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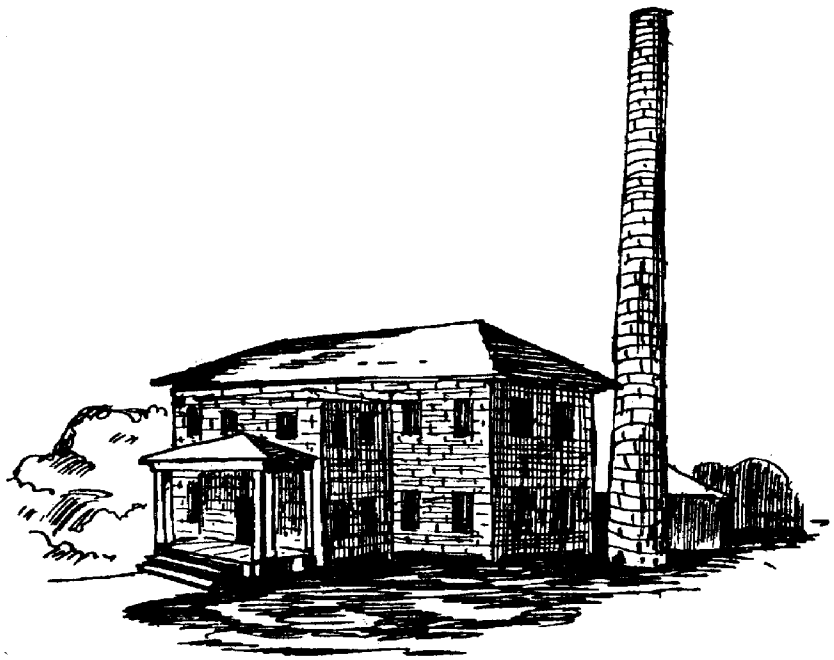

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Miniaturizing Yoknapatawpha: *The Unvanquished* as Faulkner's Theory of Realism

MOST COMMENTATORS ON Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* for the past three decades agree: the novel, or collection of stories, or whatever it is, is a small work. Yet ironically, it is the very smallness of *The Unvanquished* which enables the reader to perceive the relationship between form and function, between design and meaning. Faulkner uses the rhetorical device of alternately miniaturizing and magnifying images, characters, and scenes in order to create a fictional world which is realistic in every respect but its spatial dimensions. *The Unvanquished* thus demonstrates that when Faulkner made his famous decision to limit himself to his "own little postage stamp of native soil,"[1] he was describing a theory of proportion underpinning a fiction (whatever its size) which portrays both a geographical region and a national history. Faulkner's historical narratives are clearly written "to scale." In learning how to "read" the proportions of that scale, the reader derives a theoretical model of Faulkner's narrative technique. *The Unvanquished* is no more, no less realistic than the opening chapter's "living map."

The first chapter establishes a scale model for the novel; the first paragraph, the model for the chapter; and the first sentence, the model for the paragraph. "Ambuscade" opens with the creation of microcosm: "Behind the smokehouse that summer, Ringo and I had a living map."[2] This is the summer of Grant's siege of Vicksburg, the battle which in its duration repre-

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1 "Interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel," in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-62*, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 255.

2 William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 3. Further references will be noted in parentheses in the text.

sented both the tenacity and the futility of the South's struggle.[3] Likewise, the boys Ringo and Bayard—one black, one white—engage in "a prolonged and wellnigh hopeless ordeal" as they "join forces" against their "common enemy, time" (p. 4) and against the "ponderable though passive recalcitrance of topography" of the packed earth in order to create their play world, a Vicksburg which lived for them even "in miniature" (p. 3). Just as the actual battle of Vicksburg delayed for a season the increasing inevitability of the South's defeat, the "miniature" Vicksburg creates "the pattern of recapitulant mimic furious victory" and acts as "a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom" (p. 4). To the extent that the novel itself continues to create a "shield" between the boys and reality, the microcosm of the "living map," with its explicit distortion of reality, becomes an analogy for action in the expanding fiction. Microcosm itself—the game world—creates the "shield"; as the size of the microcosm more closely approximates human scale, "fact and doom" come to replace "mimic furious victory."[4]

More is at stake in Bayard's errors in proportion, in this novel in which boys grow up and in which the loss of innocence is as inevitable as the loss of the war, than the inaccurate perception characteristic of childhood. In juxtaposition with the opening tableau, later scenes in "Ambuscade" allow the reader to view the epic magnification which is the counterpart to the boys' miniature Vicksburg. Yet when Bayard sees his father,

[3] The battle of Vicksburg was fought in the summer of 1863. However, the novel's chronology is confused, and James B. Meriwether points out that the ages of the boys better determine the chronology than Faulkner's references to historical events. For a full discussion of the problem, see Meriwether, "The Place of *The Unvanquished* in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Series," Diss. Princeton 1958, Appendix C, "Chronology and Textual Problems of *The Unvanquished*."

[4] In his essay "Sartoris *Ludens:* The Play Element in *The Unvanquished*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 29 (Summer 1976), 375-387, A. James Memmott describes the novel's play as "a necessary, albeit illusionary, shield between mankind and chaos" (p. 376). Memmott writes about the opening scene, "Their elaborate and noisy mock battle of Vicksburg serves to announce the theme of play in the novel and it joins this theme with that of war, suggesting that play may be a kind of war and war a kind of play" (p. 378). My own essay does not contradict Memmott's thesis, but postulates that the play world serves Faulkner as technique in addition to providing him with an expression of theme.

John, as "doing bigger things than he was" and describes "the illusion of height and size which he wore for us at least" (p. 11), Faulkner is demonstrating by contrast both the smallness of the boys' world and the inaccuracy of the South's own perception of the war. When John tells his news of places and battles and generals, "we didn't listen to that. What Ringo and I heard was the cannon and the flags and the anonymous yelling" (p. 17). The boys translate the reports of war into the glory of an imaginary world, in which Father and his horse Jupiter are so inflated in size that " 'Together they will be too big; you won't believe it' " (pp. 10-11).

The scale of the microcosm is inversely proportional to the exaggerated size of the imaginary world; both scale model and fantasy are significant distortions of reality. For the novelist who alone in classic American fiction has attempted a realistic portrait of what it must have been like to live through the Civil War, not through the actual battles themselves but amidst the spirit of war which altered domestic life behind the lines,[5] the size of the fiction must also be inversely proportional to the myths surrounding that war—and hence *The Unvanquished* becomes a "small" work. Techniques of miniaturization and magnification prepare the eyes of childhood—and Faulkner's reader—to accept a war stripped of myth, a fiction returned to human scale. It is no accident that when Faulkner collected the first six chapters of *The Unvanquished* from previously published stories and added his seventh, "An Odor of Verbena," he also added the entire first paragraph of "Ambuscade." The creation of microcosm becomes the fiction's preparation for the immediacy

[5] For all of its achievement as a work of psychological realism, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* simply does not attempt historical fidelity to the spirit of this particular war, as Faulkner achieves it in *The Unvanquished*. For excellent comments on Faulkner's use of historical reality in the novel, see Andrew Lytle, "The Son of Man: He Will Prevail," in *The Hero with the Private Parts* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 121-125. Lytle is one of the few critics who have unreservedly praised the novel, calling it "one of his most successful and least understood books." See also Douglas T. Miller, "Faulkner and the Civil War: Myth and Reality," *American Quarterly*, 15 (1963), 200-209. For a sympathetic discussion of the limits of Faulkner's accuracy concerning specific historical details, see Meriwether, "The Place of *The Unvanquished* in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Series."

of sense perception characterized by the novel's final image—the odor of the sprig of verbena which Drusilla leaves on Bayard's pillow.

From the first paragraph onward, to the end of the novel, Faulkner perceptibly alters the scale with which he presents the events of Civil War. One afternoon, still in "Ambuscade," Bayard and Ringo are watching for the Yankees Loosh has predicted are "'just down the road'" (p. 26), half watching and half dreaming, when "then Ringo made a choked sound and I was looking at the road, and there in the middle of it, sitting on a bright bay horse and looking at the house through a field glass, was a Yankee. . . . I remember thinking, 'He looks just like a man'" (pp. 27-28). From the "living map" the dimensions of the boys' play world have increased in size; what they have previously only imagined now exists in flesh and blood. They shoot at the Yankee with Father's old musket and in their excitement equate one Yankee soldier with "'the whole army'" (p. 29). The scene reenacts the "living map" of Vicksburg for them as Faulkner both magnifies and miniaturizes in the same moment. The scale model of the microcosm more closely approximates, though far from mirrors, the real world. The Yankee is at once too real ("'He looks just like a man'") and too imaginary (intruding as he does upon their dreaming) for the boys to perceive him accurately. When the Yankees track the boys to Granny's parlor, Faulkner once again alters the size of his fiction. In fact, the boys have only managed to shoot a Yankee's horse, and Colonel Dick proves to be as chivalrous as any Southerner, choosing to view the incident, not as the major battle of the war Bayard and Ringo thought they were fighting, but for what it was—child's play. For a moment, the model disappears and we seem to be left with the boys' reality—a bathetic deflation of both fiction and fantasy.

Yet the chapter ends with Granny's attempt to punish the boys for swearing—because they had run back from their "battlefield" shouting "'We shot the bastud!'" (p. 30)—and with the novel's return to the world of make-believe and model. In the real world of war (which impinges momentarily on the lives of Granny, Bayard, and Ringo in the person of Colonel Dick), it is Granny's responsibility to keep the children alive, even if

this means sacrificing her sense of ethics (she lies to the colonel and tells him that there are no children on the place); in the world of microcosm and dream, to which they all return after the Yankees leave, Granny is responsible for rearing children to join a stable social order. Therefore she washes their mouths out with soap, and in the final section of "Ambuscade," Faulkner allows a sense image to capture for the first time the fleeting presence of reality in the boys' lives.

They stand on the back gallery spitting the soap into the sun. As they look to the north, they see a cloudbank. "When Father came home in the spring, we tried to understand about mountains. At last he pointed out the cloud bank [sic] to tell us what mountains looked like. So ever since then Ringo believed that the cloudbank was Tennessee" (p. 40). They look at the cloudbank and decide that Tennessee, "'where Marse John use to fight um at,'" is "'mighty far.'" "'Too far to go just to fight Yankees,' I said, spitting too. But it was gone now—the suds, the glassy weightless iridescent bubbles; even the taste of it" (p. 40). At the same time that Bayard is claiming a false maturity (he doesn't need to go any farther than the front yard in order to fight Yankees) he expresses the impermanence of that maturity. "Even the taste" of adventure, heroism, war, and Yankees "was gone now." So is the image and its momentary realism. Yet the rhythms of the work have been established: moving back and forth between miniaturization and magnification, Faulkner creates a fictional world in which Bayard's perception of reality gradually alters, until it becomes (however fleeting the moment here on the gallery at the end of "Ambuscade") integrated into sense experience.

As Faulkner expressed the relationship between sensing and understanding six years earlier in *Light in August*, "Memory believes before knowing remembers."[6] Only when memory and knowing, when sensing and understanding, become integrated for Bayard and the reader at the end of the novel will Faulkner entirely dispense with the necessity for creating small worlds. As we learn the significance of progressively larger worlds, our

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[6] (New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas, 1932), p. 111.

capacity for perceiving the meaning of images also increases. In Faulkner's implicit theory of realism, the sense image conveys the immediacy of the microcosm, without the distortions of size.[7]

In "Retreat" through "Skirmish at Sartoris" (chapters two through six), Faulkner traces the pattern of alternate miniaturization and magnification, creates a series of concentric analogies, and alters the scale of his fiction as the "size" of the incidents begins to approach that of reality.

In "Retreat," which takes place a year after "Ambuscade," Granny and the boys dig up the buried trunk and head in the direction of Memphis, where they hope to visit Granny's sister. As they pass by "the curve where we had seen the Yankee sergeant on the bright horse last summer" (p. 51), it is clear that the boys are leaving their familiar world behind. The Confederate soldiers they pass are no longer wearing complete uniforms; one of them is wearing Yankee pants. Like Granny and the boys, the South is also in "retreat." By picturing the boys and the soldiers side by side on the same road, Faulkner reduces the exaggeration of his fiction. Microcosm subsides, in such moments, to mere analogy.

Yet at noon when the boys and Granny stop by a spring to water rose cuttings Granny has brought along from a neighbor's garden, Ringo pinches off some of the dirt and begins to put it in his pocket.

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[7] Faulkner's critics seem inclined to dispose of his narrative technique in *The Unvanquished* as superficial romanticism. Joachim Seyppel, for example, writes, "The composition of the novel is as conventional as its optimism . . . . Describing heroic deeds of the war, Faulkner seems not too far removed from Paul Bunyan" (*William Faulkner* [New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1971], pp. 69-70). Melvin Backman, in *Faulkner: The Major Years* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1966), writes that "the Faulkner of *The Unvanquished* idealizes and oversimplifies the Southern past . . . . The stereotypes to which the author clings suggest some fundamental unwillingness to confront reality" (p. 119). Hyatt Waggoner, in *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1959), attempts to correct this misunderstanding of Faulkner's style. He suggests that "it may be not . . . that it is weakly romantic and heroic but that we have failed to see the function of the romantic and heroic in a unified work" (p. 170). And on the last sentence in "Ambuscade," Waggoner writes, "'Romanticism' as conscious as this is not self-deception but an effort at definition" (p. 177).

> "I reckon I can save dirt if I want to," he said.
>
> "It's not Sartoris dirt though," I said.
>
> "I know hit," he said. "Hit's closer than Memphis dirt though. Closer than what you got."
>
> "What'll you bet?" I said. He looked at me. "What'll you swap?" I said. He looked at me.
>
> "What you swap?" he said.
>
> "You know," I said. He reached into his pocket and brought out the buckle we had shot off the Yankee saddle when we shot the horse last summer. "Gimmit here," he said. So I took the snuff box from my pocket and emptied half the soil (it was more than Sartoris earth; it was Vicksburg too: the yelling was in it, the embattled, the iron-worn, the supremely invincible) into his hand. "I know hit," he said. "Hit come from 'hind the smokehouse. You brung a lot of hit."
>
> "Yes," I said. "I brought enough to last." (pp. 62-63)

The snuffbox filled with "Vicksburg" soil which Bayard has brought with him is a microcosmic image of childhood, home, and the war which has altered the other two. It is also a receptacle of the same shape, though smaller in size, as Granny's trunk, containing the silver which, for the adults, serves the same purpose as Bayard's native soil. Larger than the snuffbox, the trunk remains a miniature. The silver which John Sartoris and Granny want to protect from the Yankees represents everything of value in a way of life which they want at all costs to preserve. The snuffbox turns the trunk into more than a symbol; snuffbox, trunk, and wagon all become analogies for the novel, itself simply another container drawn "to scale"—and the four create a concentric series of analogies for all of the history Faulkner manages to condense into the short space of seven interconnected stories.

Shortly after, Bayard and Ringo leave Granny behind, in their pursuit of stolen mules. They fall asleep beside a bridge and wake to see "the whole rim of the world . . . full of horses running along the sky" (p. 69). The magnification of Bayard's perception heralds the arrival of John Sartoris's "regiment" (itself a distortion of the group of men Sartoris leads, since he has become a horse stealer, trying to replenish the diminished store of Confederate stock, and in this moment a larger version of Bayard and Ringo, who have also "borrowed" the horse they ride). In the scene which follows, in an incident which further demonstrates Faulkner's pattern, John, Bayard, and Ringo them-

selves become, for the space of a moment, an entire Confederate regiment and manage to capture the muskets, ammunition, boots, and clothes of sixty "vanquished" Yankees. This "victory" over Yankees is significant in one sense—they steal supplies from sixty men—and they also enact one "battle" of the larger war; but in another sense, their victory only serves as comic relief—it is "mimic" if not entirely "furious"—and in fact, actually reduces the incident in size. More than microcosm of reality, the scene deflates the seriousness of war, turning it back into a child's game—the same deflation Faulkner achieved in "Ambuscade" when the boys shot the Yankee soldier's horse. Faulkner thus distorts the scene in two ways, magnifying and miniaturizing at the same time, as Sartoris returns the boys to their home—and their microcosm.

The chapter ends with the arrival of the Yankees, who try unsuccessfully to capture John Sartoris, but who manage to steal the silver, burn the house, and literally as well as symbolically to destroy a way of life. Loosh, carrying a bundle on his shoulder, is about to depart in the wake of the Yankee soldiers. When Granny asks him who he is to give the Sartoris silver away, Loosh replies,

> "You ax me that?" Loosh said. "Where John Sartoris? Whyn't he come and ax me that? Let God ax John Sartoris who the man name that give me to him. Let the man that buried me in the black dark ax that of the man what dug me free." (p. 85)

The burning of the house and Loosh's new freedom undercut the comic view of the war which the earlier "victory" created. No longer will Bayard perceive the world magnified as large or miniaturized as small as he formerly did. The Yankees have introduced him to reality. Yet the series of analogies continues: earlier in the chapter, snuffbox and trunk of silver became images which fitted inside each other and the novel like Chinese boxes; at the chapter's end, they serve as grave-shaped metaphors for the slavery which has "buried" Loosh's life. By showing the Yankees where his former masters have buried their silver, Loosh frees himself—and the boys—from their make-believe world. The scale to which the novel draws the world more nearly approaches life-size; in consequence, the ability of Bayard and

Ringo to perceive that world becomes more realistic. Even Granny is drawn into the real world and she joins the boys in cursing the Yankees: " 'The bastuds!' we cried. 'The bastuds! The bastuds!' " (p. 86).

As the novel progresses, the play world alternates with the real world of war. At times—as when the boys watch with Cousin Drusilla as the great wave of former slaves migrates north, following the Yankee soldiers—reality seems to have replaced the microcosm and realism, the scale model. Yet as if Faulkner is saying that the boys are capable of understanding just so much reality and no more, in section two of "Raid," Bayard returns to the language of the living map to find a way of describing what he is forced to see. When the Yankees blow up the bridge, Bayard is incapable of viewing the scene realistically. He sees it instead as smaller than human size. Instead of human beings blown sky high by the Yankee explosives, he watches "little toy men and horses and pieces of plank floating along in the air above the water" (p. 121). Yet he has a "funny taste" in his mouth as he watches, implicitly recalling for the reader the scene on the gallery at the end of "Ambuscade." Bayard's losses since that moment in his life have reduced his innocence and shortened the proportion between fiction and reality. Yet even though Bayard attempts to reduce the impact of the explosion by seeing it as smaller than it is, Faulkner's miniaturization only serves to increase the intensity of the scene.

In the remaining sections of "Raid," and in the subsequent chapters "Riposte in Tertio" and "Vendée," Faulkner's continued distortion of the size of fictional reality becomes the means by which he offers the reader an ever clearer picture of American history, of the effects of Civil War and Reconstruction. In a comic misunderstanding of Granny's request for the return of her silver, Loosh and Philadelphy, and the mules Old Hundred and Tinney, as well as further use of Faulkner's magnification device, the Yankee lieutenant gives her a requisition order allowing her to reclaim *"Ten (10) chests tied with hemp rope and containing silver. One hundred ten (110) mules captured loose near Philadelphia in Mississippi. One hundred ten (110) Negroes of both sexes belonging to and having strayed from the same*

locality" (p. 128). As Granny and the two boys, with the aid of Ab Snopes, carry on their own small battle against the Yankees, Ringo, with his skill at drawing, forges signatures and keeps a map of their "requisitions." This map recalls the "living map" of the novel's first paragraph and once again suggests the scale effect of the scene.

Granny's "war" ends when Ab Snopes betrays her to Grumby of the scalawag Grumby's Independents, who shoots her in an old cotton compress. Bayard, left with a doll-sized Granny (she looked "like she had been made out of a lot of little thin dry light sticks notched together and braced with cord," p. 175), sets out to avenge her death. In "Vendée," as critics have pointed out, he proves his manhood, or so it seems to him, by killing a man. He and Ringo cut off Grumby's hand and nail it to Granny's grave. The entire incident is Faulkner's attempt to capture in scale the Old Testament justice of the Civil War. Although Bayard and Ringo are dealing specifically with Grumby, not the Yankees, their vengeance reflects the larger violence of the war, in their successful attempt to take "an eye for an eye," or, rather, to cut off the hand that killed Granny.

In chapter six, "Skirmish at Sartoris," the ballot box replaces the snuffbox and the chest of silver as the receptacle of all of Southern life which John Sartoris joins the women in trying to preserve intact. Bayard's Aunt Louisa demonstrates Faulkner's comic reduction as she censures Drusilla: " 'Ah. To vote. Since you have forced your mother and brother to live under a roof of license and adultery you think you can also force them to live in a polling booth refuge from violence and bloodshed, do you? Bring me that box' " (p. 240). Drusilla's sleeping in Sartoris's tent and riding with his troop becomes, first, a "roof of license and adultery," inflating the actual size of her action; then the "roof" becomes reduced in size to a "polling booth refuge from violence and bloodshed," then reduced further to the ballot box itself. The miniaturization and the mock battle, by which Drusilla becomes not a bride but a "voting commissioner" (p. 240), inversely reflect the seriousness of the real struggle between Sartoris and the carpetbaggers to prevent the voting and election of former slaves. When Aunt Louisa refuses to "live" in a polling

booth and flings aside the ballot box, she is rejecting, like Sartoris's men themselves who unanimously vote "no," both the changes that the war has brought and the loss of the war itself.[8]

The ballot box, larger than Bayard's snuffbox, is still the same shape—and it is not until "An Odor of Verbena" that Faulkner finally leaves behind the scale model of Civil War and settles for straight realism. Yet the realism of the seventh chapter results directly from the distortions of the first six. In this final chapter, as a result of his experiences throughout the novel—in which his child's perception repeatedly exaggerated the size of reality—Bayard learns to recognize accurately both the size and the significance of his world. Eight years have passed between chapters and Bayard emerges in "An Odor of Verbena" as a grown man. He is not the hero his father was—yet he behaves courageously, choosing to avenge his father's death by meeting Redmond, his father's killer, unarmed.

At the same time, Faulkner lifts the "shield" between "us and fact and doom," creating a fiction returned to human scale. Faulkner's narrative technique in "An Odor of Verbena" reflects Bayard's altered vision. Having instructed us to perceive the world in miniature, Faulkner strips his fiction's image of both shape and literal dimensions and substitutes the formless but evocative odor of the sprig of verbena Bayard finds on his pillow in the novel's closing lines. This odor integrates memory and understanding. "Living map" yields once again to sense image.

The verbena, which Drusilla said "was the only scent you could smell above the smell of horses and courage" (p. 253), becomes for Bayard at novel's end the image of loss. By meeting Redmond as he does, Bayard inaugurates a new order; but the verbena's odor remains, its very presence filling "the room, the dusk, the evening" (p. 293) with the scent of the past, of "blood and raising and background" (p. 249), of "eyes of men who have killed too much" (p. 266), and finally of an "incorrigibly individ-

[8] See James B. Meriwether, "Faulkner and the South," in *Southern Writers*, ed. R. C. Simonini (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1964), pp. 142-161, for a perceptive discussion of "Skirmish at Sartoris." Meriwether writes of Aunt Louisa and John Sartoris that "both are strong wills unthinkingly attempting to prevent a change that the war has produced in the course of events" (p. 156).

ual woman" (p. 263). Whether Drusilla forgives Bayard in her final gesture or not, she cannot live with the changes Bayard's peaceful resolution of conflict portends. Like Aunt Louisa in "Skirmish at Sartoris," Drusilla remains unvanquished. She is one of those women who, according to Bayard, "don't ever surrender: not only victory, but not even defeat" (p. 239).

The fiction instructs us well: in the lingering odor of verbena, which the reader literally "smells" with Bayard if Faulkner's method has achieved its design, we detect the lingering presence of history, geography, and personal grief. Life itself as the child views it becomes a model, a series of analogies, a microcosm. Yet these three allow Faulkner to shape his fictional world. In the moment in which he achieves his objective correlative with the odor of verbena, the novel itself has fulfilled its function. Unlike the boys at the end of "Ambuscade," who lose "even the taste" of their momentary encounter with reality in the form of the Yankee soldier, the reader is left with a lasting sense of the novel's realism. *The Unvanquished* illustrates that no matter how closely the realist tries to approximate the size and shape of reality, the resulting fiction remains a miniature, possessing that ponderable though passive recalcitrance which outweighs history, "against which the most brilliant of victories and the most tragic of defeats are but the loud noises of a moment." No less than the pictorial map of Yoknapatawpha county which Faulkner himself drew, *The Unvanquished* serves as one guide to the theory behind the practice of his art.