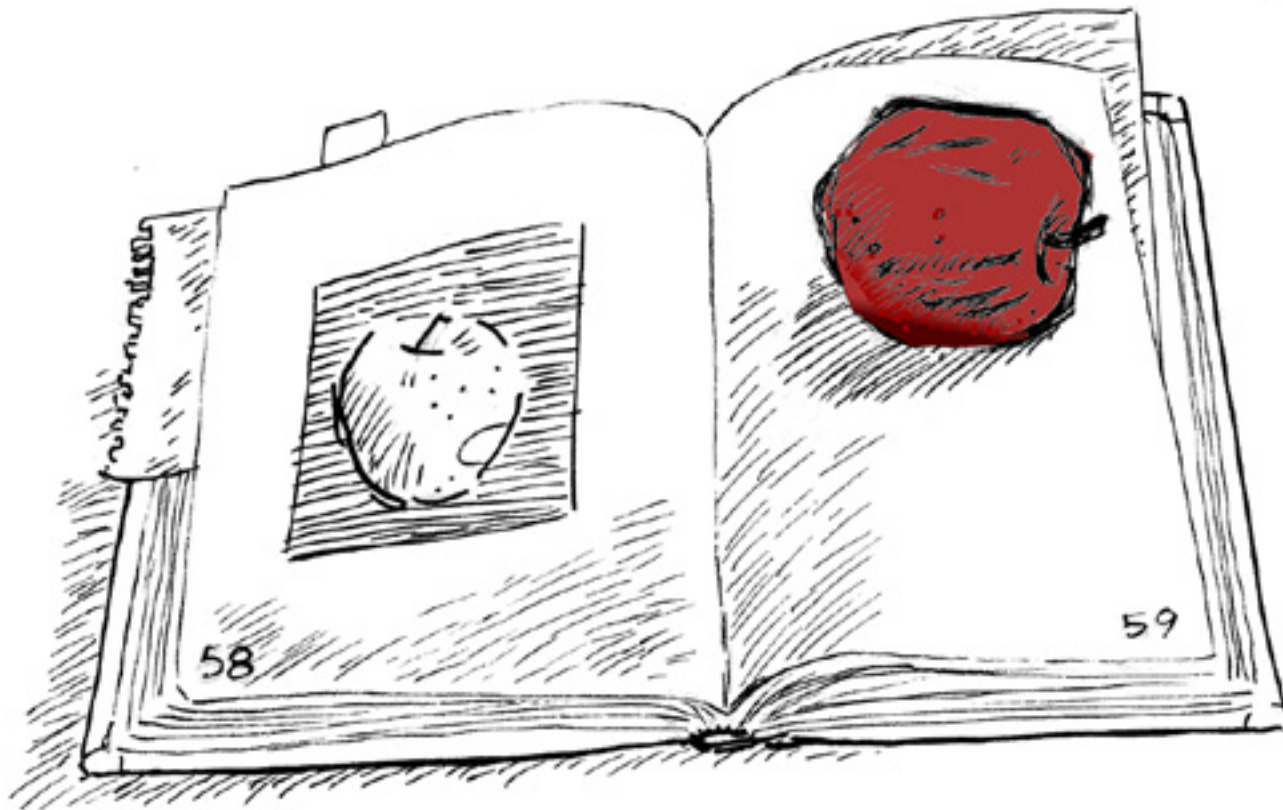


Faulkner's Style



William Faulkner

From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them.

—*Absolam, Absolam!*

William Faulkner

Monday is no different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees—the water oaks, the maples and locusts and elms—to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning, gathering the bundles of clothes into bright-colored, specially-made motor cars: the soiled wearing of a whole week now flees apparitionlike behind alert and irritable electric horns, with a long diminishing noise of rubber and asphalt like tearing silk, and even the Negro women who still take in white people’s washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles.

— “That Evening Sun”

ing: 'Suppose I told you I did not intend to go back to her?' and Henry would walk there beside him, with his pack and his eight feet of musket, and he would begin to pant, panting and panting while Bon watched him: 'I am out in front of you a lot now; going into battle, charging, I will be out in front of you—' and Henry panting, 'Stop! Stop!' and Bon watching him with that faint thin expression about the mouth and eyes: '—and who would ever know? You would not even have to know for certain yourself, because who could say but what a Yankee ball might have struck me at the exact second you pulled your trigger, or even before—' and Henry panting and looking, glaring at the sky, with his teeth showing and the sweat on his face and the knuckles of the hand on his musket butt white, saying, panting, 'Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!' Then it was Shiloh, the second day and the lost battle and the brigade falling back from Pittsburgh Landing—And listen," Shreve cried; "wait, now; wait!" (glaring at Quentin, panting himself, as if he had had to supply his shade not only with a cue but with breath to obey it in): "Because your old man was wrong here, too! He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn't. Because who told him? Who told Sutpen, or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit? Sutpen didn't know because he wasn't there, and your grandfather wasn't there either because that was where he was hit too, where he lost his arm. So who told them? Not Henry, because his father never saw Henry but that one time and maybe they never had time to talk about wounds and besides to talk about wounds in the Confederate army in 1865 would be like coal miners talking about soot; and not Bon, because Sutpen never saw him at all because he was dead—it was not Bon, it was Henry; Bon that found Henry at last and stooped to pick him up and Henry fought back, struggled, saying, 'Let

be! Let me die! I wont have to know it then' and Bon said, 'So you do want me to go back to her' and Henry lay there struggling and panting, with the sweat on his face and his teeth bloody inside his chewed lip, and Bon said, 'Say you do want me to go back to her. Maybe then I wont do it. Say it' and Henry lay there struggling, with the fresh red staining through his shirt and his teeth showing and the sweat on his face until Bon held his arms and lifted him onto his back——"

— First, two of them, then four; now two again. The room was indeed tomblike: a quality stale and static and moribund beyond any mere vivid and living cold. Yet they remained in it, though not thirty feet away was bed and warmth. Quentin had not even put on his overcoat, which lay on the floor where it had fallen from the arm of the chair where Shreve had put it down. They did not retreat from the cold. They both bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation of physical misery transmogrified into the spirits' travail of the two young men during that time fifty years ago, or forty-eight rather, then forty-seven and then forty-six, since it was '64 and then '65 and the starved and ragged remnant of an army having retreated across Alabama and Georgia and into Carolina, swept onward not by a victorious army behind it but rather by a mounting tide of the names of lost battles from either side—Chickamauga and Franklin, Vicksburg and Corinth and Atlanta—battles lost not alone because of superior numbers and failing ammunition and stores, but because of generals who should not have been generals, who were generals not through training in contemporary methods or aptitude for learning them, but by the divine right to say 'Go there' conferred upon them by an absolute caste system; or because the generals of it never lived long enough to learn how to fight massed cautious accretionary battles, since they were already as obsolete as Richard or Roland or du Guesclin,

who wore plumes and cloaks lined with scarlet at twenty-eight and thirty and thirty-two and captured warships with cavalry charges but no grain nor meat nor bullets, who would whip three separate armies in as many days and then tear down their own fences to cook meat robbed from their own smokehouses, who on one night and with a handful of men would gallantly set fire to and destroy a million dollar garrison of enemy supplies and on the next night be discovered by a neighbor in bed with his wife and be shot to death—two, four, now two again, according to Quentin and Shreve, the two the four the two still talking—the one who did not yet know what he was going to do, the other who knew what he would have to do yet could not reconcile himself—Henry citing himself authority for incest, talking about his Duke John of Lorraine as if he hoped possibly to evoke that condemned and excommunicated shade to tell him in person that it was all right, as people both before and since have tried to evoke God or devil to justify them in what their glands insisted upon—the two the four the two facing one another in the tomblike room: Shreve, the Canadian, the child of blizzards and of cold in a bathrobe with an overcoat above it, the collar turned up about his ears; Quentin, the Southerner, the morose and delicate offspring of rain and steamy heat in the thin suitable clothing which he had brought from Mississippi, his overcoat (as thin and vain for what it was as the suit) lying on the floor where he had not even bothered to raise it:

(— the winter of '64 now, the army retreated across Alabama, into Georgia; now Carolina was just at their backs and Bon, the officer, thinking 'We will either be caught and annihilated or Old Joe will extricate us and we will make contact with Lee in front of Richmond and then we will at least have the privilege of surrender': and then one day all of a sudden he thought of it, re-

membered, how that Jefferson regiment of which his father was now colonel was in Longstreet's corps, and maybe from that moment the whole purpose of the retreat seemed to him to be that of bringing him within reach of his father, to give his father one more chance. So that it must have seemed to him now that he knew at last why he had not been able to decide what he wanted to do. Maybe he thought for just a second, 'My God, I am still young; even after these four years I am still young' but just for a second, because maybe in the same breath he said, 'All right. Then I am young. But I still believe, even though what I believe probably is that war, suffering, these four years of keeping his men alive and able in order to swap them blood and flesh for the largest amount of ground at its bargain price, will have changed him (which I know that it does not do) to where he will say to me not: Forgive me: but: You are my oldest son. Protect your sister; never see either of us again.' Then it was '65 and what was left of the army of the West with nothing remaining now but the ability to walk backward slow and stubborn and to endure musketry and shelling; maybe they didn't even miss the shoes and overcoats and food any more now and that was why he could write about the captured stove polish like he did in the letter to Judith when he finally knew what he was going to do at last and told Henry and Henry said 'Thank God. Thank God,' not for the incest of course but because at last they were going to do something, at last he could be something even though that something was the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity and training and the acceptance of eternal damnation. Maybe he could even quit talking about his Lorraine duke then, because he could say now, 'It isn't yours nor his nor the Pope's hell that we are all going to: it's my mother's and her mother's and father's and their mother's and father's hell, and it isn't you who are going there, but we, the three—no: four of us. And so at least we will all be together where we belong, since even if only he went there we would still have to be there too since the three of us are