

Faulknerian Puritanism in *The Wild Palms*

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I have lived for the last six months in such a peculiar state of family complications and back complications that I still am not able to tell if the novel is all right or absolute drivel. To me, it was written just as if I had sat on the one side of a wall and the paper was on the other and my hand with the pen thrust through the wall and writing not only on invisible paper but in pitch darkness too, so that I could not even know if the pen still wrote on paper or not.¹

The letter, written to publisher Robert K. Haas on July 8, 1938, symbolically shows the way of hard muddling-through in which William Faulkner wrote *The Wild Palms*, one of his best and "the novel about the paradox of human freedom and the preciousness of memory and love which he wanted to call 'If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem.'"² At that time Faulkner was not well-conditioned, both physically and environmentally. Victoria, his stepdaughter, had been left with a baby by her husband, and the stepfather had to do all he could to help her through the bitter winter. Moreover, his back burn which he had suffered in the bathroom in a New York hotel in November 1937 was giving him constant trouble.

What gave him most pain was, perhaps, the theme he had taken up—the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, the one which is ever new and troublesome, though seemingly old and simple. Besides, he was cryptically trying to advance his own denunciation of Ernest Hemingway, who then was riding the crest of fame. There was a danger that he would be regarded as just a bad loser. He found, while writing, the story of two lovers going to prove more and more difficult to manage, until he had to fix some support to it, which was to be called "Old Man." His intention to set up a well-balanced harmony between the two stories, however, had been given little appreciation for a long time until recently.

It is easy for us to call *The Wild Palms* a failure. Faulkner himself would not hesitate to do so. Failure is a virtue for him, not a vice. The world in the novel may be said to look like a vacant house, through which winds are blowing. A certain crankiness is apparently showing itself; something seems puzzling anyway, and, to be frank, somewhat engaging, too. It may be this curiousness of the book that got Michael Millgate to comment on it as follows:

There is much about *The Wild Palms* which does not seem wholly expli-

cable in terms of the thematic patterns of the book or the psychology of its characters. It is, indeed, in many ways a strange and uncomfortable book, and not least in the extraordinary painfulness of the central story, the infliction upon Charlotte and, more especially, on Wilbourne of a degree of suffering that seems grossly in excess of what the situation might be thought to demand. . . . It is tempting to posit some kind of autobiographical or peculiarly personal significance for Faulkner's third New Orleans novel, *The Wild Palms*; for only by thinking of it in some such terms does it seem possible to account satisfactorily for the curiously personal quality of many of its incidents and allusions, or for the almost masochistic intensity of Wilbourne's agony.³

Apart from his innate bent towards mystification, there are, it must be admitted, some elements that are likely to disturb the reader's common sense. Faulkner is, indeed, a stubborn egotist in writing novels.

The first of readers of *The Wild Palms* was Mrs. Estelle Faulkner. When Faulkner finished proofreading the typescript, "he gave it to Estelle to read, as usual. She told him that she did not like the Harry-Charlotte story, though she did enjoy 'Old Man.' He received this comment in silence, and the subject was never discussed again."⁴

Estelle's criticism must be said to have had after all a very symbolic tone, for almost all the reviewers of the novel were to follow suit. They did not make much of "Wild Palms," though they were virtually unanimous in their praise of "Old Man." What was worse, the alternating chapters of two stories was gravely denounced by all of them except for one critic or two, such as Conrad Aiken, who admired the "very skillful fugue-like alternation of viewpoint,"⁵ ranking the work with *The Sound and the Fury* as Faulkner's best. The following is one example of these cold criticisms.

The author has not truly succeeded in rendering into life his critical view of our modern world. As a result, the novel fails, but it fails most interestingly. One must admit too that the novel fails because the counterpoint is not integrated organically into the novel's structure; alternating the stories' chapters is a mechanical, inartistic device for establishing counterpoint.⁶

Keeping to this critical tendency, Signet Books published the two stories in one-volume edition without alternation of chapters in 1954. Modern Library adopted only "Old Man" from *The Wild Palms* in its *Three Famous Short Novels* in 1958. And, Malcolm Cowley, too, put "Old Man" alone into *The Portable Faulkner* as an independent selection in 1946.

On the other hand, however, there were some critics coming out in the 1950s, who were eager to appreciate the significance of the alternating chapters. In 1952, Irving Howe made the first serious effort to justify the alternation of chapters, submitting a clear-cut pattern of parallels between the two stories. He said that if taken together the two stories might yield a tone of dissonant irony which neither could alone.⁷ W. R. Moses presented an article in 1956, whose title is "The Unity of *The Wild Palms*," suggesting that "themes—and plots are... mirror twins of an almost embarrassing degree of similarity."⁸ And then, by adding his own ideas to Howe's schematization of the literary design, Joseph J. Moldenhauer put forward a more subtle structural representation to reveal "the consistent ironic contrasts of motivation, incident, and theme."⁹

Different, and brighter in a sense, streaks of light have been thrown onto the novel. It is the silhouette of Ernest Hemingway against *The Wild Palms* that has been enchanting many of its readers since 1948, when in the note to the Penguin edition an anonymous editor made a significant mention that this one bore many parallels to Hemingway's earlier novel. It seems to me, however, that serious papers dealing with the resemblance between *The Wild Palms* and *A Farewell to Arms* appeared earlier in Japan than in the United States. It is in 1956 that Prof. Tadamasu Shima presented five pairs of similarities in the two novels in his "The World of William Faulkner—A Study of *The Wild Palms*—" (written in Japanese).¹⁰ In 1957, the late Prof. Hiroshi Hayakawa wrote "*A Farewell to Arms* and *The Wild Palms*,"¹¹ which was later compiled into his *Study of William Faulkner*, published by Kenkyusha in 1961.

In the United States, as Thomas L. McHaney says, it is perhaps H. Edward Richardson's "The 'Hemingwaves' in Faulkner's 'Wild Palms'" that first provoked a number of students of Faulkner into hot discussions on the problem.

Yet, the parallels in *Palms* which go beyond coincidence indicate that, as imitative as the novel is in certain respects, it is also an independent satirical comment upon Hemingway himself. Why did Faulkner choose the weapon of satire? Hemingway, at the time Faulkner wrote *Palms*, was riding the crest of fame. Faulkner, on the other hand, was practically unknown. Even as late as 1944, all his seventeen books were out of print. The sword of satire may have been a lonely genius's way of combating a universal neglect.¹²

Immediately after Richardson's comment, W. R. Moses noticed the similarities between *A Farewell to Arms* and "Old Man," to say nothing of the closeness of "Wild Palms" to the former.¹³

In his *PMLA* article in 1972, Thomas L. McHaney, the deepest of the com-

mentators of *The Wild Palms*, caught the haunting phantom of Sherwood Anderson in "Wild Palms," and put forth some decisive corrections on Richardson's surmises. (For instance, he asserts McCord, instead of being a Hemingway figure, is far more likely to be modeled on Anderson.) I am interested in his contention that Faulkner was never apt to be vindictive against a fellow artist whom he could admire.

During 1937, Hemingway was very much in the public eye, visiting Hollywood to see about *This Spanish Earth* and storming New York in his usual manner. His plans for fighting or covering the war in Spain received wide publicity, his face appeared on the cover, and frequently in the columns, of *Time*. His new novel, *To Have and To Have Not*, coming out at about the time Faulkner was in New York, became a best seller, despite the fact that it was not very good.

Faulkner must have noticed, and the result, coupled with the friendly gesture by Anderson, may have had a lot to do with the Hemingway references in *The Wild Palms*. Faulkner had a right to feel a little bitter over his own fate as an American writer, but he was never apt to be vindictive, especially against a fellow artist whom he could admire. He had a high opinion of what he thought was Hemingway's best work;... But as an artist, Faulkner had taken a different path from Hemingway; he thought it was the better path, as his well-known and often misunderstood rating of modern writers revealed.¹⁴

In 1975, Thomas L. McHaney published a surprisingly great book "to establish the complexity and the greatness of *The Wild Palms* unmistakably for everyone."¹⁵ His insight goes into every nook and corner, uncovering the meanings hidden in the characters' names and indicating the influences from the literary big figures such as Dante, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. He is quite ready to place *The Wild Palms* beside such monumental works as Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Joyce's *Ulysses*.¹⁶ For nearly forty years since the publication, Faulkner's Nessay had not come out on the surface to show the whole bulk. But, with this admirable measurement by McHaney, it seems to me, the clamours of the spectators will be sure to subside into a unanimous admiration of the splendour of the sight.

It is Ernest Hemingway, when all is said and done, that hangs over the whole world of *The Wild Palms*. The question of why to choose Hemingway is rather easy to answer. It can be easily imagined that, while writing the book, Faulkner must have been keenly conscious of the overwhelming impact of Hemingway on him. However, what I should like to assert here is that, as McHaney notes above, it is not out of jealousy or bitterness and resentment that Faulkner used

Hemingway references. Not that he exploited plots, characters, and incidents just as tools. Nor was he howling in the distance like an underdog. Faulkner truly seriously tried in *The Wild Palms* to establish his own metaphysic on life and express his own manifesto on justice.

Faulkner, as it were, turned almost all the cards upside down which Hemingway had dealt on the table. The scene underwent a sudden total change, with the cards unchanged in number and position.

Faulkner tried, rather in vain, to warn innocent and ignorant readers not to be moved by illusions in pulp-fiction. Charlotte admits her stubborn romanticism has come from books. Nietzsche, besides Hemingway, may be being referred to.

"Yes," he said. "Your children."

For a moment she looked at him, smoking. "I wasn't thinking of them. I mean, I have already thought of them. So now I don't need to think of them any more because I know the answer to that and I know I can't change that answer and I don't think I can change me because the second time I ever saw you I learned what I had read in books but never had actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself. So I don't need to think about the children. I settled that a long time ago..."¹⁷

The tall convict was also cheated by shades in fiction, and so his rage is directed not to those who have put him into prison, but to paper novels.

So that at times as he trod the richly shearing black earth behind his plough or with a hoe thinned the sprouting cotton and corn or lay on his sullen back in his bunk after supper, he cursed in a harsh steady unrepentive stream, not at the living men who had put him where he was but at what he did not even know were pen-names, did not even know were not actual men but merely the designations of shades who had written about shades.¹⁸

Here, the author is referring to the dime novels popular in the 1860s, in which such badmen as Jesse James and Billy the Kid were romanticized.¹⁹ Paired, as seen above, the two quotations make the author's intent much clearer. Faulkner would say, "Don't take the love story in *A Farewell to Arms* as it is. It is as dangerous a trap as the charming figure of Jesse James is." His main concern is to strip a veil off the paradise of lovers.

There are two main objectives Faulkner sought to attain in "Wild Palms."

First, he wished to reject Hemingway's nihilism. Secondly, he wished to establish Faulknerian Puritanism. To attain these aims, he borrowed the Romeo and Juliet in *A Farewell to Arms* for his own adaptation. And during the process of developing the theme, he began to feel something lacking, so he had to invent another story to couple with the other. In nearly all points, the lovers in "Wild Palms" are different from the ones in *A Farewell to Arms*. In short, they are neither beautiful nor charming. They are nothing but weak lovers committing follies.²⁰ Faulkner intended them to be so. So, in a sense, he may be said to have succeeded, when Estelle, publishers and commentators following suit, recoiled from "Wild Palms" as uninteresting.

Roughly speaking, "Wild Palms" has a structure as tragedy in which the heroine's strong egotistic romanticism cannot go on to the last hand in hand after all with the hero's Puritanism.

Now, what in essence is the paradise of love Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer try to attain? To be sure, the two lovers can find a haven on a Wisconsin lake for a short while. Here Harry certainly testifies that he is happy.

"I'm happy now," Wilbourne said. "I know exactly where I am going. It's perfectly straight, between two rows of cans and sacks, fifty dollars' worth to a side. Not street, that's houses and people. This is a solitude. Then the water, the solitude wavering slow while you lie and look up at it."... "And then fall will come, the first cold, the first red and yellow leaves drifting down, the double leaves, the reflection rising to meet the falling one until they touch and rock a little, not quite closing. And then you could open your eyes for a minute if you wanted to, remembered to, and watch the shadow of the rocking leaves on the breast beside you."²¹

But, what a cheap happiness he has got! At the end of the path between the two rows of cans and sacks, he is dreaming of himself perishing sadly and beautifully among the fallen leaves. McCord gives him a biting jest, though feeling it just futile.

"For sweet Jesus Schopenhauer," McCord said. "What the bloody hell kind of ninth-rate Teasdale is this? You haven't near done your share of starving yet.... If you're not careful, you'll talk that stuff to some guy who will believe it and'll hand you the pistol and see you use it..."²²

I would say McCord bears a very important role as criticizer of Harry in the novel, such as is absent in *A Farewell to Arms*. Whether or not there are any straightforward judges in fictional world seems to be a vital element for exaltation.

Adam in Eden, however, begins to feel himself madder and madder, and says

quietly to himself:

*I am bored. I am bored to extinction. There is nothing here that I am needed for. Not even by her. I have already cut enough wood to last until Christmas and there is nothing else for me to do.*²³

This speech is, so to speak, the ace of spades, the biggest trump card Faulkner turned upside down. Remorse gradually changes into rage against Eve, the seducer.

*Yes, he thought. It's the Indian summer that did it. I have been seduced to an imbecile's paradise by an old whore; I have been throttled and sapped of strength and volition by the old weary Lilith of the year.*²⁴

What is it that compels the couple to go all the way to what Harry calls "an imbecile's paradise"? In order to put them on the road to the "imbecile's paradise," the author gave the heroine a very powerful initiative. (It goes without saying that the roles of man and woman in *A Farewell to Arms* are here reversed.) Eve has to drag Adam along up to the catastrophe. She is, therefore, given a definitely strong character, a locomotive, as it were.

For one thing, she persists in her futile, dogmatic and egocentric romanticism, which is revealed in both her obstinacy to reject childbirth and her openly executed adultery. The image of Lilith in the passage quoted above becomes her very well.²⁵ Faulkner himself regarded childbirth as a happy and rich symbol of regeneration, so that, for example, in *Light in August* he cherished Lena Grove in a mood of celebration, and, in "Old Man," the woman easily gives birth to a baby on an Indian mound amid the turbulent flood waters. (By the way, I had been wondering with anxiety where Lena Grove, after reaching Tennessee, was wandering, until at last here in "Old Man" I found, to my surprise and relief, the woman, the disguised Lena, sitting "on the lowest limb of one of the trees... in a calico wrapper and an army private's tunic and a sunbonnet."²⁶)

Secondly, her abnormally strong lusts of the flesh must be noticed. She is always ready to pull down her lover's pants, wherever they may be, even on a train as well. This sexual aggressiveness of hers serves us with a number of comic scenes. In the Utah mine, the couple and the Buckners sleep "in the one room, not in beds but on mattresses on the floor."²⁷ So, six weeks after, when the train the Buckners have got into begins to move, Charlotte looks after it for only a moment and turns, already running. She says, running, "Let's don't even eat tonight."²⁸

Her third characteristic is vital energies in cutting through the practical affairs. Harry makes an admission that "she is not only a better man and a

better gentleman than I am, she is a better everything than I will ever be."²⁹ A sparrow can have nothing to do but obey a falcon in silence. Charlotte's role as an artist or artisan of figurines is said to have come from Tennessee Mitchell, the second wife of Anderson. Another name is also often introduced as a model.³⁰ Contrasted with the idyllic world of the happy lovers in *A Farewell to Arms*, who are exempted from money affairs, are the unideal situations in which the vigorous Charlotte tries very hard to earn money to live with. In "Wild Palms," the lovers seem to be a little too conscious of money. It must be also noted that their struggle for earning a living is not presented as a form of unsocial heroism. All the time the lovers are under the warm patronage of Rittenmeyer and McCord. In this sense, they, too, may be safely called blessed elopers. (But, as I have mentioned earlier, neither Rittenmeyer nor McCord has consented to their way of living. The husband and the newspaper reporter stand as indicters, as well as as helpers, in their presence at any moment. I would say these two criticizers are a very significant factor in the book. The author's moral can be vividly illumined by them.) There is one scene presented in "Wild Palms," where the elopers play positive roles as welfare workers in the Utah mine. Charlotte tries to explain to the hunkies the situation in which they have been left behind without money by means of drawing pictures instead of speech, because English does not serve the purpose. Charlotte gives the miners what stock commodities they can carry. Here is an image as saviour of deserted workers.

The fourth of her traits, which comes from the image suggested above, is gratuitous philanthropism. This quality seems to be contrary to her egotism, but we must remember that in Japanese Buddhism, Kishimojin, who often ate others' children, has been transformed into a benevolent goddess for childbirth and upbringing through the influence of Buddha. Even Charlotte, a cruel mother, who has left two children and insists to stay sterile, has a touch of mercy enough to buy, two days before Christmas, some presents for her far-away daughters, though wastefully. The above episode helps give a shade of warmth to the heroine's character.

Her ambiguous philanthropism, egocentric as well, comes up dramatically in the dog-hunting scene,³¹ which may be supposed to be an acid antithesis to the Hemingway country where the sound "nothing" is reverberating in vacuum. (Look at the very last scene in *A Farewell to Arms*, for reference.)

In Chicago, when Charlotte finds Harry out of job, she suddenly begins to insist to find out a dog, and wraps the two chops for supper taken from the ice-box. The reader feels himself involved in a confusing situation. Outside, the couple meet McCord, and Charlotte says, "We've lost our job. So we're looking for a dog." Then, it begins to seem to Harry that the invisible dog is actually

among them. In the bar they join four friends, McCord telling them that they have lost their job and that now they are waiting for a dog. For the invisible dog, is an empty chair reserved, "the two chops unwrapped now and on a plate beside a glass of neat whisky among the high-balls." The "hemingwaves" scene follows.

They had not eaten yet; twice Wilbourne leaned to her: "Hadn't we better eat something? It's all right; I can——"

"Yes, it's all right. It's fine." She was not speaking to him. "We've got fifty-eight dollars too much; think of that. Even the Armour's haven't got fifty-eight dollars too much. Drink up, ye armourous sons. Keep up with the dog."

"Yah," McCord said. "Set, ye armourous sons, in a sea of heming-waves."³²

Two people having disappeared, they are six in the cab, including the invisible dog held by McCord, which is named Moreover now from the Bible.³³ They stop at a drug store to buy a flashlight with which to search for the dog. At last they can see it plainly in the faint starlight (they do not use the flashlight now)— "the cast-iron Saint Bernard with its composite face of the emperor Franz Josef and a Maine banker in the year 1856."³⁴ Charlotte places the chops upon the iron pediment, between the iron feet. Thus ends a black celebration of looking for a dog.

McHaney says this scene reminds him of Bill Gorton's talk about a stuffed dog in *The Sun Also Rises* ("Road to hell paved with unbought stuffed dogs," he says) and that the chops given to the iron dog are like the traditional sop thrown to distract Cerberus, who guarded hell's gate. That is to say, the chops are laid at the dog's feet to propitiate the force which she believes is their chief threat.³⁵

Richardson's elucidation is as follows:

The "invisible dog" mentioned in the scene could be an allusion to the dog that got nothing to eat in *Farewell*, but whom Lieutenant Henry attempted to feed from a garbage can (235). "There isn't anything, dog,' I said" (*Farewell*, 235). Both Henry and Charlotte in *Palms* are "out of a job" and are "waiting for a dog." It is important to remember at this point that Henry found the wallet of money in a garbage can—the money which enabled him and Charlotte to start their lives together; now the money that they have remaining from the garbage can has almost run out. In a sense, then, Lieutenant Henry's "There isn't anything" applies to them.³⁶

This seems to me quite a relevant discussion. Let me quote the dog-scene in

A *Farewell to Arms* for reference.

I drank this glass, paid and went out. Outside along the street were the refuse cans from the houses waiting for the collector. A dog was nosing at one of the cans.

'What do you want?' I asked and looked in the can to see if there was anything I could pull out for him; there was nothing on top but coffee-grounds, dust and some dead flowers.

'There isn't anything, dog,' I said. The dog crossed the street. I went up the stairs in the hospital to the floor Catherine was on and down the hall to her room.³⁷

The way Faulkner makes allusions is, however, very ambiguous, sometimes double, even triple, implications suggested. I would suggest this dog-scene in "Wild Palms" could be seen as an interlude for presentation of one of Faulknerian morals—desperate generosity, or, in other words, egotistic charity.

As for Hemingway, a dog nosing at a refuse can is no more than a small device to shed a streak of cold-coloured light onto the precarious mentality of the hero, who is waiting for his beloved to undergo childbirth. But, to Faulkner, the way Frederic Henry keeps saying, "Nothing," must have seemed to symbolize nothing but Hemingway's nihilism. In Hemingway's world, everything tends to be reduced to zero. Faulkner may have wished to say, "Don't be so stingy. Give the helpless all you can, however poor you may be. Fellow sufferers must pity one another." When in a perverse mood Charlotte goes out to drink up, she does not forget to bring with her the chops for the dog which could get nothing from Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*. It must be remembered, Charlotte would say, that in Luke even poor Lazarus, who wanted to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table, allowed the dogs to lick his sores. And Charlotte remembers that they themselves have got a big windfall from a trash bin—a leather wallet containing twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars, which money has enabled them to plunge into a new life. She persists to do the dog a favour on behalf of Lieutenant Henry at the cost of their own supper. (Though Wilbourne insists to eat something, Charlotte ignores.) I should like to call this sort of sympathy Charlotte's gratuitous philanthropism.

(Incidentally, the dog's composite face of the emperor Franz Josef and a Maine banker in the year 1859 represents the image of a patron who gives money. It is, as it were, the stray dog in *A Farewell to Arms* transformed into a god of wealth. Call it Daikokuten, if you please. Charlotte, and Wilbourne, too, for that matter, prays for well-being in a monetary sense to what may be called the dog-god. Franz Josef (Joseph, in *Farewell*) is an Austrian emperor who gives money to the

Pope. The name is referred to in *Farewell*.³⁸)

If the heroine's driving power is so exaggerated, it seems natural that the hero's inability comes up contrasted when he is dragged by Lilith to Eden of love in a rather silly way. Wilbourne is, indeed, a foolish and imprudent man in love. As a lover, as Edmond L. Volpe put it, he is "an insult to the entire male sex."³⁹ Moldenhauer notes that Harry's tragedy (the thesis of the novel) is caused not by the implacable forces of external nature nor by Charlotte's "powerful sexual needs," (as Howe has said) but by his own inner weakness.⁴⁰ Such a male image is, of course, the reverse of the shapely-figured Frederic Henry. Yet, I should think some emphasis must be put on the fact that even he has in the back of his mind some pride, or self-respect, as a man. It is this pride that makes him hesitate for long to do abortions (whether for a neighbor or for his own love). When in Utah he says yes at last to Mrs. Buckner's request for abortion, he thinks quietly, "I have thrown away lots, but apparently not this. Honesty about money, security, degree. Maybe I would have thrown away love first too."⁴¹ This sounds a little ironical when uttered by the would-be devotee of the true cult of love. "This" in his meditation above is exactly what is called pride—in other words, justice or Puritanism or fear of God (or of Nature). Even so, we may have to stick to the denotations an adjective — Faulknerian. "This," being very dogmatic, may be unable to have a universal value. "This" is equal to "justice" uttered by Charlotte when she is talking to Rittenmeyer in her New Orleans home, Harry waiting outside in the park, which scene is all supposed to be imagined in Harry's clairvoyance. "Justice" is to be modified as "hope" later.

'... A year ago you let me choose and I chose. I will stick to it. I won't have you retract, break your oath to yourself. But I want to ask one thing of you.'

'Of me? A favour?'

'If you like. I don't ask a promise. Maybe what I am trying to express is just a wish. Not hope; wish. If anything happens to me.'

'If anything happens to you. What am I to do?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing?'

'Yes. Against him, I don't ask it for his sake nor even for mine. I ask it for the sake of — of — I don't even know what I am trying to say. For the sake of all the men and women who ever lived and blundered but meant the best and all that ever will live and blunder but mean the best. For your sake maybe, since yours is suffering too — if there is any such thing as suffering,

if any of us ever did, if any of us were ever born strong enough and good enough to be worthy to love or suffer either. Maybe what I am trying to say is justice.'

'Justice?' And now he could hear Rittenmeyer laughing, who had never laughed since laughter is the yesterday's slight beard, the negligee among emotions. *'Justice? This, to me? Justice?'* Now she rises; he too: they face one another....

*'...I told you before that maybe what I was trying to say was hope.'*⁴²

Rittenmeyer cannot understand what his wife means when she—the unfaithful and remorseless wife herself—talks about “justice.” Her “justice” seems to belong to quite a different dimension from her husband’s. A man of common sense, he feels himself being given a moral lecture by a burglar. Yet, so far as Charlotte and Harry are concerned, this “justice” is their own unswerving faith, which ought to have guided them safely to the true paradise of love.

Harry, though advised to run away by both Charlotte and Rittenmeyer, won’t budge an inch. And, in the final dramatic scene, he rejects Rittenmeyer’s exhortation to suicide. In his own way, he would say, he had lived a serious life, silly-looking as it was, and if in the process he was blamed for a grave failure, he would submit to punishment. He wouldn’t play foul. Between grief and nothing he would take grief. The cyanide-handing scene runs as follows.

“Here,” he said. It was a small box for medicine, unlabelled. It contained one white tablet. For a moment Wilbourne looked down at it stupidly, though only for a moment. Then he said quietly:

“Cyanide.”

“Yes,” Rittenmeyer said. He turned, he was already going: the face calm, outrageous and consistent, the man who had been *right* always and found no peace in it.

“But I don’t—” Wilbourne said. “How will my just being dead help—” Then he believed he understood. He said. “Wait.” Rittenmeyer reached the door and put his hand on it. Nevertheless he paused, looking back. “It’s because I have got stale. I don’t think good. Quick.” The other looked at him, waiting. “I thank you. I do thank you. I wish I knew I would do the same for you in my turn.” Then Rittenmeyer shook the door once and looked again at Wilbourne—the face consistent and *right* and damned forever. The jailer appeared and opened the door. (Italics added)⁴³

Both Rittenmeyer and Wilbourne are “right” in their respective ways of life. But their ways are different in dimension. The self-respect Harry Wilbourne has

established in the end after repeated hesitations and mistakes, should I like to call Faulknerian Puritanism.

I have not very much to talk about "Old Man." Not that the story lacks significance and charm. The tall convict is interesting in that he is another type of embodiment of Faulknerian Puritanism. The image is mythologically definitely simply pictured. All I can say about him is that he is exactly another version of Sublieutenant Hiroo Onoda, a Japanese straggler on Lubang Island in the Philippines, who came out of his hideaway in February 1974, after twenty-nine years of self-directed war. A man of this sort can keep his heart at rest only when obeying rules with absolute faithfulness, with no intent to reexamine the meanings of the rules. Faulkner once said that the convict gained his strength because he had a very simple moral standard.⁴⁴

One more word. The convict is essentially a player in a comedy. May I suggest Faulkner's inveterate inclination towards comedy is apparently reflected on the story of the convict?
(1977. 10. 3)

Notes

- 1 Joseph Blotner (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (Random House, 1977), p.106.
- 2 Thomas L. McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study* (U. P. of Mississippi, 1975), p.4.
- 3 Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (Random House, 1966), p.179.
- 4 Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (Random House, 1974), Vol. II, p.995.
- 5 Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel As Form," *William Faulkner: a collection of criticism edited by Dean Morgan Schmitter* (McGraw-Hill Paperbacks, 1973), p.50.
- 6 Melvin Backman, *Faulkner: The Major Years* (Indiana U. P., 1966), p.138.
- 7 Irving Howe, *William Faulkner* (New York, 1952), p.177.
- 8 W. R. Moses, "The Unity of *The Wild Palms*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 2 (Autumn, 1956), p.125.
- 9 Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Unity of Theme and Structure in *The Wild Palms*," *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* ed. F. J. Hoffman & O. W. Vickery (Michigan State U. P., 1960), p. 321.
- 10 *Shiga Masaru Sensei Tsuito Ronbunshu* (Kansei Gakuin Eibei Bungakukai, 1956).
- 11 *Hokkaido Eigō Eibungaku*, 4 (1957).
- 12 H. Edward Richardson, "The 'Hemingwaves' in Faulkner's 'Wild Palms,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 4 (Winter, 1958—1959), p.360.
- 13 W. R. Moses, "Water, Water Everywhere: 'Old Man' and 'A Farewell to Arms,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 5 (Summer, 1959,) pp. 172—174.
- 14 Thomas L. McHaney, "Anderson, Hemingway, and Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*,"

PMLA, 87 (May, 1972), p.471.

- 15 Thomas L. McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study*, p. xxi.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. xx.
- 17 *The Wild Palms* (Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp.42—43.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.21.
- 19 Stuart B. Flexner, *I Hear America Talking* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), p.16.

Badmen ...*Dime novels* (1864, the Dime Book Series began publication in 1860) began to romanticize badmen in the 1860s and ever since we have been talking about such men as: Sam Bass (1851—78),...; "Cole" (Thomas Coleman) Younger (1844—1916), who with his brothers James and Robert formed "the Younger Brothers" who sometimes rode with Jesse James' gang; ...; and, of course, the two who play the biggest part in American badman mythology, BILLY THE KID and JESSE JAMES.

- 20 Walter K. Everett, *Faulkner's Art and Characters* (Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1969), pp.126—127.

Their (=Charlotte and Harry's) situation is analogous to one in which Oedipus, knowing his father's identity, might deliberately set out to murder him and then marry his own mother, recognizing beforehand that what he intended to do would only bring sorrow and unhappiness; that it would be an affront which the gods would not ignore. Charlotte and Harry are not noble figures guilty of hubris; they are weak lovers perpetrating an action that is merely foolish.

- 21 *The Wild Palms*, p.92.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.92.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp.103—104.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.105.
- 25 Thomas L. McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study*, p.93.

In his ambiguous recriminations, Harry also refers to Lilith, the legendary first wife of Adam (Harry has been called Adam here in the woods). Lilith refused to assume the recumbent position in intercourse, believing herself Adam's equal (Charlotte is the sexual aggressor), and she became a destroyer of children.

- 26 *The Wild Palms*, p.136.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.176.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.180.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.190.
- 30 Thomas L. McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study*, p. 11.

I have seen no evidence that William Faulkner ever met Tennessee Mitchell Anderson, but much written — and it may be assumed spoken — about her indicates that she is the model for a portion of the characterization of the heroine of *The Wild Palms*. She was a dilettante artist who dabbled in several forms. In 1920, during her marriage to Anderson, she joined him at Fairhope, Alabama, on Mobile Bay, and found there multicolored clay which she began working into grotesque, satirical figurines. (Cf. *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs*, 442.)

Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, Vol. II, p.982.

Again Faulkner seemed to draw on Helen Baird Lyman. As she had been one girl amid three brothers, so Charlotte had been one among four. In an attic with a skylight like that in Bill Spratling's place on St. Peter Street, Charlotte made figurines of wire and papier-mâché to sell to stores. Helen had made nine-inch-high papier-mâché dolls and had even tried to sell them in New York. Some of them were flapper-style, but there were others, hundreds of them, both before her marriage and after. There was the Lady from Niger, Father William with his telescope, an abstract Diana, and the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*, done in paper of twenty different colors and ready to shout, "Off with their heads!" Another woman who made such figures was Sherwood Anderson's second wife, Tennessee Mitchell, and this, together with other resemblances, would suggest to some that she was the primary model for Charlotte. Again, Faulkner was probably blending imagination, observation, and experience.

31 *The Wild Palms*, pp.88—90.

32 *Ibid.*, pp.88—89.

33 The Japan Bible Society, *The New Testament English and Japanese* (1959), Luke, 16; 20—21, p.223.

20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Laz'a-rus, full of sores,

21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

34 *The Wild Palms*, p.90.

35 Thomas L. McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study*, pp. 81—82.

36 H. Edward Richardson, *op. cit.*, p.359.

37 Ernest Hewingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Penguin Modern Classics, 1964), p.242.

38 *Ibid.*, p.10.

'The Pope wants the Austrians to win the war,' the major said. 'He loves Franz Joseph. That's where the money comes from. I am an atheist.'

39 Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (Thames and Hudson, 1964), p.216.

40 Joseph J. Moldenhauer, *op. cit.*, p.321.

41 *The Wild Palms*, pp.178—179.

42 *Ibid.*, pp.207—208.

43 *Ibid.*, p.298.

44 F. L. Gwynn & J. L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Vintage Books, 1965), p.183.

P.S. Faulkner must have borrowed the idea of Charlotte's rejection of children from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Confer *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Alfred Kröner Verlag Stuttgart, 1964), „Das trunkene Lied," p. 357.

Weh spricht: „Vergeh! Weg, du Wehe!“ Aber alles, was leidet, will leben, daß es reif werde und lustig und sehnsüchtig,

— sehnsüchtig nach Fernerem, Höherem, Hellerem. „Ich will Erben, so spricht

alles, was leidet, ich will Kinder, ich will nicht mich,“ —

Lust aber will nicht Erben, nicht Kinder, — Lust will sich selber, will Ewigkeit,
will Wiederkunft, will Alles-sich-ewig-gleich.