prevent the death of his twin brother John in the war. The sense of guilt develops into a death drive, the character purposefully putting himself into dangerous situations, as when riding a wild horse without a saddle, then driving a car so fiercely that his grandfather sitting next to him dies of a heart attack (an indirect murder) and finally flying a wrecked plane that crashes (an indirect suicide). Before his final doomed flight, Sartoris has married Narcissa Benbow and shortly after his death, their child is born. Connected with Narcissa there is the other theme of violence or spiritual degeneration in the novel: introducing the first representative of the voracious Snopes clan, Faulkner makes him send anonymous love letters to Narcissa that violate her sense of decency by being erotic to the point of being obscene. Finally Snopes disappears, having stolen money from the bank where he had been working.

“The Sound and the Fury” (1929). This novel, considered by many to be Faulkner’s best, includes no murder but a suicide and there is a lot of other kinds of violence. The continually whining mother of the Compson family keeps her husband

and children in a state of continuous psychoterror. The youngest son, idiot Benjy, attacks and tries to rape a schoolgirl passing by the yard of the Compsons, as a result of which he is finally castrated. The only daughter Caddy evades the love of Benjy and the other brother Quentin for her and connects herself with several frivolous men which breaks Quentin's heart. Finally she goes to Germany and becomes a high class prostitute of the Nazis. Her daughter Quentin remains living in the Compson mansion. Because of losing his sister, Caddy's brother Quentin drowns himself in the river in Harvard, having tied two irons around his neck. Previously he has tried killing Caddy and himself with a knife and also performing incest with her. The third son Jason is a callous and heartless materialist who steals the money Caddy has sent to her daughter, treats Black servants cruelly, whips his niece Quentin and has his brother Benjy castrated. Since most of the action takes place in the old-fashioned mansion, its presence can be seen as an indirect motif of Gothic.

“As I Lay Dying” (1930). This novel presents the events around the death of the simple farm woman Addie Bundren and her numerous family taking her body in a coffin for a funeral in town. Above all, the violent role is here taken by nature which punishes them with a flood, excessive heat and other disasters. A log floating in the river knocks over the wagon with the coffin, drowning the ponies. The stink of the corpse decomposing in the coffin attracts buzzards. The daughter Dewey Dell wishes to get rid of her pregnancy and looks for help towards several pharmacists, who start making advances to her. There is violence alongside with tenderness in the relations of another son, Jewel, with horses. The clairvoyant son, Darl, sets fire to the barn in which the coffin is temporarily placed, in order to prevent (for irrational reasons) his mother to be buried. He is arrested and taken by force to the psychiatric hospital.

“Sanctuary” (1930). Faulkner called this novel a “pot-boiler”, one having been written solely for the sake of earning money, and that fact is perceivable, above all, in the figure of the main character, Popeye Vitelli, who is two-dimensional, without depth, and resembles a machine programmed to kill rather than a human being. He is mentally underdeveloped and he murders the idiot Tommy and, being impotent, rapes the college girl Temple Drake with a corncob. After that he forcefully takes her to a brothel and observes her making love with a client, whom he later kills. At the end of the novel he is hanged for another crime he has not committed. Lee Goodwin, whom Temple, in the court, falsely accuses of raping her, gets lynched by the raging crowd. The novel bears partial similarities to a Gothic novel. An indebtedness to Freud and also to T. S. Eliot (in depicting the contemporary world as a cultural waste land) is a well established fact.

Of Faulkner’s numerous short stories, two will be surveyed here for their relatedness to themes of Gothic violence. “A Rose for Emily” (1930) presents a spinster, Emily Grierson, who poisons her sweetheart with arsenic, to prevent him from abandoning her, and keeps his body in her bed for years (necrophilia). The murder is not shown directly and the necrophilia is also only hinted at. By the suspension of the whole horrific truth from the readers the story resembles the best Gothic fiction. With the exception of the reversed gender roles, by the nature of the crime the story strongly resembles McCarthy’s novel “Child of God”. Another short story, “Dry September” (1930), shows a married man with the mind of a member of Ku Klux Klan instigating and participating in the lynching of a Black man, falsely accused of raping a white spinster. The murder of the Black is not shown.

“The Wild Palms” (1938; an alternative title, “If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem”). A man convicted to long time hard labour in a penitentiary for an attempt of robbing a

train rescues a pregnant woman from a Mississippi flood and helps her in delivering the child by cutting its navelcord with a can lid. The force of the flooded river almost attains supernatural traits, resembling a heavenly punishment. In a parallel story, Harry Wilbourne tries to perform abortion on his pregnant mistress and causes inner hemorrhage in her, as the result of which she dies.

“Go Down, Moses” (1942). This novel in stories, the last one of Faulkner’s “great period”, shows in poetical terms the violation of wilderness by human beings. In a dramatic episode, Boon Hogganbeck kills with a knife an old bear who for the more idealist hunters had almost become a holy creature.

### **A Survey of Gothic Details and Violence in the Early Works of Cormac McCarthy Not Analyzed in Chapter Three.**

The first literary works of McCarthy were two short stories (a form he has not practised later) that appeared in the literary supplement of *The Phoenix*, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville’s student magazine, at the time he was studying at that institution. The first story, “Wake for Susan”, appeared in October 1959, and the second, “A Drowning Incident”, in March 1960. The first is a series of daydreams of a young man called Wes who likes hunting. On his wanderings he visits a ruined cemetery hidden in the woods. The Gothic elements of the story emerge when towards the end of it he engages in a fantasy romance with the occupant of one of the graves, a young girl called Susan Ledbetter. The imaginary atmosphere gives the story a ghostly flavour, and love to a corpse, though just a daydream, prefigures the necrophilia of Lester Ballard in McCarthy’s third novel “Child of God” (Wallach 2000: 17). The second story, “A Drowning Incident”, involves more real action, and is darker in mood. A boy living in a rotting household goes to the outhouse. On his

way he finds a cricket whom he crushes, making its guts extrude, and drops into a spider's web. The cricket remains "kicking one leg in slow lethargic rhythm"(cited in: Wallach 2000: 19). Crossing a bridge, the boy can see floating in the river decomposing puppies his father had drowned. A crawfish is visible in the intestines of one of the puppies. As a revenge on his father for his cruelty towards the bitch and her puppies, the boy takes one of the rotting puppies in a sack to the house and drops it into the crib of his baby sister. Though there are no human corpses in this story, the impact is macabre (Wallach 2000: 19). It also evokes admiration for the young writer for being able to produce powerful associations of life and death by means of very small, economical details. The miserable conditions the boy is living in anticipate many similar households in McCarthy's later fiction. Even with these two pieces of juvenilia (written when he was 26), McCarthy affirmed his place as a Southern Gothic writer.

McCarthy's first novel, "The Orchard Keeper" (1965) presented a new level, being written in an unusually masterful and mature style. Although the style owes very much to Faulkner, the literary devices are sufficiently integrated to suit the author's fresh vision. The book has in some aspects more affinity with the works of McCarthy's later period than with those which followed immediately, because the protagonist is quite a likeable young man, one with whom it is easy to empathize, not like the criminal or sin-laden personalities of "Outer Dark" or "Child of God". On the other hand, the other central characters of the book do engage in violence or crimes, as when the old man living near the orchard shoots at government property and later at the policemen who come to arrest him. He does it out of his peculiar sense of justice, being accustomed to the old ways of wilderness which he tries to save. He is finally put into a house for lunatics. The main plot of the novel is the following: an

inn located on the edge of a ravine falls into it. Kenneth Rattner, a petty thief and rascal, takes advantage of the disaster and robs its victims. Having crept into the car of Marion Sylder, he attacks him when they stop on the road by hitting him from behind him with the car jack, crushing his shoulder bone. He had tried to kill Sylder but now it is he who becomes a victim of violence. Being younger and stronger, Sylder bounces the man who had attacked him. His methods of vanquishing Rattner are shown with great precision. "They were lying in the road, the man with his face in the dirt and Sylder on top of him, motionless for the moment as resting lovers" (in "The Orchard Keeper", p. 38). Sylder's broken shoulder aches terribly, making it difficult for him to breathe. In a self-defense carried too far, Sylder starts to strangle Rattner: "He pushed the head back into the crook of his leg, straightened his arm, and bore down upon the man's neck with all his weight and strength" (39). Finally, as he remembers his shoulder, he closes the man's windpipe and lets him die. Sylder then dumps Rattner's body in the abandoned spray pit of an orchard. The body is later found by the old man living near the orchard, "the orchard keeper" (though the phrase may refer to the body as well), who does not remove it but keeps and adorns it in the water with green leaves like a sacred object. There are recurrent descriptions of the corpse floating and decomposing in the water throughout months and years which constitute the most Gothic aspect of the book. Beside being a murderer, Sylder also breaks the law by selling illegal whiskey (the novel is set in the prohibition era). But when he meets the late Rattner's son, in an ironic twist of fate they become close friends. Neither of them knows nor ever learns that Sylder has killed the boy's father. Finally Sylder gets caught in his illegal trade and is put to jail. The end of the book is an elegy on the vanishing lifestyle of the men of wilderness. The boy who had tried his luck as a hunter also suffers from the action of authorities who confiscate his game

as illegal. The horrific scenes in the novel are balanced by extensive, majestic descriptions of nature and the landscape. The book as a whole leaves a dolorous but beautiful impression, the first signs of the complicated dialectics of the pleasant and the repulsive of the later works being already perceivable in it.

“Suttree” (1979). This is the least Gothic of McCarthy’s early novels. His longest novel, strongly indebted to Joyce’s “Ulysses”, it presents a young intellectual, Cornelius Suttree, who has degenerated into an outcast of the society, living alone in a hut and making his living by fishing in the river. He mainly communicates with drunkards, petty criminals and prostitutes (with a few of whom he has romantic love stories). He might be viewed as an adult version of Huckleberry Finn, especially as a big Southern river is as important a factor in his life as it was in Finn’s. The author has also used Suttree as the archetype of a wanderer, similar to Joyce’s Leopold Bloom. Psychologically, he is obsessed with the death of his twin brother at his birth, about which he has nightmares and stunning visions (the brother’s ghost comes to visit him). The most horrific scene in the novel may be Suttree helping a friend of his drown the body of the friend’s father in the river at night. Though Suttree hardly evokes great admiration, he differs from most of McCarthy’s early characters by not entering fully the path of evil, merely testing illegal opportunities and balancing on the verge or repulsiveness.

### **About Faulkner’s and McCarthy’s Linguistic and Stylistic Means to Convey Violence or Calm.**

Louise Y. Gossett has written about the way Faulkner’s uses of language convey violence. The “conveyance of violence” may need some explanation, since it can be understood in different ways. In this case it is not to be understood merely as

depicting violent acts through an appropriate choice of verbs, adverbs and adjectives. A parallel may be brought with the art of painting. A scene with sunshine or rain and darkness, or also of people in action, can be depicted in painting by attracting attention only to what is presented (as in realist painting) in which case the brushstrokes are melted together and hardly discernible, but it can also be shown with a focus on *how* it is presented. The latter way is characteristic of impressionism and later of many of the modernist isms. In these traditions, the brushstrokes and the paint constitute clearly visible particles and the whole impression of the topic of the picture is an interplay of the subject and the medium. Similarly, a scene in prose writing (but one of the most universal topics in literature is violence, along with love, sex and death) can be presented in a stylistically neutral way with the only attention on what is happening – such are the methods in police reports and, as to fiction, in most of detective stories, or the language itself as an independent medium can be involved in the process of creating an impression of the event. The latter method is used seldom in fiction, and when it is used it is mostly by writers with a highly poetical sense of language who put their own lyrical selves into the descriptions of epic events. Such writers are Faulkner and McCarthy. The linguistic conveyance of violence in their case therefore means, above all, a forceful and seemingly tormented use of grammatical structures, of long periods sometimes with unexpected twists of subordinate clauses and constructions with present participles and gerunds. Moreover, such constructions are usually pervasive throughout the books or at least in long passages since it is one of the traits of Southern Gothic that the focus is not only on actual violence but (even more) on violence as a danger and an opportunity that is always in the air.

Thus it becomes clear why Gossett says Faulkner's conveyance of violence mostly occurs through "complicated syntax". In addition she writes:

Words pass back and forth across the same area of thought or action until they are magnetized and attract to themselves every possible emotion and interpretation. Their movement around fixed points from which Faulkner contemplates events serves actually to temper the violence by reporting onstage the action which occurs offstage. This classical device allows the receiver to embellish the report out of his own imagination of evil (Gossett 1965: 46).

Thus, while expressing violence through the tortuous diction, Faulkner also creates a counterbalance through language to the acts of the fictive reality: "The counterplay of several narrating voices telling the same violence makes important not the incident but the way in which it is seen. The teller who is enamoured of words can subdue violence by examining and discussing it" (ibid.: 47).

The same is generally true of McCarthy (with the exception that he seldom uses several narrating "voices"). As in Faulkner, the frequently tortuous diction at once strengthens the impression of violence and creates a medium through which one can observe the events from a safe distance.

It is one of the best known facts about McCarthy how Faulknerian his diction has always been. Both are very fond of long sentences with metaphors, with rare (sometimes almost unknown), foreign-sounding, poetic or archaic words (Bell 2000: 5). In fact, of the last ones McCarthy is even fonder than Faulkner. But whereas Faulkner has used the same kind of diction, at which he fully arrived in "Absalom, Absalom!", throughout his whole subsequent prose, in McCarthy such passages interchange with quite different, laconic, simple, Hemingwayesque ones. Perhaps surprisingly, on the whole McCarthy is much simpler to read. Although his overall visions are often darker than Faulkner's, in his descriptions of atmosphere or of nature the reader can almost always take a breath of relief and relaxation, which is usually

not the case with Faulkner. That is because whereas in Faulkner, nature is usually shown from the point of being included in the painful mental landscape of the character, McCarthy regards natural surroundings as an independent realm, stronger than people, possessing majesty and peace.

## Chapter Two.

### Three Early Studies of Violence by William Faulkner

#### **“Light in August”(1932).**

The novel contains a lot of both spiritual and directly physical violence, the two being usually combined. The main violent characters are: Joe Christmas' stepfather McEachern; Joe Christmas himself; Christmas' companion, the villainous Lucas Burch; Christmas' real grandfather Hines; and the pro-Nazi soldier Percy Grimm who murders Christmas. The deep inner conflicts of Joe Christmas start in his childhood, as he is called Nigger by the other children in the orphanage. Adopted by the McEacherns, he learns about violence when his stepfather, a religious fanatic, beats him with a strap in the stable each time he refuses to learn the Presbyterian catechism. His own violent activities start when at the age of fourteen with a group of boys he has waited for his turn to have sex with a Black girl in a barn. Sensing her blackness to which he is developing schizophrenic feelings, as well as her moral degradation, he starts kicking the girl lying in front of him. He also hits her in the face, then his companions rush in and start fighting with him until they all calm down. At seventeen years of age, he finds a lover, a waitress who is also almost a prostitute. He pays her by stealing from his stepmother's money box. When he suspects the waitress of being unfaithful, he strikes her. When his stepfather meddles with his love affair, he strikes him down with a chair, hitting him on the head. Believing he has killed his stepfather, he hysterically tries to get his lover back from her two new companions. She calls him a nigger, and the two men hit him in the face with fists so he falls down, becoming half unconscious and still receiving blows. There follow over a dozen of desperate years, Christmas moving from one part of America to another, sleeping with many women, telling his white bedmates that he is a Black and his

Black lovers that he is a white man. Though the author presents Christmas' problem of identity as caused by social prejudices, it may well be also psychopathological. Finally arriving at Jefferson, Mississippi, Christmas breaks into a house to find food. It is the household of a lonely spinster, Joanna Burden, about forty years old. She starts hosting him and accepts him as her lover, demanding him to satisfy her perverse, rather masochistic sexual desires. Descended from abolitionists, she has a peculiar attitude to the Black people, pitying them, but not without a certain sense of superiority. During their lovemakings, she finds additional pleasure in thinking about Christmas as a Black: "She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!" (in "Light in August", p. 245)

Their relationship lasts for several years. Then she wants him publicly to recognize he is a Black. She is also rigidly religious, with Calvinist fatalist convictions. As she demands him to kneel down with her and pray, he refuses. She then threatens him with a revolver. Then Christmas kills her, cutting her throat with his razor knife (the typical murder tool of Black criminals). The act of murder is not shown; instead, the author masterfully describes the events just preceding it, letting the ominous details accumulate:

"No," he said. Then he saw her arms unfold and her right hand come forth from beneath the shawl. It held an old style, single action, cap-and-ball revolver almost as long and heavier than a small rifle. But the shadow of it and of her arm and hand on the wall did not waver at all, the shadow of both monstrous, the cocked hammer monstrous, backhooked and viciously poised like the arched head of a snake; it did not waver at all. And her eyes did not waver at all. They were as still as the round black ring of the pistol muzzle. But there was no heat in them, no fury. They were calm and still as all pity and all despair and all conviction. But he was not watching them. He was watching the shadowed pistol on the wall, he was watching when the cocked shadow of the hammer flicked away (267).

In the following scene, Christmas is already on the road, escaping, stopping the car whose passengers are frightened to death by his appearance. It is only after the ride they give him that he realizes he has been holding in his hand the revolver, which he then throws into bushes. These details and the absence of the murder scene suggest that Christmas has committed his crime in a half-unconscious state, perhaps being seized by a fit of madness. Although the murder itself is cold-blooded, Christmas as a whole is not cold-blooded, insensitive, but is often caught by hysterical terror, feelings similar to the terror Shakespeare's Macbeth experiences as he is urged by his wife to murder King Duncan. Joanna Burden cannot be regarded as merely a victim, or at least as without a violence of her own. Whereas Christmas' violence is physical, hers is spiritual. She tries to force him to accept her obsessive religious and racial ideas. There is certainly a monstrous contradiction in someone being forced with a revolver to pray to Christian God, traditionally understood as the God of meekness, humility and tolerance. Her feelings for Christmas as supposedly a Black man are not sincere compassion, but rather a condescending pity, which deeply humiliates him. Having set Burden's house afire, Christmas escapes into the wilderness. His aimless runnings and wanderings in the fields and forests of Yoknapatawpha County are shown with great compassion. He almost loses the sense of time; he no longer seems an abominable criminal but a forlorn human being cruelly treated by the fate. The sheriff and his men are pursuing him with dogs. As they finally leave, there is a passage which directly refers to Shakespeare's "Macbeth" (and also to an earlier novel, "The Sound and the Fury", of Faulkner himself), thus emphasizing the relatedness of Christmas to the English playwright's tragic hero: "At last the noise and the alarms, the sound and fury of the hunt, dies away, dies out of his hearing" (313). With attention to the smallest details, he is described shaving himself above a

spring at daybreak with the same razor knife with which he had cut Joanna Burden's throat. In the following chapter, informing the readers that Christmas has been caught in the neighbouring town, the author introduces a new character, the elderly "Doc" Eupheus Hines. In a flashback, Faulkner describes through the character's own mouth how Hines' daughter was seduced by a Mexican who may have had Black blood, Christmas' father. Thus Hines is Christmas' grandfather. He is possibly the most unpleasant character in the whole novel. He is an example of the spiritual violence that may be the most dangerous kind of violence of all. A religious fanatic, he is also on extreme racist positions. Although he is poor and depends on Blacks for sustenance, he has the habit of going to Black churches during sermons, interrupting the service to enter the pulpit "and in his harsh, dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach to them humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race, himself his own exhibit A, in fanatic and unconscious paradox" (325). Entering the crowd where the "white nigger" Christmas is held, he becomes hysterically enraged, struggling, "violent, cursing"; they try to stop him "like men trying to hold a small threshing hose in which the pressure is too great for its size" (326). He raises a stick and strikes Christmas, raging, with foam about his lips, and cries: "Kill him. Kill him. Kill him," urging them to lynch him. Others characterize him as "crazy in the face, like somebody that had done slipped away from a crazy house" (332).

A third line of narrative beside Christmas' and Lena Grove's (the latter not being analyzed here because she is innocent of violence) is the story of the old white minister Gail Hightower. He is an educated man, an erudite, but he is also sick in a way, being obsessed with the lost glory of the Southern history and with memories of his unhappy marriage, his wife having deserted him and having gone to Memphis to a

brothel before she killed herself. Although he is a Protestant minister, Hightower differs from many other Southern Christians in that he fully realizes the nasty sides that Southern Protestantism may have. He thinks of religious fanatics: "Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?*" (347) When Hines and his wife come to tell Hightower about their relationship with Christmas he finally becomes so angry he screams at them to get out. Hightower is also the most philosophical of the characters in the novel, his gestures making him somewhat similar to some of Michelangelo's paintings of Old Testament prophets, deeply pondering the mysteries of the divine purpose. Hines' wife is far more human than her husband. When Lena's child is born, she is present and in her mental confusion she calls the child "Joey", her daughter's son. It becomes evident that Lucas Burch or Brown as he has introduced himself, Christmas' long-time companion, is really the father of Lena' child. He meets Lena once, but escapes from his obligations. When Lena's secret admirer, the honest Byron Bunch (the similarity of their surnames is clearly the author's intention) finds him in the forest and attacks him to take him back to face his responsibilities as a father, there is a two minute fight. Burch fights "with the blind and desperate valor of a starved and cornered rat" (416). There is no hope for Byron Bunch to win: finally he is "lying quietly among the broken and trampled undergrowth, bleeding quietly about the face, hearing the underbrush crashing on, ceasing, fading into silence" (416). Burch flees on a passing train. A minor villain, he evokes merely disgust in comparison with the moral terror caused by the murderous characters.

Meanwhile, Christmas had escaped from the jail, gone into Hightower's house, hit him with his pistol and crouched behind his table where he was shot by the young man pursuing him, Percy Grimm. It was almost as if he had died voluntarily, as he had not fired a single shot from his loaded pistol. The first character to interpret these events, the lawyer Gavin Stevens explains Christmas' contradictory steps in a grandiloquent style as the results of the influence of his mixture of white and black blood that had directed his behaviour: "It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment" (425). After Stevens' long monologue, these events are described again, this time centering on Christmas' murderer Percy Grimm. He is twenty-five and he cannot forgive his parents having been born too late for participating in World War One. Unable to gain glory by killing enemies in the war, he searches for an outlet for his aggressiveness in beating exsoldiers who do not look patriotic enough to him and in "a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men [---]" (427). A pro-fascist by mentality, he starts organizing violently patriotic groups to "preserve order". Disappointed in the unwillingness of former soldiers and the sheriff to cooperate with him, he now seizes upon the chance to halt and punish Christmas. Starting to run after him, he orders the fire alarm to be turned on, so the following events remain accompanied by sirens. For several pages, he is described pursuing Christmas across squares, along streets and over ditches. The author uses the notion of a Player (meaning the fates or the divine will but also referring to an imaginary playwright, thereby strengthening the allusions to ancient

Greek and Elizabethan tragedies) to dramatize the movements of the two men as the climax arrives:

It was as though he had been merely waiting for the Player to move him again, because with that unfailing certitude he ran straight to the kitchen and into the doorway, already firing, almost before he could have seen the table overturned and standing on its edge across the corner of the room, and the bright and glittering hands of the man who crouched behind it, resting upon the upper edge. Grimm emptied the automatic's magazine into the table; later someone covered all five shots with a folded handkerchief.

But the Player was not done yet. When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body (439).

With a butcher knife, Grimm castrates dying Christmas. His hips and loins bleeding, he looks peacefully at the people. His search for identity has finally reached a solution: he has been killed and castrated as a Black man "to let white women alone even in Hell". His skin is white but his blood seems black: it seems "to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man [seems] to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever" (440). Christmas' death is also a kind of triumph for him.

### **General Characteristics of "Light in August".**

On its appearance, "Light in August" was received by some critics as a Gothic book because of "Miss Burden's sombre house, the nightmarish quality of Joe's life during his relationship with Joanna, the macabre scenes [and] the violence and the sadism" (Pitavy 1973: 153). The critic Herschel Brickell wrote in *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1933: "[Faulkner] is really writing Gothic romances in the modernistic manner" (cited in: Pitavy 1973: 153). However, the texture and the imagery of the novel are so rich that they allow equally well for mythological, existentialist and humanist interpretations.

With his split soul and identity, Joe Christmas reminds one both of old Greek tragedy and of Dostoevski. All the same, his problems are deeply and uniquely Southern. The scenes of his escape resemble the description of the escape of another Faulkner character, the Black slave in the short story "Red Leaves", whom the Indians want to sacrifice to their late chief's spirit but who clings obstinately to life. By the depth of its analysis of racial problems, "Light in August" is unique in Southern and world fiction. The evil it depicts is depressing, but it is not a wholly depressing novel, for it can also ennoble and purify the readers, like real tragedies do. Though its style of narration is relatively traditional in comparison with Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury", "As I Lay Dying" and "Absalom, Absalom!" (there are no long stream-of-consciousness monologues, no breaking down of conventional time limits), "Light in August" is still a structurally highly complex novel, using such devices as flashbacks, parallel and intersecting narrative lines and switches from the present time narration to the past tense narration and back. It is one of the best examples of how Faulkner is able to turn his native themes universal, for the problem of unsolved racial identity may also be seen to symbolize other cases of lost identity. Christmas is both a criminal and a victim of an unjust, prejudiced society, and both his aspects are presented in a convincing way. By conveying Christmas' sensations compassionately and with a poetic touch originating in his own lyrical self, Faulkner elevates him to a high tragic level. The following passages about the escape in the wilderness may serve as an example of how the author literally registers the smallest changes in the breathing of his character, each vibration in his soul:

[---]He was not in the cotton house when the man and the dogs passed, as the sheriff believed. He paused there only long enough to lace up the brogans: the black shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro. [---] It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered [---].

It is just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. "That was all I wanted," he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. "That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years (313).

Since the author seems to attribute these deep feelings and sensations to his murderous character, the reader may feel that Christmas is related to such poet-criminals as appear in "Macbeth" and "Richard III". Thus, while what the writer offers is realism, it is a realism tempered with the conventionality of a lyrical drama.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, many critics consider "Light in August" Faulkner's best novel, or at least one of his best. The only question that may remain unresolved in the text is whether Christmas' problems are also psychopathological or whether he is just a hypersensitive person.

### **"Absalom, Absalom!" (1936).**

This novel, always counted among Faulkner's best, consists of nine chapters. It is connected with certain other works such as "Light in August" through its racial themes (both these works had the same initial working title, "Dark House" (Blotner 1974: 701, 830)), and "The Sound and the Fury" whose character Quentin Compson appears in it as a main narrator. "Absalom, Absalom!" is the best example of how even the language, the style and the sentence structure of Faulkner's prose may convey violence. With its tortured periods, the narrators seem to force meaning out of their interpretation of facts, violently to create meanings from the chaos of history. By the number of crimes, it is the most violent of Faulkner's novels. The main violent characters in it are: Thomas Sutpen who, although he kills nobody, forces his obsessive ideas about success and race on life and other people; his son Henry Sutpen

who kills his own half-brother Charles Bon; Wash Jones who murders Sutpen and his own granddaughter and her child; and Sutpen's Black daughter Clytemnestra who sets the house with Henry and herself afire. But some sort of mental aggressiveness is also characteristic of the narrative style of the narrators Rosa Coldfield and Quentin Compson (who, as one learns from "The Sound and the Fury", is soon to commit suicide). With its leading theme of fate that sneers at the main character's attempts of success and through its structural development in which motifs occur and recur the novel resembles a long thundering piece of music such as Beethoven's symphony of fate. This impression is introduced at the very beginning, as soon as the narrator Rosa Coldfield evokes the shadow of the main character Thomas Sutpen:

Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran (in "Absalom, Absalom!", pp. 4 – 5).

Rosa Coldfield is Sutpen's sister-in-law, had for a time been engaged to him, and she tells about him from her perspective. His whole life is not completely laid out, the readers learn about it bit by bit. It is words such as "ruthless", "murder" and "fratricide" that start to be repeated in telling about Sutpen creating his mansion and plantation; Miss Coldfield uses the expression he "tore [them] violently" into existence (6). It becomes clear that although Sutpen had become a rich and powerful plantation owner and sired a son and a daughter to continue his dynasty, he had committed some fatal mistake which caused his son widow his sister before she had been a bride, after which the son disappeared and all of Sutpen's ambitions had turned out to be in vain. But although it was his son Henry that became a murderer, it is revealed from Rosa's recollections that in fact Henry had a tender heart: when the children were still small and Sutpen had organized vicious wrestling among his Black

slaves in which he himself also participated, Henry had not borne to look at such a cruel sport, but his sister Judith had sneaked there on her own and looked down from the loft on it with calm interest. The Black slaves had fought “naked, [---] not like white men fight, with rules and weapons, but like negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad” (30). Another time there had been a “white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another’s eyes” (31). The white one was Sutpen himself, covered with blood, and he had just struck down his Black partner. And his little son Henry who had seen it plunged out “from among the negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting” (31). In the second chapter, Sutpen’s first appearance in Yoknapatawpha is presented again, this time through Quentin Compson’s imagination supported by what he has heard from his grandfather, Sutpen’s only friend. The newcomer looks to the town residents “like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just a fever” (36). He demonstrates to the townspeople his superb skill as a gunman. His Black slaves go around “stark naked save for a coating of dried mud” (39), and there soon emerges a legend of Sutpen’s wild Blacks. The epic event of Sutpen creating his mansion with the help of the slaves and the French architect and Sutpen’s courtship of and wedding with Rosa’s elder sister are described. He had married her because she came from a respectable family, so as to strengthen his own social position, and the marriage had made the wife continuously weep. In the third and fourth chapters, Quentin’s father tries to reconstruct the events in his way, analyzing Rosa Coldfield as a character in Sutpen’s story and outlining the figures in the conflict that was to come: Henry, as he attends the university and becomes friends with his half-brother Charles, Judith, as she falls in love with Charles, the poor white Wash Jones who serves and adores Sutpen. It is hinted that Henry may have had incestual feelings towards Judith

even before his half-brother came on the scene as her fiance. On the other hand, even a slight possibility of homosexual attraction between the half-brothers is suggested. For dozens of pages, the narrator spins his story laden with rare words, archaisms and striking metaphors which are difficult but never boring to read, hinting at the various versions of truth but never stating anything certain. It becomes revealed that as Judith and Charles grew ever more closer, Thomas Sutpen became aware of Charles' secret before either Henry or Judith did – the secret being, first, that Charles was Sutpen's son, and second, that Charles was already married to a Black woman. Then the Civil War had started, to which both the father and the half-brothers had gone. None of them was killed there, but as it was about to end and Judith was waiting for her fiance to come and marry her, the first murder had occurred. With a powerful technical device, the author develops suspension around that event. First, at the end of the third chapter, Wash Jones is shown bringing an important news to Rosa Coldfield. "Air you Rosie Coldfield?" he is reported to have said (107); but the information is withheld. Then starts the fourth chapter with its sixty pages of difficult retelling and guessing of events, until at the end of it the same scene is revoked and now Jones is allowed to tell his news: "Air you Rosie Coldfield? Then you better come on out yon. Henry has done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as a beef." (165). The fifth chapter returns to Rosa Coldfield as the narrator, all of whose 50-page-long soliloquy is presented in italics. The structure, vocabulary and imagery of the soliloquy are as demanding as the previous chapters. It tells about Henry having shot Charles at the gate of Sutpen's mansion, Judith hearing the news and accepting it with fatalist calmness, the coffin with the body being carried on the stairs of the mansion and buried in the garden, and it reaches the time when Rosa hears of another death, another murder ("the stroke of a rusty scythe" (214)), as Jones revenges on Sutpen.

(When Rosa heard of Sutpen's death, she had cried: "Dead? You? You lie; you're not dead; heaven cannot, and hell dare not, have you!" (215)) But there are a lot of transitional periods and deviations between the conveyance of facts which read like extreme high style elegies strongly reminiscent of ancient Greek tragedies, the poems of Pindar or of poetic deviations in the monologues in Shakespeare's tragedies. In the following example of these passages, Rosa tries to understand what made Charles let Henry kill him like a lamb, without any resistance:

Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either: not cowardice which will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal distillant, wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, relicts the seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing [---] (177).

This elegy on Charles Bon's death seems anything but peaceful: in its muscular succession of highly original images its very structure suggests tension and violence. It is at once lyrical (there are numerous initial and inner rhymes and it almost seems to follow a metrical pattern) and deeply philosophical. At the end of the fifth chapter there is yet another time shift: the reader is brought to the time of narration (the autumn of 1909), Rosa telling Quentin that she suspects someone is hiding in Sutpen's rotting mansion at the present time.

From the sixth chapter, the point of narration shifts again: it is now the winter of 1910, no longer in the South but in Harvard in the student dormitory where Quentin is telling his roommate Shreve about Sutpen and Shreve is trying to help him penetrate into what really happened. Quentin learns from his father's letter that Rosa Coldfield is dead and buried. Shreve in his interpretations brings in the new tonality of irony. Since Rosa had demonized Sutpen, Shreve repeatedly refers to him as "this

Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub” (223). Ever more often, the image of a scythe as the symbol of Sutpen’s final doom starts to appear in the text, and Shreve dresses that image in notably masterful rhetoric (“that scythe, symbolic laurel of a caesar’s triumph – that rusty scythe loaned by the demon himself to Jones more than two years ago to cut the weeds away [---] that rusty blade garlanded with each successive day’s gaudy ribbons or cheap bead” (223)). At first Jones is shown to deify Sutpen, speaking to him with admiration in his ungrammatical dialect, but when Sutpen has made his granddaughter pregnant and after a daughter is born has repudiated them (implying that he would treat even his horses better), Jones catches the scythe, and saying “I’m going to tech you, Kernel” (232), starts to approach him. The murder is not visualized; the reader must just guess from the context that Jones had beheaded his master with the scythe (in fact Shreve describes these events as a Black woman crouching in the bushes might have witnessed them). Though the comparison is not explicitly stated, it is obvious that Jones in his final desperate vengeful acts embodies Sutpen’s dark destiny, resembling the Black Reaper whose traditional attribute a scythe is. In a flight of fantasy, Shreve envisions Sutpen and Jones sitting together in the afterworld and drinking wine in a friendly manner, oblivious of what had really happened between them. It is explained only much later in the text (and more extensively in a separate short story, “Wash”) that after killing Sutpen Jones had entered the house where his granddaughter and her child were and there in the darkness cut the throats of the unsuspecting granddaughter and the infant with a knife meant for killing pigs. He then had set the house afire and run with the scythe above his head towards the armed horsemen who had come to arrest him, getting obviously shot by them. Those very memorable scenes of successive murders have an impact similar to that of Greek tragedies. Towards the end of the sixth chapter, Quentin’s

memories of the previous autumn carry the reader back to the South, to him and Rosa Coldfield visiting the graves of Charles Bon and his Black descendant, of Sutpen, his wife and of Judith (who had died of smallpox about a dozen years after her father), and to their entering the half-deserted mansion whose only known inhabitant was Sutpen's Black daughter Clytemnestra. Who or what else they found in the mansion is for some time withheld from the reader. In the seventh chapter, in a flashback narration by Quentin and Shreve, the focus is brought back on the earliest days of Sutpen in Yoknapatawpha, as he and his Black slaves were chasing with dogs in the wilderness the French architect who had escaped from them. Attempts are made to analyze what it really was that made Sutpen conceive his obsessive plan of establishing a white dynasty (it is revealed that he was spurred as a boy by an insult received from a black servant of a rich plantation owner) and it is proposed that Sutpen's trouble was his "innocence", an uncritical but ambitious acceptance of the social conventions of his day. As a son of poor whites trying to swallow his humiliation, sitting in a cave in the forest, brooding and then resolving his mind, he briefly appears from quite a human side, almost evoking compassion (290). It is stressed that "he was not mad" (292). At first he had thought about shooting the plantation owner, then, in a dialogue with himself, he had decided there was a better way of revenging on rich whites. The life of his father's family in a shabby cabin in West Virginia mountains is described (all of this as a reconstruction by Quentin and Shreve). Then Sutpen's first, abortive career in the West Indies is touched upon, he deserting his first wife and their son because they turned out to have Black blood. It is sometimes hard to tell precisely who is narrating, either Quentin, Shreve, Quentin's grandfather or father. This occasional obliteration of boundaries between narrators is a trait which makes the novel similar to several later, postmodernist novels. Also

anticipating (and in a way even surpassing) postmodernism is the very complicated juxtaposition of the numerous narrative levels. The roommates seem finally to ascertain that Thomas Sutpen had forbidden the marriage between Charles and Judith and that even in killing Charles Henry had acted out of loyalty to his father. He had shot Charles not because he wanted to prevent incest but in order to protect the white blood of their dynasty.

The fact that Faulkner consciously uses allusions to ancient Greek tragedies is evident from comparisons with Cassandra, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. An example of the allusions to Shakespeare's plays is the following passage from Shreve's narrative, describing Jones conversing with Sutpen:

Him (the demon) standing there with the horse, the saddled charger, the sheathed sabre, the gray waiting to be laid peacefully away among moths and all lost save dishonor: then the voice of the faithful grave-digger who opened the play and would close it, coming out of the wings like Shakespeare's very self: "Well, Kernel, they mought have whupped us but they ain't kilt us yit, air they? (349)

At the end of the seventh chapter, the events around Jones killing Sutpen and his own offspring are reconstructed again, this time in more detail and with more emphasis on Jones' feelings, his moments of hesitation, of utter bitterness and of regret being outlined (after killing Sutpen he starts raving, still talking to the dead man and talking aloud to himself). Chapter Eight deals mainly with the triangular relationship between Henry, Charles and Judith. Towards the end of it the roommates start a sort of role-play, envisioning themselves as Charles and Henry together on the Civil War front. In what is the most elaborate of all their reconstructions, they ride together to Sutpen's mansion shortly before the end of the war and the enamoured but fatalist Charles literally persuades his bride's brother to shoot him (after having confessed he has Black blood). In the ninth and final chapter Quentin tells Shreve how at the end of the previous year he and Rosa Coldfield had gone to Sutpen's

mansion and found the aged Henry there in the sickbed, having returned from his life-long self-banishment. As they have just entered the pitch-dark mansion, the scraping of the match by Sutpen's daughter Clytemnestra sounds to Quentin "like an explosion, a pistol" (459); and the weak light of the kerosene lamp by which they can see Henry who looks "as if he were already a corpse" (464) can remind one of the torches in Gothic castles. As they went back to the house a few months later with ambulance to cure Henry, his sister Clytemnestra had thought it was the police coming to arrest Henry and had set fire to the mansion, thus killing herself and her brother. The only descendant of Sutpen's who survived was Charles' Black grandson Jim Bond, one of the many idiots in Faulkner's fiction, who remained howling around the ruins at night. Such is the end of Sutpen's violent, self-destructive dynasty and that scene very nearly also finishes the novel.

#### **General Characteristics of "Absalom, Absalom!"**

A maelstrom of various interpretations of Southern personal and social history, "Absalom, Absalom!" is full of allusions to such diverse sources as the Old Testament, ancient Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's tragedies, Goethe, and the Gothic novel. At the same time, just like "Light in August", it is also uniquely Southern. By its settings ((deserted) mansions, caves) and leading motifs (incest, fratricide), it is the novel in which Faulkner has come closest to the conventions of the Gothic novel. It has already been marked that Sutpen's mansion, especially after the death of its master, resembles a Gothic castle. But in a certain way the novel in its whole build-up, in its narrative architecture, bears an even greater similarity to such castles, through its tortuous (and torturous) periods, through its mysterious depths, lines of thought that occur, disappear, recur and revolve like hidden passageways (and may

contain skeletons), through the general darkness that dominates in all the variants about the precise relations and the motives of the main characters, and through its occasional striking images that rise like tops of turrets and may attract revelatory lightning-bolts.

Yet "Absalom, Absalom!" is not merely or even predominantly a Gothic novel. Rather, Faulkner has done with the genre approximately the same that Cervantes did with the genre of the chivalrous novel in his "Don Quixote": used and transcended the old form to convey an entirely new and unique message. Though very dark and violent, it is not an entirely depressing and hopeless book, because all the tragedies that befall Sutpen and his family can be seen as a punishment to him for his arrogance, something which was called "hubris" in ancient Greek tragedies (Rubin 1966: 54). All the same, even Sutpen is not an entirely despicable figure, as he also has qualities that can be admired, such as courage and almost endless energy. He is thus a truly tragic character in the vein of ancient Greek and especially of Elizabethan tragedies. He has been shown to possess sufficiently human (in some cases, superhuman) sides not to remain merely a villain (he is therefore a much deeper character than the evil men in Gothic novels usually are). On the other hand, those characters who seem victimized are not wholly innocent either. Charles Bon is a regular visitor of New Orleans brothels. He also deceives Judith by not revealing to her that he is already married. Though Judith rather well fits the role of the pure virgin of a Gothic novel, she also possesses some of her father's ruthlessness and blindness to facts. Henry who becomes his brother's murderer is tender-hearted but a weak person. Wash Jones as a representative of the "white trash" finally revenges not only on Sutpen but also on his own fate, rising to a tragic grandeur in his role as Sutpen's Black Reaper.

Of all Faulkner's novels, "Absalom, Absalom!" has had the greatest and most direct impact on the following world fiction. Many writers, notably Claude Simon (who in his novel "Flanders Road" (1960), usually considered his masterpiece, created the figure of a French cavalry officer, de Reixach, who is as shadowy, mysterious and impressive as Thomas Sutpen and who also dies a violent death; as in Faulkner's novel, the main character is not presented directly but only through a complicated tangle of several narrating voices belonging to people who either knew him or had heard about him, all trying to reconstruct the truth of the events around him and of the motives that led him to his proud and nearly suicidal death; similarly to "Absalom, Absalom!", throughout the novel, long periods and constructions with present participles abound) and other representatives of the French *nouveau roman*, as well as other postmodernists of numerous countries have used "Absalom, Absalom!" as their model (mostly for the network of narrative techniques). It should be conceded, however, that few of them have achieved an equal level, as their works are mostly overconstructed and too formal, lacking the warm humanism beneath the horrors in Faulkner's novel.

#### **"The Hamlet" (1940).**

This novel dates from towards the end of Faulkner's greatest period. Still magnificently, masterfully written, a synthesis of stark realism and high poetry, and entirely new in its approach, it nevertheless shows first signs of the softening of the vision that came into his novels along with their late maturity. Though its depiction of violence still rises to tragic heights, the moral weight and tension of violence is somewhat alleviated. The main tonality of the novel is that of a comedy. It is mainly the story of the rise to power and eminent positions of the morally degraded Snopes

clan. They seldom use violence but dirty tricks and foul play in order to secure their success, being spiritually degenerate, rather like a group of rodents than human beings. Cleanth Brooks writes about them: “The insidious horror of Snopesism is its lack of any kind of integrity – its pliability, its parasitic vitality as of some low-grade, thoroughly stubborn organism [---]” (1963: 222).

The only murder in the novel is Mink Snopes shooting his neighbour Jack Houston for a quarrel about a cow. Mink is the only Snopes that resorts to physical violence. He differs from the rest of the clan in being straightforward, with a peculiar sense of justice and honour. Seeing himself as an eternal loser, he is full of bitterness at anyone whom he considers luckier than himself, including the other Snopeses.

The detailed description of Mink Snopes starts from the moment he has murdered Houston on a horse, as he is crouching in the thicket, surprised and shocked by the loudness of the shot. It seems to him “as though the very capacity of space and echo for reproducing noise were leagued against him too in the vindication of his rights and the liquidation of his injuries” (in “The Hamlet”, p. 218). He has thought about Houston as his enemy. As with the case of Christmas in “Light in August”, suspicions may arise as to the mental health of this character, but his psychological illness is never asserted, he may as well have just a deviant soul or be outright stupid. In any case, he seems to have a theory of “conspiracy to frustrate and outrage his rights as a man and his feelings as a sentient creature” (218). He would like to leave on the breast of his victim a placard with the text: “This is what happens to the men who impound Mink Snopes’s cattle” (218).

Mink differs from Faulkner’s earlier murderers in that he has no grand dilemma, no tremendous identity problem nor an obsessive plan that he wants to stick to, but he acts just out of feeling poor and miserable, of a need to revenge on others

for economic reasons. In that he is a plain character, not suggesting such terror mixed with awe as the previous murderers. But for the same reasons, his choosing a criminal path is also easier to understand, and in some ways he is the Faulkner criminal with whom it is the easiest to empathize. The author uses every detail to show how poor and down-trodden he is. His corn is “meagre and sorry” (219). The roof of his rented cabin leaks and the weather-stripping is rotting away. He knows “this [is] the closest as he would ever come to owning [a] roof over his head” (219). The only thing he can use for oil are bacon-drippings. The corn is “yellow and stunted” because he has no money to buy fertilizer and he does not even own proper tools to cultivate the field with (220). As it has rained throughout the early summer, even the “zodiac [seems to have] stacked cards against him” (220). When he returns home and his wife (taller than he is) implies she knows what he has done and says she hopes she can see him hanged, he strikes her four times across the mouth, making it bleed. He does so “with that slow gathering which [is] not deliberation but extreme and patiently indomitable and implacable weariness” (221).

The vengeful act of murder was not just another moment for him: “nothing but his own death would ever efface [it] from his memory” (223). With compassion he is shown to eat cold peas and briefly repose in the bed. His plunging through the undergrowth and briers and through mud in the darkness on his way to hide the body resembles Culla Holme making his way through the dark swampy forest in McCarthy’s “Outer Dark”. He heaves the body up with a rope and dumps it in the cavity of an old oak tree from which he has taken honey in earlier times. His wife has left him; from now on he lives alone, not shaving, sleeping with shoes on, eating raw meal or not eating at all, drinking hot water, looking at the field of meagre untended corn as the proof of his misery. Every night, Houston’s hound is howling in the

nearabouts. His mind and will are compared to “an unresting invincible ungrazing horse” upon which his “puny body” rides (228). Like Dostoevski’s Raskolnikov, he starts having suspicions of having been found out, fearing others might have seen him dragging the body. He finally goes and shoots at the hound too, so as not to let its howling betray the location of the body. The way the atmosphere of a dark forest gets mingled with and included in the depths of the murderer’s soul can be seen in the following long sentence with an almost hypnotizing effect:

[T]he tremendous silence which had been broken three nights ago when the first cry of the hound reached him and which had never once been restored, annealed, even while he slept, roared down about him and, still roaring, began to stiffen and set like cement, not only in his hearing but in his lungs, his breathing, inside and without him too, solidifying from tree-trunk to tree-trunk, among which the shattered echoes of the shot died away in strangling murmurs, caught in that cooling solidity before they had had time to cease (230).

Buzzards start circling the sky above the hiding-place of the corpse. When he goes to the store to which his cousin had invited him, the cousin tells him Houston’s horse has been found without the rider and Mink’s wife has been telling everyone that Mink “never done it” (233). The cousin knows he has murdered Houston but characteristically of the majority of Snopeses, what amazes him is that Mink had not taken any money from his victim: “Do you mean to tell me you never even looked? *Never even looked?*” (233). In a following flashback, Mink is depicted as a young man of twenty-three having left his farmhand father’s cabin and looking for the sea but instead meeting his future wife at a labour camp of convicts. After the flashback, he meets his wife in the new circumstances. She is astonished at his not having escaped. When she gives him a ten-dollar note, he throws it away. Mink’s cousin keeps persuading him to take the money (fifty dollars) from the corpse and divide it with him. Compared with the baseness of his cousin, Mink looks like a noble character, having been spurred to murder only by the feeling of wounded dignity. But

he starts regretting his choice of staying and not escaping. "I thought that when you killed a man, that finished it, he told himself. But it dont. It just starts then" (243). The cousin comes to his cabin not to let him go and take all the money from the corpse without dividing it. They play checkers on some of the money they intend to take. Then Mink goes to the barn, the cousin following him. Mink takes "a short, smooth white-oak stick eyed at the end with a loop of hemp rope" (248) that had belonged to Houston and strikes the cousin unconscious with it, then ties his hands and feet and gags his mouth and leaves him in the crib. In the darkness, looking for the tree with the corpse in it, he gets lost. He knows he is running short of time and he rushes "ahead of that avalanche of accumulating seconds which [is] now his enemy" (250). Completely disoriented, he ends up back at his house where he meets his cousin, untied. The sheriff had found him in the crib and freed him, and he says he had lied to the sheriff about where Mink had gone. But Mink does not feel grateful: he finds a stick and strikes the cousin unconscious again. After that he quickly finds the oak with the corpse. There Houston's hound that had survived the shooting attacks him. He hits it with his axe, then continues hitting the base of the tree to recover the corpse. Finally the axe disappears into the rotten wood, he starts tearing at the shell with his hands, from the opening there comes a foul smell, and the wounded hound tries to get into the tree at the corpse, howling. He takes the body to a stream and drowns it, but one of its arms is missing. Still fighting with the satanic-looking hound, he is caught by the sheriff's men. It thus becomes obvious that the cousin had not lied to the sheriff but had helped him find Mink's traces. Mink is arrested and put into jail. He is not executed.

Other characters.

Mink's cousin who wants to have his victim's money is a typical example of the kind of wickedness the clan members are capable of. Another Snopes makes a hole in a barn wall and charges money from people coming to peep through the hole to look at his idiot cousin copulating with a cow. The head of the clan is Flem Snopes who rises to more and more eminent positions through dirty tricks. He finally sells his land to the honest countrypeople by lying them there is a treasure buried in the garden. It is implied in a grotesque episode that he would be able to trick and bewilder Satan himself.

#### **General Characteristics of Mink Snopes in "The Hamlet".**

Although Mink Snopes somewhat lacks the tragic grandeur of many of Faulkner's earlier criminal characters, he is shown not only from despicable sides but also with compassion, a victim of the more elaborate wickedness of others. The description of his days and hours between the murder and his being caught, especially the desperate ramblings in the wilderness, resemble the scenes of Joe Christmas' escape in "Light in August". Since upon recovering the corpse he does not look for money in his pockets, it is clear that he had not succumbed to his cousin's cravings for money. The author would keep his compassionate, almost sympathetic treatment of Mink in the third part of the trilogy of which "The Hamlet" was the first one, "The Mansion", where he after his release from the thirty-year imprisonment emerges as an embodiment of authorial justice, an angel of fate that comes to punish Flem Snopes for all his wickedness.

**A Generalization.**

It may be said about these three studies of violence by Faulkner analyzed here that they resemble the Gothic tradition by their focus on villains, but Faulkner goes much further than Gothic novelists by not only making the actions of his main villains engaging, but by offering additional insights into them from an understanding, compassionate angle, still without fully justifying their crimes. On the other hand, moral, spiritual degeneration is fully condemned.

## Chapter Three.

### Three Early Studies of Violence by Cormac McCarthy

#### **“Outer Dark” (1968).**

The 240 page long novel consists of rather long unnumbered chapters, each of which is preceded by a much shorter piece in italics. The parts in italics present the wanderings of an unidentified triad of men whose paths intersect and meet with those of the main characters and who start doing terrible things. The title, “Outer Dark”, is most likely a quotation from the gospels (Matthew 8: 10 – 12 (Arnold 1999b: 46)), and the whole book has a strong allegorical tendency, as it can be seen as a dark anti-gospel, a story of human lives without redemption, deeply seeped in sin. The allegorical level helps to explain the essence of the mysterious triad because they can hardly be seen as real living people, they rather resemble a satanic, Unholy Trinity. In the first italicized passage those three men are shown camping for night. We learn that one of them is bearded and is the leader of the other two.

The narrative proper starts with a woman waking a man. He has been dreaming, and the author tells the readers his dream. At once the main tonality, the allegorical and darkly visionary character of the novel is introduced. The dreamer had seen a prophet speaking to a crowd of beggars among whom the dreamer was and he had asked the prophet if he could be cured. All the images suggest doom. There are “a black sun” and “a night more dolorous”, “a delegation of human ruin” with “blind eyes” and “leprous sores”. The sun “would darken” – he dreams of an eclipse – and it becomes clear that the eclipse is to last forever. And the crowd “knew him even in that pit of hopeless dark and fell upon him with howls of outrage” (in “Outer Dark”, p. 6). As the man gets up, it gradually becomes clear who they are. They are a brother and a sister living in a hut somewhere in the obscure countryside in the South. The

woman, Rinthy, is pregnant, and the child she is expecting is by the brother, Culla Holme. That there has been an incest is never explicitly stated; it just becomes evident from the relationship they are shown to be having. The delivery soon begins; he helps her at giving the birth, severs the navelcord with a handleless claspknife and wraps the child – “a chap” – in a towel. When the sister asks about her son’s health, he answers: “I don’t look for it to live.” As the sister falls asleep, Culla takes the child into the forest. He leaves his son onto a hummock of moss in the forest to die. On his way back, he gets lost, “confused in a swampy forest, floundering through sucking quagmires and half running” (16 – 17). The Gothic atmosphere is strengthened when lightning starts and the trees seem “malign and baleful shapes” to him. Exhausted from seeking his way, Culla finally lies face down on the earth, “his hands putting back the night like some witless paraclete beleagured with all limbo’s clamor” (18), and hears his child wailing. It is obvious that Culla realizes the perversion of the incest and wants to destroy its fruit. But doing that, he commits a crime. To his sister he says that the child had died of natural causes and that he had buried him, showing her what he claims to be his grave. In reality, a tinker passing by finds the child and takes him along with him. The sister starts digging up the asserted grave and discovers Culla had lied to her. Suspecting the tinker of having the child, she leaves home to start looking for the tinker. In the following italicized episode which reads rather like prose poetry, the three mysterious men are shown travelling, “seeming blind with purpose”, “armed with crude agrarian weapons, spade and brush-hook” (35). In the narrative proper, Culla leaves home to find his sister, and gets hired in a town to fell trees. The whole of the following book is a description of the wanderings of the sister and the brother. They meet a lot of people, some of whom are friendly, some hostile. Rinthy has a trouble with her breasts which are lactating and bleeding.

Critics have noted that as a mother figure in search of her child, Rinthy has a similarity to the mild country girl, the pregnant Lena Grove of Faulkner's "Light in August", also travelling on foot for hundreds of miles and looking for her child's father (Grammer 1999: 38). Both are driven by motherly instincts and both seem innocent, without any consciousness of evil, forming a balance to the otherwise sinful and violent contents of the two novels. Rinthy is the only character in "Outer Dark" who may suggest hope and redemption, but whereas Lena Grove is almost sunny and joyful, Rinthy is just neutrally calm. Thus "Outer Dark" may be seen as a darker version of "Light in August", as even their titles suggest (it is worth mentioning that with its working title "Dark House" Faulkner's novel also suggested greater gloom). In the italicized episodes, the ominous journey of the three men continues, and there occurs the first murder: they stop a wagon, seize the reins, one of them comes up behind the driver and swings the brush-hook in the small of his back, severing the spine. The action is conveyed as in silent films: there is no dialogue, the men act in silent agreement and the driver falls "without a cry". Culla's dark experiences continue: he becomes witness to someone having dug up several graves in the churchyard. In a ghoulish, Gothic scene, he observes the "waxen gray face" of an old corpse "scowling eyelessly at the bright moon", another corpse with the flesh on its legs "drawn and withered and gone a dusty brown" (in "Outer Dark", p. 87). He can see the black arm of the body of an old man, sharing "his resting place with a negro sexton whose head had been cut half off and who clasped him in an embrace of lazarous depravity" (88).

Hired to repair a roof, on the third day of work he can see from the rooftop four men approaching with a shotgun and he understands from their talking that they plan to catch and kill him. Quickly descending the ladder, he escapes, but one of the

men manages to hit him on the back with a slat. They shoot at him, and he is slightly wounded. As if to add horror, in the next episode the author describes the hanging from a tree of the bodies of two itinerant millhands and the swinging of them in the wind. The motivation of these horrible acts remains wholly unexplained. Continuing his wanderings, Culla stops at a lonely man's place to ask him for a sup of water. The man is friendly, saying that he "would not turn Satan away for a drink" (117) and there follow several pages of their friendly country talk in the Southern dialect. In the following italicized episode, the three mysterious men reach the house of the old man which Culla has just left. The bearded one taps at the door, says he is a minister, and as the old man lets them in, he stabs him in the stomach: "Light went in a long bright wink upon the knifeblade as it sank with a faint breath of gas into his belly" (129). The murderers look truly satanic: "His assassin smiled upon him with bright teeth, the faces of the other two peering from either shoulder in consubstantial monstrosity, a grim triune that watched wordless, affable" (129). McCarthy's choice of vocabulary seems to support the supposition that the murderous men represent a sort of Antichrist, but they may also be seen as an embodiment of Culla's dark, sinful soul or shadow always following him and killing the people with whom he has just become friends. The murderer twists the knife in the old man's stomach and completely disembowels him.

Trying to cross a river in the dark on a ferry, Culla gets caught in tragic events. There is a horse on the ferry that turns wild in the middle of the river. It starts repeatedly rushing from one end of the ferry to the other, almost crushing Culla. It finally rushes overboard in a huge splash and drowns. The ferryman is also swept overboard so Culla is the only one who survives and reaches the other shore. Soaking wet and exhausted, Culla wanders on the dark shore and finally finds a fire around

which three men are sitting. It is Culla's first contact with the dark "triune" following him. They are roasting and eating something "mummified" that the writer lets the reader suspect is human flesh, and they force Culla also to eat it. This is the first time the men speak. The reader learns that one of the men is called Harmon and another is mute. They question Culla about his quest and about his sister. Finally they force him to take off his good boots and give the boots to them, giving him a pair of "mismatched, cracked, shapeless, burntlooking" boots in return. The men look "ragged, filthy, threatful" (182).

The sister Rinthy finally meets the tinker but the man denies ever having had her child. After leaving the dark "triune" Culla finds an empty house in which he falls asleep. When he wakes, a man is aiming at him with a gun. The man accuses him of trespassing into his property and takes him to the squire who orders Culla to work ten days for him as the punishment. After his punishment is over, Culla meets a swineherd with a huge group of hogs. He and the swineherd discuss many things, including the idea that pigs are unclean animals which is why Jews do not eat them (Culla does not know what a Jew means). Then something scares the hogs and they start rushing by dozens over the cliff into the ravine: "[H]e could see the hogs welled up in a clamorous and screeching flume that fanned again on the far side in a high meadow skirting the bluff of the river. [---] [A] whole echelon of them careering up the outer flank forsook the land and faired into space with torn cries. [---] The hogs were in full stampede" (217).

The other pig-drovers trying to save the animals begin "to assume satanic looks with their staves and wild eyes as if they were no true swineherds but disciples of darkness got among these charges to herd them to their doom" (218). This event may clearly remind the readers familiar with the gospels of the parable about evil

impulses of people going into swine (Matthew 8: 28 – 34), a parable which Dostoevski quoted in one of his novels. In this weird and dreadful scene, Culla can see the swineherd he had talked with being swept down by the wild animals and falling into the ravine with them. Now the other herders, companions of the dead drover catch Culla and accuse him of what happened. They are about to hang him and a ridiculous, grotesque minister (whom they call Reverend) among them reads Culla his sermon. At the last moment, Culla escapes by jumping from the cliff into the river, hurting his leg.

The last of the italicized episodes describes the tinker meeting the three mysterious men who are going to kill him. It is in the same darkly visionary language as the previous ones and it is one of the best examples in the whole of McCarthy's oeuvre of the highly poetic, Elizabethan-like and archaic diction that he often uses:

What discordant vespers do the tinker's goods chime through the long twilight and over the brindled forest road, him stooped and hounded through the windy recrements of day like those exiles who divorced of corporeality and enjoined ingress of heaven or hell wander forever the middle warrens spoorless increate and anathema. Hounded by grief, by guilt, or like this cheerless vendor clamored at heel through wood and fen by his own querulous and inconsolable wares in perennial tin malediction (229).

This passage may help one understand the reason some critics and readers have complained about McCarthy being extremely difficult to read, almost unreadable.

The murder of the tinker is not directly shown. With his leg hurting, Culla comes limping into a glade and meets again the three men sitting around a fire. They have a child with them and near them there is the tinker's cart. The child has been half blinded, one of his eyesockets is empty. The tinker has been hanged, swinging from a tree. It becomes evident that the child is Culla's son. The men give him a hint they

know he is the father: “I figure you got this thing here in her belly your own self and then laid it off on that tinker” (233).

After the men have asked Culla what his feelings for the child are, and he repeatedly says: “He ain’t nothin to me,” the bearded man takes the child between his legs like a rabbit. Seeing the man catch a slender knife, at the last moment Culla tries to save the child, saying: “My sister would take him. That chap” (236). But it is too late: “Holme saw the blade wink in the light like a long cat’s eye slant and malevolent and a dark smile erupted on the child’s throat and went all broken down the front of it. The child made no sound. It hung there with its one eye gazing over like a wet stone and the black blood pumping down its naked belly” (236).

Then the murdered child is given to the mute man, who buries his face in the child’s throat, apparently starting to drink the blood. In the following episode, the sister Rinthy is shown entering the glade and finding her son’s ribcage in the ashes of the deserted fire. There is also a description of the hanged tinker’s body decomposing through seasons and years. The final episode of the novel is about Culla much later meeting a prophetic blind man, one of the first of the many symbolic, clairvoyant blind men to appear in McCarthy’s fiction.

### **General Characteristics of “Outer Dark”.**

“Outer Dark” is probably the darkest of McCarthy’s novels (only “Blood Meridian” may be more depressing). Even when writing it, the author must have understood that it would never become widely popular. Even with the strongest attempts it is difficult to find hope in its ghoulish atmosphere and to believe in any kind of redemptive power in its violence. There is no happy end as a reward for the reading efforts; with its numerous blind acts of horror (the only crime for which it is

possible to find motivation is Culla abandoning his child in the forest), the novel tends to leave the reader just baffled and shocked. A pessimistic, allegorical play with reverse Christian ideas and imagery, it is, however, far more interesting to read than Faulkner's Christian allegory "A Fable". It is mainly through allegory that the reader must interpret the role of the "triune" of the murderous men. If McCarthy had attempted to write a fully realistic novel, these figures should be regarded as a failure. As realistic characters, they look two-dimensional, rather like crime machines than living beings. But as embodiments of Culla's dark consciousness and of absolute evil they are interesting enough. There is great power in the conveyance of country speech and of natural surroundings. Even though the book as a whole causes repulsive rather than empathic feelings, the author's courage and skill to tell about these horrors in an engaging way evokes admiration, which is mainly why most critics accepted the novel warmly and have praised it.

#### **"Child of God" (1973).**

The 200 page long book consists of three parts of about equal length. The readers are first shown Lester Ballard, a young man in his twenties, on a fair. He is standing at the barn door. He is "small, unclean, unshaven." In one of his few comments the author says about him: "A child of God much like yourself perhaps" (in "Child of God", p. 4). He is annoyed because the fair is being held on what used to be his land. Using rude language, he demands the people to get off his "property". He threatens them with a rifle. In the following episode (each part of the book consists of short episodes each at the most a few pages long), he has already been punished: a man called Buster had sneaked behind him and hit him on the head with the blunt edge of an axe, after which he "never could hold his head right" (9). He is bleeding at

the ears. Thus although he had threatened others with violence, he had acted out of a peculiar sense of justice and out of despair, and had himself become a victim of violence. After this incident, he goes on to live in a shabby house, or rather a cabin, which is all that is left to him. The cabin is surrounded by heavy growth of weeds. In a following episode an anonymous narrator recalls an incident from his and Ballard's school days. The boys had been playing softball and the ball had rolled far away. Ballard had told another boy to fetch the softball. When the boy had refused, Ballard had hit him on the nose which had started bleeding. In this episode we are revealed that Ballard had had violent, short-tempered tendencies even in his boyhood. The episode preceding that had shown Lester living in his cabin: sitting outside, eating hot potatoes, being thirsty, dreaming beautiful dreams. Showing the simple human side of Ballard's existence, the author makes him sufficiently close to the readers; thus he carefully balances the repellent and the compassionate sides of information, making the character appear many-sided and three-dimensional. The following episode shows Lester for the first time at his favourite activity: lurking at a car in which a young couple is making love. He masturbates on the fender, is discovered by the couple and chased away. It is clear that he has developed this voyeurist perversion out of despair, because nobody loves him (he is characterized as "a misplaced and loveless simian shape" in this episode (20)). Next we learn from a narrator that Lester's father had killed (hanged) himself and his mother had run off with somebody. The nameless narrators who appear mostly in the first part of the book to provide in an ungrammatical dialect additional information about the main character may remind one of the role of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedies. Like the tragic chorus, they create the background, the atmosphere to the story, enrich the narrative with facts the readers would not learn otherwise and offer a change in the otherwise straightforward

narrative, determining the direction of the following episodes. This parallel with classical Greek literature brings forward the fact that in this novel McCarthy has undertaken quite an amazing task, to create a tragic hero from an almost utterly repellent and low character. In tragedies, the main characters are usually noble and of high birth, even if they are violent. It is McCarthy's innovation to give tragic nobility, by illuminating his basic humanity, to a character who in a different literary treatment would deserve only hatred.

Some of those who unlike Lester have had luck with women are morally no better: a father is shown raping one of his teenage daughters, after having caught her with a lover. Lester, on the other hand, once even attends a church service. But he does not find solace anywhere. The writer says about him in a poetic passage:

He'd grown lean and bitter.  
Some said mad.  
A malign star kept him (41).

Although so distant from a usual tragic figure, he does seem to possess the tragic hubris, being "a figure of wretched arrogance" (41). Once more his fate deals him a blow with its injustice. In the forest, he finds a woman in her nightdress, almost naked, lying down as if she were dead, but in reality she is just drunken. He had approached her just out of curiosity, he even asks her if she is not cold, but the woman goes to the sheriff and accuses him of raping her. In the sheriff's office, hearing the woman accusing him, Lester calls her a whore, the woman slaps his mouth, Lester starts to choke her and they both fall down. Ballard is put for nine days and nights into jail. On his release the sheriff asks him: "What sort of meanness have you got laid out for next. [---] I guess murder is next on the list ain't it?" (56) Finally the sheriff will be proved right, but it will take some time for Ballard to degrade further to that degree. The incident with the drunken woman shows that Ballard's violent tendencies

do not come solely from himself but are also caused by the morally corrupt society that produces in him a deep bitterness. Deep down, Lester is still a human being yearning for love, however perversely twisted his yearning may be. One of the following episodes depicts him from quite a touching angle. An excellent gunman, he shoots three times into a small red dot on a fair, winning as a prize three stuffed toy animals, two teddy-bears and a tiger. He is to keep these prizes in his cabin as his dearest treasure. With interest, he observes a blacksmith reshaping his axehead. There is one more scene which may strengthen the reader's compassion for him: he catches a robin and takes it as a present to an idiot boy whose sister he knows and secretly lusts for. When the idiot boy bites off the bird's legs (there remain only "small red nubs" working (79)), the reader can imagine how indignant Lester grows. Even such a small detail may increase the violent bitterness in a mentally unstable person.

In the second part of the book, Lester's perversions reach a new degree. In a car on a road, he finds a naked young couple that have died of poisonous engine gases in the middle of lovemaking, the man's penis in the condom still erect. The dead girl looks so attractive to Lester that he copulates with the corpse. His movements around and in the car, all his moments of hesitation and action are shown in detail, with great precision. Thus his necrophilia has begun. Not satisfied with one lovemaking, he drags the dead girl to his cabin. He repeatedly dresses and undresses her, admiring her beauty, and finally heaves her into the attic. Then he goes to the shop and pays a dress, a pair of drawers and a slip for his "girl-friend". Each time he copulates with the body he undertakes a ceremony of dressing and undressing her and painting her lips: "He would arrange her in different positions and go out and peer in the window at her. After a while he just sat holding her, his hands feeling her body under the new

clothes. He undressed her very slowly, talking to her. Then he pulled off his trousers and lay next to her. He spread her loose thighs. You been wantin it, he told her” (103).

Where some other writers might have stressed the ugliness of Ballard’s moral self, McCarthy keeps a neutral tone, tacitly letting the reader remember that Lester has been denied love by living girls. However, soon he loses his playmate. He has heated the cabin excessively, in order to make her rigid body thaw, and when he wakes in the middle of the night, the whole building is afire. He manages to save a few items, including the stuffed animals, but the whole cabin and the girl in the attic burn to ashes.

He then moves to a cave in the mountains. That will remain his home for a long time. Soon afterwards his murderous activities start. He goes to the house where the girl with her idiot brother lives. There is nobody else at home. He demands her to show him her breasts (“titties”). When she refuses, he pretends to leave but aims at her through the window with his rifle and shoots her. Ballard re-enters the house and stands above her, watching the girl die. He then sets the house afire, letting the idiot boy die in flames. He takes the dead girl with him to his cave as the replacement for the one he had lost. He earns money by selling old things he does not need any more. The most Gothic motif in the book is the cave which stretches for miles in the mountains, all of whose moist passageways Lester learns to use. In one of its farthest caverns he starts collecting the bodies of his victims. Beside hunting, he also gets food by stealing hens. Then he develops yet another perversion: “[h]e’d long been wearing the underclothes of his female victims but now he took to appearing in their outwear as well” (140). He is described as a “gothic doll in illfit clothes” (140). This is one of the two cases when the author uses the word “gothic”. Not all his murders are depicted, but it is probable that he mostly attacks couples making love in cars on

forest roads. Although a serial killer now, he still has preserved human signs of intellectual curiosity: “he watched the hordes of cold stars sprawled across the smokehole and wondered what stuff they were made of, or himself” (141).

He does not kill only girls but also their male companions. In a scene at a car, he asks the couple rudely: “You was fixin to screw, wasn’t ye?” (150), then shoots the boy through the neck. There follows the murder of the girl:

Turning her by the shoulder he laid the muzzle of the rifle at the base of her skull and fired.

She dropped as if the bones in her body had been liquefied. Ballard tried to catch her but she slumped into the mud. He got hold of her dress by the nape to raise her but the material parted in his fist and in the end he had to stand the rifle against the fender of the truck and take her under the arms (151).

Almost immediately, after dragging her into the bushes, he starts copulating with the body, kissing the still warm mouth.

Although he has been shown evolving into a monster, it is difficult to forget the more human aspects of him shown earlier. Therefore the reader may almost pity him when he crosses a flooded river with his belongings and the stream carries his beloved prize animals away. It is winter and his feet get frozen in the water, so the following night he is in agony. Nature is also shown in a violent role, as all the streets in the town are flooded and people have to use boats to move. Finally Ballard’s fateful day comes: as he tries to kill a man called Greer, whom he has hated for a long time, and shoots him through the chest, the man shoots back at him and deprives him of his arm. Ballard is taken to the hospital and remains there until a group of men who suspect him of the murders come and take him away in a car. They are ready to lynch him, already placing his neck in a noose for hanging, telling him as his last chance to describe them where the bodies are. A second before being hanged he agrees to show them the cavern in the mountains but while they are creeping through the caves he

escapes through a narrow passage, leaving the men at a loss in the darkness, finds a way out and returns to the hospital. Obviously he understands that he could no longer survive in the wilderness with one arm. Since there is no proof found of his murders, he is never indicted for any crime. At the age of about thirty he dies of pneumonia in a hospital. His body is preserved in formalin at a medical school and “flayed, eviscerated, dissected” (194), his brains removed, his heart taken out, until the remains are finally “scraped from the table into a plastic bag” (194) and interred in a cemetery. The book ends with the Gothic scene of a man plowing seeing suddenly the earth open and his ponies disappear into a cave at the bottom of which seven decomposing bodies, Ballard’s victims, are lying.

#### **General Characteristics of “Child of God”.**

Except the brief narratives of by-standers resemblant of the chorus in Greek tragedies in the first third of the book, the structure of the novel is extremely simple and the style is laconic. Metaphors and similes are few but striking; nature descriptions are few but poetic. There is no overabundance of archaisms and endless complicated periods characteristic of many other novels of McCarthy. The character is shown mostly through external action, his emotions are rarely described. Although the treatment of the main character lacks the almost Shakespearean grandeur in which Faulkner sometimes shows his murderer Joe Christmas in “Light in August”, McCarthy’s conveyance of the development of evil is deeply philosophical, and the repulsive serial killer emerges before the reader, against all expectations, as also a victim, deeply human, and a tragic hero.

**“Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West” (1985).**

The 340 page long novel consists of twenty-three chapters, each introduced with a short synopsis of the following events. It is the first novel by McCarthy in which the action is not in the historical South, but in the Southwest (Texas) and mostly in Mexico. Though some critics have called it Gothic, that is not because of any direct motifs derived from English Gothicism, but because of the abundance of violence and horrible details. In various points the novel constitutes a transition from McCarthy’s Southern Gothic period to the Southwestern novels of his “Border Trilogy”. Its choice of characters makes it more similar to the early works. As in those, the characters, even the protagonists are mainly shown in a negative, repulsive light, it is difficult fully to empathize with them. As in the early novels, the violence is connected with no noble aspirations, but is a result of utter sinfulness and primitive, blood-thirsty instincts. Most critics agree that the horrors of “Blood Meridian” have little cathartic, redemptive effect but rather come like “a slap in the face” by the author (James 1985: 31). It is therefore not a tragedy in the classical sense, just an engaging succession of horror scenes. On the other hand, the novel resembles McCarthy’s later period by its settings in the deserts, plains and mountains of the Wild West, by its relatedness to cowboy themes and most of all by its breathtakingly beautiful and powerful nature descriptions. If there is any redemption at all to the violence in it, that can be found in the conveyance of the landscape, of sunshine and storms, of dawns, sunsets, days and nights.

However, while it is mostly agreed that “Blood Meridian” is not a tragedy, there are also other opinions. Leo Daugherty has argued that the novel constitutes a “gnostic tragedy” (Daugherty 1999: 159). In his opinion, the violence is derived from

the gnostic idea of this world being governed by a cruel, evil god (the jealous Yahweh), all of whose subjects are products and slaves of blind matter. The gang of scalp-hunters in the story who mercilessly murder and scalp almost anyone on their way, both the violent and the peaceful, are thus the agents of that evil god. The sixteen-year-old main character called the kid who participates in those raids but who nevertheless takes a relatively detached position (in fact he is not shown to commit any of the more atrocious crimes), has, according to this interpretation, preserved in his soul a spark of the divine fire of the other, good god of spirituality, exiled from this world. According to that interpretation, the novel is a story of the good and evil sides fighting in and for the kid's soul and the kid therefore rises to the position of a truly tragic hero. More generally Daugherty's theory exemplifies one of the two schools of McCarthy interpreters, one of whom regard him as a highly talented writer having a slightly perverse drive to prove his narrative skill through describing excessive bloodshed (therefore wasting his talent), whereas the other school believes him always to convey some moral, essentially humanist message. Beside Daugherty, one of the representatives of the latter school is Edwin T. Arnold. According to Arnold, McCarthy always writes what can be called "moral parables" (Arnold 1999b: 61). The present analysis attempts an intermediate position, admitting that it is sometimes difficult to perceive a moral message behind the atrocities in McCarthy's fiction, especially in his earlier works, but also maintaining that McCarthy is far too deep a psychologist and philosopher to engage in conveying horror just for its own sake and that traces of the humanist, compassionate (though definitely fatalist) view of humankind that fully emerged in his "Border Trilogy" must be discernible already in his earlier works. Daugherty's theory of "Blood Meridian" as a gnostic tragedy therefore seems more interesting and more reasonable than the interpretations of the

novel as a glorification of absolute nihilism. It seems justified at least to start from the supposition that the novel has elements of a tragedy, though by some of its other traits it may fail as such.

“The kid” is very early in his childhood exposed to the cruelty of the world. His mother dies giving birth to him. His father is a drunkard. At fourteen there broods in him “already a taste for mindless violence” (in “Blood Meridian”, p. 3). He runs away from his home in Tennessee, wanders through the South, ending up a year later in Saint Louis, where a “Maltese boatswain shoots him in the back with a small pistol” (4). Then he is shot again just below the heart. After recovering he works in a sawmill. In the Texan town of Nacogdoches he has his first stunning encounter with Judge Holden, the other main character in the book, whose name he does not know yet. At once, the judge is shown as an utterly cynical, vicious and deceitful creature. During a sermon in a church he interrupts the speech of the preacher, starting to accuse him in a loud voice of rapes and sexual relationships with animals, claiming him to be wanted by the law in various states. He speaks with such confidence and persuasiveness that the listeners lynch the preacher. Later in a bar the judge admits with a light-hearted grin that he had never heard of the preacher before and that he had entirely made up his accusations. In the following episode the kid meets with his other future companion called Toadvine, a man whose ears have been cut off. They start quarrelling for a trivial reason and try to kill each other, the man attempting to stick a jagged bottleneck in the kid’s eye. After being separated they become friends.

On his way westward the kid stays for a night at an old hermit’s place who is friendly to him. The hermit had earlier been a slavehunter and he shows the kid a dry blackened thing which he explains is a Black man’s heart. When the kid stops in a bar, he wants a drink but since he has no money, he offers to mop the floor for a

whiskey. After he has done his work, the barman, who is Mexican and speaks no English, gestures him to get lost and ultimately threatens him with a pistol. The kid then sticks out his eye and kills him with a broken bottle. That is one of the two murders he is shown to commit, though in fact he probably commits many others. His cruelty in punishing the Mexican impresses the federal troops in the town so much that he is offered the opportunity to enlist in the army (thus also getting a livelihood, a horse and a nice uniform) to go on a patriotic mission to Mexico with the purpose of annexing the northern Mexican states into the U. S.. For dozens of pages, the expedition of the troops through deserts and mountains is described, many men dying of diseases during the journey. Though the landscape and the weather are often infernal, there are majesty and a certain peace in the descriptions of them. After weeks of hardship, the warriors are attacked on a plain by a large group, almost an army, of Comanches. In what will become the first of the great massacre scenes of the book, the costumes of the Comanches in their grotesque or comic aspects contrast sharply with their deadly mission:

A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniforms still tracked with the blood of prior owners, [---] one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil [---] and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a spanish conquistador [---] (52).

Almost all the Americans perish in the bloodshed. They are “lanced and caught up by the hair and scalped standing” (53). The scenes with the savages “ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals” (54), read like pages from “The Iliad” or especially from Dante’s “Inferno”, as critics have marked (Banville [features/cormac/bibliography.html](http://features/cormac/bibliography.html)).

The kid survives, and so does another man from the company. They escape and start wandering through the desert and the mountains, hungry and thirsty, one of the man's arms wounded and worms already crawling in the wound. One night a vampire bat falls on the man's neck and sucks his blood. They pass a tree on which eight dead babies are hanging. When they ultimately reach a town, the man dies of his wounds and the kid is captured and shown the severed head of the leader of their company in a jar of mescal. In the prison the kid meets again his earless friend Toadvine who has also been captured. They are forced to do the humiliating work of cleaning the street gutters with their bare hands. It seems the fortune has smiled on them when they are given the chance of joining a band of scalp-hunters, mostly white Americans, who have signed an illegal contract with Mexican state authorities to hunt and murder Indians (Mexicans are also afraid of wild Indian tribes). They are to earn a hundred dollars for each scalp of an Indian. The kid and Toadvine join the gang whose leader is a man named Glanton and whose second, spiritual leader is Judge Holden. The judge seems to have a special feeling for the kid whom he always observes with a smile. Altogether, the judge has been counted smiling thirty-eight times in the course of the book (Sepich 1993: 160). The rest of the novel is an account of the journeys and single and mass murders of the gang. Even though they initially scalp only aggressive Indians, they soon become so intoxicated with their success that they start killing and scalping even peaceful Indians, including women and children, and even Mexican peasants whom they in fact are hired to protect. There are also conflicts among the gang members themselves, some of whom murder their companions in brutal ways (as when a Black gang member cuts off the head of a companion for a racist insult (107)). Wherever they go they act in a vicious and short-tempered way. The judge is especially noteworthy as a man of sly and deceitful ways.

Once he saves an Indian boy from a massacre, rides with him on his saddle, even plays with him and pats him, only to scalp him when the boy has come to trust his saviour. An exceptionally cruel man, the judge is also widely educated, speaking various languages and knowing apparently all about animals, plants, rocks and ancient tribes. He repeatedly gives other gang members lectures about geology, the theory of evolution and history. He also glorifies and justifies war and bloodshed as the noblest of man's activities. Critics have noted parallels of this book with Melville's "Moby Dick", as in both works a group of men ventures on a desperate and doomed journey with the purpose to kill (Shaviro 1999: 146). The kid as an initially innocent young man resembles Ishmael, the role of the mad Captain Ahab being played by turns by Captain Glanton and by Judge Holden. Although the initial motivation of the gang is relatively justified, they act on a blind faith in the special status and "chosenness" of their enterprise and become engaged in absolutely immoral, nihilistic atrocities, a fact which may support the gnostic interpretation of the novel by Daugherty. Similarly to the gang, the ancient Hebrews of the Old Testament, whose god the Gnostics considered evil, often engaged in brutal genocide of the neighbouring tribes and committed other horrible crimes in the name of their God who they believed had given them the status of "the elect".

Despite the general passive cooperation with murderers, the kid occasionally shows the ability for mercy. Whereas other men pitilessly kill their seriously wounded companions, the kid, being left behind to kill Shelby, leaves him alive and even gives him a flask with water before departing, even though being left alone in the wilderness where enemies roam almost certainly also means death for the man (in "Blood Meridian", pp. 206 – 209).

The gang finally perishes when they stay too long at one place, jubilant for the accumulation of the riches they have robbed and losing apprehension. The Indians attack and kill the leader Glanton by smashing his head and most other gang members. Finally only the kid, the judge (alongside with an idiot) and an ex-priest survive and there are thrilling scenes as the judge who has turned against the other two tries to kill them in the desert. Back in the USA, the kid witnesses the public hanging of his former companion Toadvine and manages to buy a necklace of human ears the man had been wearing. There are signs that after the end of the doomed journey the kid grows less aggressive and may even come to regret the atrocities in which he had participated. He keeps the necklace as the only reminder of his violent past. He is then shown twenty-nine years later, at the age of forty-five. He commits one more murder, but merely out of self-defense (322). In what may be the most moving episode of the book, he narrates all his gloomy adventures to an old Indian woman sitting motionlessly at the entrance of a cave. It is only when he turns to her for a reply that he realizes he has been talking to a mummified corpse. Since he had promised her “that he would convey her to a safe place” (315) it becomes clear that he is not heartless, that he is also capable of humane feelings and that he has a greater need for self-expression than discernible in the rest of the novel.

The end of the book is ambivalent: the protagonist meets Judge Holden, who still looks almost the same, in a bar, reluctantly replies to his garrulous remarks and is a little later apparently murdered by him in some perverse way in an outhouse (the murder is only hinted at). In the final episode the judge, now the sole survivor of the events described, is merrily dancing with the people in the bar and boasting that he “will never die” (335). Since the judge clearly stands for (almost absolute) evil, evil is

victorious in the book, a fact which makes the ultimate impact of the novel similar to that of “Outer Dark”, there being no happy end, not even final calmness.

### **General Characteristics of “Blood Meridian”.**

Although some critics have hailed “Blood Meridian” as McCarthy’s greatest masterpiece, such claims can also be doubted. While it is possible to see traits of a moral parable in it, such a reading is not inevitable. The central relationship of the story, that between the kid and the judge, strongly resembles the relations between Culla Holme and the leader of the murderous triad in “Outer Dark”. Like Culla Holme, the kid is generally far too passive and inert a character to evoke either great compassion or great repulsion. The violence of the judge (as that of the whole gang), being essentially and mostly unmotivated and nihilistic, resembles the automatic crimes of the dark triune (though the judge does present a philosophy of evil which the murderers in “Outer Dark” do not do). It seems therefore right to say that the depiction of violence in both these books, while conveyed with great graphic precision, suffers from being a little too schematic and two-dimensional, not entailing any deep psychological insights, as one should expect from a work of art, but merely stunning with repulsion, as experiences of crimes in real life usually do. It is, however, possible, that the real-life-like impact was precisely the author’s intention (especially because all the main violent characters of “Blood Meridian” have real nineteenth-century prototypes). Indisputably, the descriptions of the massacres are masterfully and powerfully written, and the conveyance of the landscape and natural phenomena strikes the reader as majestic and unforgettable.

As previously said, “Blood Meridian” could perhaps be best interpreted as a transitional work between McCarthy’s Southern Gothic novels and his “Border

Trilogy". It is, like "Outer Dark" and "Child of God", a deep and ruthless study of evil in which the power of redemption is of secondary importance. There are mostly yet lacking in it the complicated juxtaposition and dialectics of beauty and repulsiveness, nobility and hideousness, a glimpse of which had previously been captured in "Child of God" but which was fully to appear only in "The Border Trilogy". The kid is a preparation for the protagonists of the trilogy. Similarly to them, he is in his late teens, skilled with arms and with horses, coming rather close to (but not fully merging with) the archetype of the Hemingwayesque "wounded hero", whom McCarthy was to introduce into his Westerns. John Grady and Billy of "The Border Trilogy" also occasionally engage in violence, but in their case it is justified by noble motives. They are also given a far greater number of warm human qualities than the kid has, the scene with the mummified corpse being almost the only one that evokes sincere compassion for him.

#### **A Generalization.**

What was generally said about the three studies of violence by Faulkner, could be repeated here about McCarthy. Like the Gothic novelists, he presents villain-heroes, but he does it with far greater empathy than any of them. The worlds of his violent characters are even more horrible than those of the characters of Faulkner, but he concentrates his attention on them not as criminals, but as human beings lost in an unethical world.

## Chapter Four

### The Later Periods of William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy

#### **William Faulkner's Later Period (1948 – 1962).**

Certain traits of Faulkner's later period may be seen, in an embryonic form, even in his first period writings. It almost seems Faulkner is unable to create a sympathetic character, one that is innocent of any crimes, without making him or her look pathetic: even Dilsey of "The Sound and the Fury" and Ratliff of the Snopes trilogy might be examples, though their goodness and dignity is relatively easy to believe. The reader may be thankful for their existence in these novels, for they provide a glimmer of hope in the general gloominess; but even they can already be seen as simply masterful incarnations of the author's rhetoric about high human values that was fully to emerge in his later period, most notably in the figure of the Christ-like French corporal of "A Fable". The sugary moralizing of later Faulkner even led to him making of the infant-killer Nancy of "Requiem for a Nun" a stereotypical "golden-hearted" (former) prostitute, a pitied and innocent "child of God" (without the irony that McCarthy gave to that phrase), missing almost all the interesting depths and heights that a Dostoevskian treatment might have allowed in that character.

There is violence also in Faulkner's later novels, but it is less frequent and it always serves some moralizing idea. In the half-drama and half-novel "Requiem for a Nun", the Black house servant Nancy Mannigoe strangles her housemaid Temple Stevens' little child with a pillow (the murder is not shown) in order to awaken Temple's conscience with this murder and prevent her deserting her family for a frivolous man, an imminent danger. She achieves her purpose but is sentenced to death by hanging for her crime (Temple vainly tries to save her by claiming her to be

insane). Nancy thus sacrifices herself for a noble ideal (probably hoping to get to heaven for that) but the outcome fails to justify the horrible crime. Faulkner seems to have intended to write a classical tragedy, reminiscent by its impact of the dramas of Sophocles, Euripides and Seneca, one that would read like a moral theorem or formula, a paradoxical riddle (like the questions posed by the sphinx) about the “old verities of the human heart”, but it is rather one of his “noble failures”, being psychologically unconvincing. In “A Fable” (1954), set on the Western front of World War One, a charismatic French corporal refuses attacking the Germans, initiating a truce on the whole front. He is executed as a punishment for disobedience. By using parallels with the gospel story (but without miracles), Faulkner tries to attribute a Christ-like historical mission to his main character. He may even have tried to free the Christian tradition from its mythological, supernatural qualities to revive and stress the philosophical and moral message of the New Testament in its pure form, as required by the modern age of science and rationalism. As such, his attempt deserves respect, but it nevertheless strikes the reader as unconvincing, as merely an evasion of the depths of evil and of human endurance in border situations which the same author had studied so unrelentingly in his earlier works. The main impression of the book is that Faulkner had grown scared of the gloominess of his own earlier vision, of the sensuality and sinfulness of his former characters. It is rather surprising because Faulkner never was a devout Christian, and in his first period he even earned the condemnation of some Christians for his ironical use of religious motifs.

In the second part of the Snopes trilogy, “The Town” (1957), the violent scene is the suicide of Flem Snopes’ wife Eula driven to desperation by his callous husband. In the third part of the trilogy, “The Mansion” (1959), Mink Snopes, known from “The Hamlet”, after being released from his thirty years of imprisonment, finds his

hated cousin Flem and murders him. The shooting is shown very laconically and economically and it is clearly meant as a punishment for Flem for his wickedness: the author's sympathy is unmistakably on the murderer's side. Finally, in Faulkner's last novel, "The Reivers" (1962), set predominantly in a comical key, only the little rascal Otis emerges as a truly violent and spiritually degenerate character, charging money for letting others peep through a hole at a couple making love and threatening his admonishers with a knife. If not else, the book reads as excellent entertainment. It offers no great philosophical insights, but neither is it burdened by overpretentious ethics. It is perhaps here that the moralizing tendency of late Faulkner has found its most satisfactory form, for the book is presented as a grandfather's reminiscence to his grandchildren, an attempt to teach the wisdom of life to future generations.

The criticism in this survey is not to say that the works of Faulkner's later period do not deserve reading. On the eve of the post-modern era with its marginalist theories, he warms the heart with an attempt at holistic humanism, which remains just a little too declarative. The late Faulkner can strike the reader as an organized, though not deep thinker who remains interesting as a writer because by his matured, strong cadenced style, his main artistic appeal to the senses and rich imagery he can be amazingly refreshing and original. What seems to have happened to Faulkner is that he got tired of his earlier Shakespearean humanism and turned to more Miltonian, more doctrinal methods. Faulkner's "A Fable" has been compared to Milton's "Paradise Lost", with the concession that being as ambitious it is not equally successful (Simpson 1979: 158).

### **General Characteristics of Faulkner's Later Period.**

It might be said that by modifying his vision towards greater didacticism and a softening of passions, Faulkner showed a certain artistic courage of looking at things from new angles and searching for new narrative territories, but the moralizing, declarative humanism of his later works is clearly not as valuable as the studies of human psyche in his first period. His later depictions of violence are less powerful and shallower, but to some degree still capable of generating the reader's interest.

### **Cormac McCarthy's Later Period. "The Border Trilogy"(1992 – 1998).**

It is McCarthy's great innovative merit, given his general indebtedness to Faulkner, that beginning with "All the Pretty Horses" he introduced a type of positive character that is not pathetic, but is, firstly, masculine, resourceful and, if necessary, violent, secondly, has a wounded soul and faces difficult existential problems, and thirdly, evokes the reader's sincere compassion (Wallach [intertext.htm#McCarthy&Hemingway](#)). Such had been most of the male characters of Hemingway's; but since the rest of McCarthy's vision remains closer to Faulkner's, one can say here is a case in literary history when the elementary components were already there but latent until there emerged a writer of great talent to put them together in a new way.

It may be reasonable to treat the "Border Trilogy" novels ("All the Pretty Horses", 1992; "The Crossing", 1994; "Cities of the Plain", 1998) simultaneously as they are united by common characters and topics and are sometimes even published in one volume as a single mammoth book. To put it very short, they all present the life of young cowboys in the U. S. Southwest, set from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, therefore long after the heyday of cowboy life (the 1880s), as the young men try their

best to preserve at least something of the romantic vanishing lifestyle and listen to their older companions' memories. A unification of violence and action in the style of movie westerns with heavy psychological and philosophical questions gives reason to speak of them as "philosophical westerns". They all include crossings into Mexico where the landscape and even the civilization look wilder and which presents a danger, sometimes mortal, to the young men's life and senses of justice and morality. Some kind of love story with a Mexican girl is also a part of all the three novels. The first and the second novel have different protagonists, John Grady Cole in the former and Billy Parham in the latter, who meet and become "buddies" in the third one. The first and the second are travel (road) novels, the third one is more precisely located at a single place, the twin cities of El Paso and Juárez and the farms around them. Beside the action of the protagonists, all the three include lengthy deviations in the form of monologues of the people the young cowboys meet. Sometimes these monologues are philosophical, discussing the essence of evil and fate, problems of identity and the strange expressions of God's mercy, if that should exist. Very often these soliloquies are recollections of violence, especially of the fierce civil wars that have ravaged Mexico. The author has faithfully conveyed the smallest details of the actual landscape of the Southwest and of Mexico, and he is likewise true to facts in rendering the social background, the main characteristics of the history of the two countries. Greater attention to sociological problems is one of the aspects that differentiates "The Border Trilogy" from McCarthy's earlier, Southern Gothic novels. Whereas of "Outer Dark" and "Child of God" it might easily be said that the author has picked the case of an aberrant individual, a criminal story of extremes in the newspapers that produced rumours, and built a novel around it, thereby giving evil and violence a place more central and outstanding than it really has in everyday lives,

the strong sociological and historical documentary evidence of “The Border Trilogy” novels leaves no doubt as to the existence of evil as a very widespread, almost daily phenomenon, encompassing and affecting masses.

In addition to evoking warm compassion for his protagonists (not typical of the author earlier), McCarthy now creates a wide range of subsidiary characters, all victims of some kind and many of them deserving sympathy, and moreover, he also draws a compassionate light on wild tribes of nature and even on animals as victims of the evil (perhaps inevitably) entailed by the civilization. The pregnant she-wolf in “The Crossing” whom Billy has caught and whom he is trying to take back to the Mexican mountains comes to trust the boy, until she finally dies from his gunshot when there is no other way of rescuing her from the brutal fight with dogs into which the Mexicans have put her for their fun. For all the time from her capture through their journey in the wilderness, the boy takes care of the wounded animal as if she were his child or his beloved. There are moving scenes of him giving her water to drink, putting pieces of a shot rabbit in her mouth, of stroking and caressing her. She seems to him a messenger of another world that is more beautiful and even more real than his.

Several miserable mountain and desert tribes of Indians are shown, most of them kind and hospitable to the cowboys. At the beginning and at the end of “All the Pretty Horses”, the tribe of Comanches appears not as real Indians but as a caravan of ghosts travelling through the wilderness to the rhythm of their chants, luring John Grady into riding along with them. There is just one really evil Indian in the whole of the trilogy, and that is the man whom Billy meets near his home, takes a liking to him (because he is “wild”, like wolves), and whom he feeds with food he has stolen from his parents’ household. Later, as Billy is away from home, the same Indian attacks the

boy's unarmed parents (Billy had taken the only gun with him), murders them, robs the house and steals the horses.

The main scenes involving violence in "The Border Trilogy" are the following:

"All the Pretty Horses": John Grady's companion to Mexico, Jimmy Blevins, steals back the magnificent horse that had run away from him during a thunderstorm and had been appropriated by a Mexican. Followed by pistol shots, they escape, Blevins going a different way. Later, as John Grady and his other companion Rawlins arrive at a Mexican ranch, where they get work, there is violence in their taming the wild horses, which really looks like a rodeo. The aggressive character of the rest of the book is balanced with the tender and highly romantic love scenes between John Grady and the black-haired Mexican beauty Alejandra. As the two Americans are arrested for having assisted Blevins, they are taken, handcuffed, to a prison. When they meet Blevins there it becomes clear that during his escape with the horse he had killed three men. During investigations, the boys are tortured. They are then taken in a truck to another prison but on their way a stop is made. The Mexican captain takes Blevins to a grove of trees and shoots him dead. On his final walk Blevins is limping, because he had not managed to pull on one of his boots. The other boys are shocked by his death. In the prison they are forced to engage in brutal fights, receiving many scars. By a friendly Indian prisoner, John Grady is urged to buy a knife for the little money Blevins had given him before his death. He gets a knife just in time, because soon during a meal he is attacked by a boy who is a professional assassin, a vicious knife-fighter. The attack starts with the boy throwing a tray at his head. John Grady immediately starts fighting back. The enemy is absolutely silent, looking like "some dark and reedy homunculus bent upon inhabiting" John Grady (in "All the Pretty

Horses, p. 200). For all his repulsiveness, he seems to have some enthralling power. John Grady receives a knife cut on his face and several on his torso. Finally, as the boy has taken him by the hair and is about to cut his throat, John Grady manages sinking his knife into the enemy's heart. He has no choice but to obey the unwritten prison law "kill or be killed". Soon upon recovery, he and Rawlins are let out of the prison, because Alejandra's grandaunt Alfonsa has paid ransom for them. When John Grady goes to thank the grandaunt, she tells him a long story about Mexican values and about the brutality of civil wars in Mexico. She had known two leading revolutionary figures, Francisco and Gustavo Madero, the latter of whom she had been in love with. Even though the brothers had come to power, they were soon overthrown. Alfonsa gives a picture of Mexico as a country virtually ungovernable in any just way, a view supported by similar long narratives in the other novels. Her sweetheart Gustavo had been murdered by savage crowds, with first his only eye being pried out, then his jaw shot off and "finally a volley of pistol shots [---] fired into him" (237). Hundreds of thousands of men had perished in the successive conflicts, Alfonsa's sister having been "widowed twice by the age of twenty-one" (229). The culmination of the novel may be John Grady's last meeting with Alejandra, the girl rejecting his marriage proposal. Finally there are scenes very reminiscent of the action in movie westerns as John Grady goes to punish the captain who had murdered Blevins and get his horses back. As he is about to leave the stable with the horses and the captain he has taken hostage he is shot at from a rifle, receiving a wound in a leg. Later, in a very manly fashion, he disinfects the wound himself by burning the hole with a red-hot pistol barrel. Although he does for a time consider shooting the captain as a revenge, he commits no more murders in the novel and just hands the man over to authorities he trusts.

John Grady is, for McCarthy, an entirely new type of protagonist. When he kills a person, it is only in self-defense. He is capable of a wide range of deep human feelings (not to mention that he is well educated), and he keeps his moral standards high. He might even look slightly too positive and faultless but to claim that would mean overlooking his development from a naïve and embittered youth into a just and heroic man of action. On the other hand, even Blevins, a murderer of three men, is shown in quite a sympathetic light. The author reserves no sympathy for the Mexicans who kill Blevins, notably the captain, neither for the professional assassin in the prison. It can be said that the absolute metaphysical evil of McCarthy's earlier novels remains also present in "The Border Trilogy", but it is here accompanied by and overshadowed with a new level of main characters evoking compassion.

"The Crossing": this novel is longer and also sadder and more philosophical in character than the previous one. Billy Parham, like John Grady, also faces heavy trials in the course of his three travels to Mexico, but whereas John Grady emerges from his hardships as a winner (even though having lost his love), that cannot be said with certainty about Billy. From early on, as a young boy at his parental homestead in New Mexico, Billy develops a close relationship with wilderness, sneaking at night into the forest to observe wolves pursuing antelopes. In his middle teens, he and his younger brother meet an Indian with a gun lurking near their home. They treat him with awe, with just little suspicion, and they bring him food to eat. When cattle start to be killed, it becomes obvious a wolf has entered the neighbourhood from Mexico (local wolves had already been annihilated by the 1930s). It is finally Billy who captures the pregnant she-wolf but at what may be the most crucial moment of his life he decides to return the wolf to Mexico. He lets people on a farm bandage the creature and then they head for the border. The scene of the boy and the wolf who is leaping

her bandaged hind leg disappearing into the darkness reminds of the final walk of Blevins in the previous novel who also limped. Billy takes along his father's only gun and with that he is partly responsible for the murder of his parents during his absence, as the Indian he had fed attacks them. It is thus shown how a seemingly innocent tendency, a veneration of wild creatures such as wolves and Indians can lead to great tragedies. The reader can already guess the results, to the protagonist they come as unsuspectedly as the terrible truth of his origins came to King Oedipus in the ancient Greek tragedy by Sophocles. The people the boy and the wolf meet on their journey are all friendly, until very near their goal they are halted by Mexican authorities who confiscate the wolf. As she would have been killed in the dog-fight anyway, Billy shows mercy by shooting her. On his return home he hears a long story from a former Mormon, one of the many subnarratives in the book, about a man who had lost his only son in an earthquake and become a heretic. That story prepares the reader for the new heavy blow of fate on the protagonist: when he reaches home, the scene of the murder of his parents looks appalling. There is a huge curdled pool of blood on their marriage bed. The next violent episode occurs when Billy and his brother Boyd, in search of their stolen horses in Mexico, meet two villainous men who apparently intend to rape a young Mexican girl. In an act of bravery (in which Boyd excels more than Billy), they rescue the girl without any of them getting hurt, although one of the men cuts through Billy's boot with his slender knife before they manage to ride away. Boyd and the girl subsequently become lovers (Billy's only love to a female remaining his attachment to the she-wolf). Since this is the only violent episode in the book which ends successfully for Billy, critics have noted its similarity to movie westerns (Kiefer 2001: 4).

On their way the boys meet a travelling opera company which has halted because of conflicts between its members (the violent relations in the play have transferred into reality) and also because one of the actors has cut off the head of a wagon mule with a machete. As the boys find their stolen horses and try to retrieve them, there is a conflict with the owners in which a Mexican policeman breaks his back and dies when Billy spooks his horse. A few days later, in an act of revenge, Boyd is shot through the stomach with a rifle. The incident is shown in slow action, to stress its gravity. Escaping from the pursuers, Billy stays a night with a blind old man, a former revolutionary, who narrates about the events of the wars in which he had participated, about the massacres initiated by the government and about how he had lost his eyes: as he was about to be executed for his disloyalty, he had spat in the face of a guard. In response, the man, huge in stature, had brought his lips to his offender's face as if to kiss him but had in fact sucked his eyes out of their sockets, leaving them hanging by the cords. With its grotesqueness and incredibility, this may be the most Gothic episode in the novel. The blind man also narrates about how his wife had lost her father and two brothers in a government raid. Billy's third and solitary journey to Mexico results in him hearing that his brother who had recovered but had joined Mexican revolutionaries had been shot dead (after having killed somebody) and in his digging out his brother's body by the light of a fire he has lit on a splinter of the coffin, wrapping the corpse in a blanket and taking it back to the U. S.. On his return he is attacked by robbers who desecrate Boyd's bones and in a blind fit of rage stab his horse in the chest, almost killing it. In a story told to Billy by a Gypsy, the violent force of nature (a flood in the mountains) is brought out. In the final episode, Billy wakes in the desert to the sound and light of the first testing of an atomic bomb (an event in actual history), thereby being reminded that destructive powers are an

element of the civilization, not just of wilderness, and can attain an immensity beyond control. Ultimately Billy discovers even he can be cruel when he chases away a grotesque, crippled cur that had come seeking for his friendship (the dog may have reminded Billy of his attachment to the wolf), then bends down, weeping in regret.

If there could be doubt as to whether McCarthy really intended his Southern Gothic novels to be moral parables as E. Arnold has claimed (1999b: 45), the weightiness of the moral message of “The Crossing” is evident. Even if much of the violence Billy meets is meaningless, it obtains a meaning in his experience, becoming a part of his wounded identity. Like the existentialist novels of Camus, “The Crossing” affirms humanist values in the protagonist’s confrontation with border situations, with evil and with the apparent futility and absurdity of life. The main concept of the novel is not Gothic, but it resembles the Gothic tradition by its heavy concentration of evil and violence and by the rapid succession of cruel twists of destiny.

“Cities of the Plain”: this novel has been called McCarthy’s version of the Romeo and Juliet story, a claim grounded on the focus of the book on a love relationship between two young characters of different cultural backgrounds that leads to the tragic deaths of both of them. They are John Grady Cole, now working as a cowboy on a farm in Texas, and a young Mexican prostitute, Magdalena, who, being beautiful and black-haired, must have reminded the boy of his former beloved, Alejandra. Like the two previous books, the novel contains long reminiscences by older characters of the bloodshed of Mexican civil wars, as well as memories of exciting hunting trips and of the violence of cattle gone wild. Early in the book there is an episode with a bewildered horse storming in a stable which is conveyed very impressively, with the eyes of the horse rolling and white. As the plot develops, the

pimp of Magdalena's is introduced together with his homosexual assistant. They are both utterly vicious men. The pimp, Eduardo, has a wicked smile and outwardly polite manners, constantly puffing a cigar. The assistant, Tiburcio, has a way of appearing so suddenly that he seems to materialize from nowhere "like Lucifer" (in "Cities of the Plain", p. 128). When Magdalena is having one of her fierce epileptic fits and the other prostitutes regard her with veneration and fear, Eduardo rushes in and treats both them and her cruelly. It becomes clear that he feels his own sadistic kind of love for her. That is why he is so reluctant in relinquishing her: when John Grady (supported by twenty-eight year old Billy Parham, his more experienced friend) tries to buy the girl out of the brothel in order to marry her, the pimp refuses. Finally, as John Grady arranges a secret escape for her so she could cross the river to the U. S. to join him, Eduardo orders Tiburcio to mislead her. She is taken into the forest near the river (the fact that she is in the wrong car with the wrong destination becomes revealed only gradually) there to be met by Tiburcio (what follows is not shown), and when John Grady finds her, she is lying in the morgue with her throat cut, having been found in the river. John Grady then brings his grandfather's hunting knife and challenges Eduardo into a knife fight. In a long episode, reminiscent of the earlier knife-fight in "All the Pretty Horses", the enemies circle each other, making dashes, Eduardo proving more successful in wounding the other, until John Grady unexpectedly kills him by sinking the knife in his jaw. But the boy is more severely wounded than after the fight in the prison, with his intestines hanging out of his stomach, and he dies the following morning. Beside this main plot, there is violence in the scenes of the cowboys hunting and killing a pack of wild dogs, a few of the animals being literally pulled to pieces with the ropes around them.

In a way even gloomier than the earlier parts of the trilogy (the protagonist dies), “Cities of the Plain” simultaneously appears more hopeful as it clearly emphasizes the redemptive power of great love. The reason it is often considered a lesser work is in that it shows less character development (than “All the Pretty Horses”) and it poses fewer philosophical questions (than “The Crossing”). But the last claim is hardly true for the epilogue of the novel (and of the whole trilogy). Set in 2002, it shows aging Billy Parham listening to a stranger’s narration of his dreams and dreams-within-dreams (in which a traveller is solemnly executed with a sword as a sacrificial offering, only to be resurrected in the framing dream). With its motifs reminiscent of Borges and García Márquez, the epilogue seems to owe a lot to Latin American magic realism and might be best interpreted as the author’s conclusive metafictional discussion about the essence of acts of imagination and of story-telling, and also about the extension and limits of violence and evil. The author seems to affirm that although the powers of destruction are strong, people’s yearning for meaningfulness, order and justice is even stronger. That is also the message of the whole of “The Border Trilogy”.

#### **General Characteristics of McCarthy’s Later Period.**

“The Border Trilogy” novels certainly offer a broader and also deeper view of humanity than the earlier works. But it would not be justified to say that McCarthy has achieved that vision by entirely subduing his earlier Gothicism. He has rather done this by a specific form of metafictional methods, by counterpoising an essentially Gothic world (with peculiar Southwestern variations) against the aspirations of his positive but initially naïve protagonists. By some aspects, these characters still resemble the Gothic villain-heroes (occasional violence), but from

another angle they stand closer by their function to the Gothic character of an innocent, endangered virgin (while being of the opposite gender). McCarthy therefore has created an innovative synthesis of various Gothic and Southern Gothic motifs. Even though the violence of his really evil characters remains as mindless and mystical as in the earlier works, on the whole McCarthy has achieved a more complex, higher stage in the portrayal of violence.

## The Conclusion

Southern Gothic is a tradition of fiction writing that focuses on violence and degeneration in the specific conditions of life in the Southern U. S.. It is not a direct continuation of the traditional Gothic of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but it shares certain important traits with it. English Gothicists such as Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe were the first to develop the special genre of horrors and evil by focusing on villains who are also heroes and whose action is set in old, dark or deserted buildings that seem to have a life of their own. The figure of an endangered maiden, intricate family relationships and seemingly otherworldly phenomena are also characteristic of Gothic, and have found their way into Southern Gothic, though not all these motifs are necessarily present in all Southern Gothic works. Gothic was introduced into American literature by Charles Brockden Brown and later Edgar Allan Poe, who remained mainly close to the English tradition but who (especially Brown) shifted the settings to American locales and used deeper psychological analysis.

Southern Gothic proper was initiated by William Faulkner who has written some of the classical works of the school. Other central Southern Gothic writers include Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and Cormac McCarthy. O'Connor in her two novels and thirty-one short stories has written masterfully and powerfully about extreme states of mind, violence and the macabre, but her works also bear an imprint of her own religious convictions which somewhat narrows the universalism of her message. Nevertheless, she has influenced McCarthy.

Motifs of violence are almost omnipresent in the works of Faulkner and McCarthy. Even the language, the tortuous diction of the style which Faulkner and McCarthy often share conveys violence, while at the same time creating a sense of

distance from the action. However, certain passages of McCarthy are written in a much simpler, laconic, Hemingwayesque style which makes him easier to read. In general, landscape in Faulkner is shown in a close interaction with the person's psyche, in McCarthy landscapes have an autonomy of their own.

Faulkner's novel "Light in August" presents the development of an abused and unhappy young man, obsessed with racial identity problems, into a murderer who is later lynched. The writer also shows him from a compassionate side and the descriptions of his doom sometimes rise to a tragic grandeur. The same author's novel "Absalom, Absalom!" continues the racial themes, but it is at the same time a complex network of various interpretations of history, of gnoseological and ontological problems, which comes surprisingly close to the conventions of the traditional Gothic novel but by using them also transcends them. The way its central character, Thomas Sutpen, forces his obsessive ideas upon reality, breaks any normal sense of morality and initiates a succession of murders, including a fratricide and the killing of an infant. In one of the most memorable scenes of Faulkner, Sutpen's servant becomes his "Black Reaper". The novel had a revolutionary impact on narrative techniques and continues influencing modern fiction. In the section devoted to Mink Snopes in the novel "The Hamlet" Faulkner portrays the desperate acts of a plain kind of murderer, driven by his twisted sense of justice.

In his novel "Outer Dark" Cormac McCarthy has written a Gothic parable, a negative version of the gospel story which abounds in horrors and perversions such as incest, cannibalism and infanticide. The novel includes a version of the *doppelgänger* motif which may be seen to stand for the main character's sin-laden consciousness. It is powerful on the allegorical level and should not be interpreted in a fully realistic way. McCarthy's novel "Child of God" shows the evolution of a lonesome young

man into a necrophiliac and a serial killer. Astonishingly he leaves quite a human impression as a person who can almost be pitied and empathized with. In an otherwise simple and straightforward narrative, the author uses narrative voices by by-standers that function somewhat like the chorus in ancient Greek tragedies. The main character's low status makes him controversial as a tragic villain. "Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West" by McCarthy is a transitional novel, Gothic by its abundance of bloodshed, cruelty and portraits of degenerates, but no longer Southern because it is set in the Southwest. Critics have different views as to the redemptive effect its gloominess may have, some call it a tragedy with a truly tragic hero, others consider it an utterly pessimistic and nihilistic book.

Both Faulkner and McCarthy underwent a change in the middle of their careers which brought new views on violence. In Faulkner that change meant a softening of passions, diminishment of terror and a strong moralizing tendency which because of its declarativeness makes the impact of his later works less powerful. In McCarthy that change meant a greater social and historical awareness and an introduction of a new narrative level, that of positive, sympathetic characters whose tackling of existentialist problems is set on a basically Gothic background with Southwestern peculiarities in which metaphysical, absolute evil still remains a presence. Comparing the counterpointing developments of the depiction of violence and spiritual degeneration in the works of Faulkner and McCarthy, it may be said that whereas the depth of analysis in the works of Faulkner's early period is almost unsurpassable, Faulkner later created weaker works, as opposed to McCarthy who in his later works has reached a higher, very innovative stage of the presentation of these phenomena.

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Resümee

**TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA ÕPPETOOL**

Lauri Pilter

**Southern Gothic: the Development of the Depiction of Violence and Spiritual Degeneration in the Works of William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy. Lõuna gootika: vägivalda ja vaimse mandumise kujutamise areng William Faulkneri ja Cormac McCarthy teostes.**

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Annotatsioon:

Käesolevas magistritöös on vaadeldud vägivalda ja vaimse mandumise kujutamise arengut kahel USA nn. "lõuna gooti" kirjanikul – William Faulkneril ja Cormac McCarthyil. Kuna mainitud suund on saanud nime teatava sarnasuse tõttu euroopa (põhiliselt inglise) gooti kirjandusega, siis on sissejuhatuses antud ülevaade inglise gootika tekkest, tähtsamatest autoritest ja põhilistest tunnusoontest, samuti paralleelidest lõuna gootikaga. Samuti on seal tutvustatud C. B. Browni kui gooti traditsiooni algatajat USA-s ja antud lühiülevaade Flannery O'Connorist kui veel ühest olulisest lõuna gooti kirjanikust. Esimene peatükk räägib Faulkneri ja McCarthy elust ja vägivaldast nende varases loomingu üldse, samuti viisist, kuidas nende stiil ja keelekasutus vahendab vägivalda. Teises peatükis analüüsitakse Faulkneri kolme romaani, "Augustivalgust", "Absalom, Absalomi!" ja "Küla". Leitakse, et kui põhiosas meenutavad need teosed inglise gootikat peategelaste poolest, kes on ühtaegu nii kurjategijad kui (nende hingeelu kaasakiskuva kujutamise tõttu) ka kangelased, siis Faulkner kujutab oma pahelisi tegelasi kaastundlikumalt ja mitmepalgelisemalt. Sama kehtib põhiosas ka kolmandas peatükis käsitletud kolme McCarthy romaani "Väljas pimedas", "Jumala laps" ja "Veremeridiaan" kohta.

Leitakse, et autorit ei huvita niivõrd peategelane kui kurjategija, vaid kui üksildane, eksistentsiaalsete dilemmadega vastamisi seatud inimene eetikata maailmas. Neljas peatükk võrdleb Faulkneri ja McCarthy muutumist nende loomingulise tegevuse teises pooles ja hindab Faulkneri teist perioodi liigse deklaratiivse moraliseerimise tõttu langusena, McCarthy hilisteoseid aga visiooni rikastumise ja humaniseerumise tõttu uue, kõrgema tasemenähtena tema loomingus. Kokkuvõttes on tõdetud, et autorite areng vägivaldla kujutamisel moodustab omalaadse kontrapunkti, kuna Faulkneri varane tipp-periood on analüüsi sügavuselt peaaegu ületamatu, McCarthy hilisperiood aga pakub ainulaadseid, tänapäeval jätkuvalt aktuaalseid teoseid ja karakterisünteesi.

Märksõnad: gooti romaan, ameerika kirjandus, lõuna gootika, XX sajand.