Faulkner’s “Dry September” and “Red Leaves”: Caste and Outcast

With respect to the symmetry of the chapters in this book, a study of “Dry September” and “Red Leaves” may seem out of place.¹ I have chosen to deal with them at length and apart from Light in August because they not only illustrate that Melville’s “social physics and metaphysics” may be usefully explored in Faulkner, but they also demonstrate in microcosm my concerns throughout. I have read Moby-Dick as a metaphysical extension of social concerns in The Scarlet Letter and White-Jacket; a reading of “Dry September” and “Red Leaves” indicates that, for Faulkner, social exclusion may result from metaphysical isolation. Furthermore, in a social analogue of Ishmael’s romantic quest, the marking of scapegoats becomes the community’s attempt to substitute social theology for a metaphysical one. Faulkner clearly reveals this process in these two particular stories. Therefore they serve as a model by which Faulkner demonstrates my thesis in this study.

It is important, in considering works that span two centuries of American fiction, to locate those elements of continuity that allow us to interpret them in meaningful ways. In establishing their emphasis on the mark as one of these elements, I do not mean to imply that the novelists in my study arrive at similar conclusions about the nature of American community, but rather that they face similar problems. The conclusions we may point to by interpreting their fictions establish the ways in which the novelists’ versions of that community have changed in two centuries. One of Faulkner’s significant contributions to American fiction, as I will show in the next two chapters, is the demonstration that many of our “new” social and metaphysical dilemmas in the early twentieth century have their origins, if not their solutions, in our history. For the purposes of my study, only Faulkner among the early twentieth-century
novelists provides us with a glimpse of those origins. He does this best of all, most single-mindedly, in the two stories "Dry September" and "Red Leaves," in which he addresses himself particularly to social and metaphysical isolation. What literary critics isolate as "themes" in American fiction Faulkner establishes as real dilemmas that have no easy resolution.

The reaction of the community to marked individuals in Faulkner differs considerably from the reaction of the Boston townspeople to Hawthorne's Hester. In The Scarlet Letter, as I have suggested, the theology by which the Puritans try to inform their lives leads to a social paradigm for self-scrutiny in which the community as a body looks "within itself," as it were, for marks of the presence of evil in their midst, and tries to strengthen its own identity by assigning social stigma. In Moby-Dick, Ishmael adopts the epistemology of marking but moves beyond the "landed concerns" of the Puritan community. However, Melville indicates that what the Puritans recognized as theology allows the "isolatoe" Ishmael to construct his own myth of analogical relationship to the universe. Ishmael transcends the limitations of theology but retains the meditative process. In Faulkner, as I will indicate in my analysis of these two short stories and Light in August, the process of social exclusion, inherited from Hawthorne's Puritans but divorced of its theological proscriptions, continues to provide the American community with a means of affirming its tenuous identity. However, Faulkner's comment on this process shows the extent to which social exclusion, in and of itself, attains the force, if not the tenets, of theology. In Faulkner's studies of fictional community, social violence becomes the group's "meditation" on who they are.

In both "Dry September" and "Red Leaves," Faulkner achieves a sociological effect by commenting on a historical situation. In "Dry September," he examines the lynching of Will Mayes in a Jefferson, Mississippi, of the 1920s; the figures William Cash provides validate the historical authenticity of the story, for during this decade, lynching remained a means of dealing with the social eccentric. And Indians like the ones in "Red Leaves" did occupy the northwest corner of Mississippi a decade or two into the nineteenth century and keep black slaves there. However, in "Red Leaves," Faulkner's temporal and chronological accuracy serves only to remind the reader that, by contrast with white slavery, Indian slavery exists historically as an arcane and local crime. Thus Faulkner's fictional world, a century later, comments on white and black caste society in the South. He has placed his Negroes in Indian hogans and dressed his Indians in white men's clothes. The particular historical situa-
tion projects the attitudes of Faulkner's own century. The historical authenticity of "Dry September" approaches social satire in "Red Leaves," if we read this story as Faulkner's portrait of his society's own tragedy; the aesthetic distance Faulkner achieves as a result demonstrates the similarities between the body servant's archetypal metaphysical isolation and the social alienation that individual members of American fictional communities experience.

"Red Leaves," like "Dry September," expresses Faulkner's concern with caste and outcast; it also studies metaphysical exclusion, in which ritual becomes social reality. "Red Leaves" thus focuses my interest in this book. The Negro body servant, archetypally marked by the Indians as their scapegoat, yet manages to transcend his social role as lower caste member by translating his social exclusion into metaphysical terms. Although it is because he is a servant that he must run the Indians' race, and although he never achieves any other social identity or even any other name than that of "body servant," it is not as a servant that he experiences his isolation. His metaphysical experience transcends the limitations of social caste. His social role becomes his personal quest, and Faulkner, in his analysis of the body servant, models for us the intimate relationship between personal and social identities. He shows us that social ritual may become a vehicle for attaining knowledge, both for the Negro and for the Indians in the story, and in his title, as I will indicate, defines metaphor as methodology, emphasizes the logic of analogy, and marks the personal as social.

I

Faulkner does not mark his characters physically, as Melville marks Ahab; socially, as Hawthorne's Boston marks Hester Prynne; or metaphysically, as Ishmael at the beginning of *Moby-Dick* marks himself. Yet each of the major characters in "Dry September" becomes marked, set apart, or outcast—becomes visible in a society that insists on invisibility. By making manifest ambiguities within a white society (the blackness within white) and casting them out by "out-caste-ing" the racial deviant (marked by skin color), the members of the society protect their homogeneity, their aggregate invisibility.

The reader first encounters Minnie Cooper as a marked character, and she becomes the focus of several different impulses of social exclusion. In the narrative present of "Dry September," the men in the barbershop make her the subject of their gossip, the branded object of rumor. The rumor has sexual connotations; and when
McLendon enters the barbershop in section 1, he labels these connotations, calls the rumor "rape." His act is a form of linguistic marking. By labeling, he effectively turns the rumor into fact, into an unacceptable act in a white male society that views sexuality as its strongest threat—"'Are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?'"

The motivations that subsequently set off a lynch mob are several and complex. Strangers and observers become visible when a lynch mob forms. They experience social pressure to place themselves well within the ranks of the invisible and, in addition, to collectively force the fear of sexual encounter between black man and white woman out of the range of sexual possibilities within the society. The mob accomplishes this by eliminating the black man; and hence when rumor becomes fact, it no longer suffices that the black man is chronically placed outside the white caste—a particular one must be killed. In "Dry September," as long as the rumor with its sexual connotations remains rumor, the group speculating in the barbershop may consider Minnie Cooper as a pornographic object. Each man may mentally "attack, insult, frighten" Minnie. But once the rumor becomes established fact and speculation becomes "rape," then the men experience the frustration of vicarious violation—and they subordinate the sexual realities of lynching.

In section 2, a flashback from the dry September present, the narrator describes Minnie's separateness. The significant details in this description emphasize Minnie's history of sexual ambiguity and her extreme visibility. Her manner, during her youth, became "brighter and louder" than her companions; and she carried her "bright, haggard look" to parties "like a mask or a flag." This particular phrase suggests the irony of social exclusion. Minnie's marked behavior both obscures and reveals. During her affair with the bank cashier, she emphasized her visibility while riding in the red runabout by wearing "the first motoring bonnet and veil the town ever saw." Faulkner implies that her exhibitionism indicated her desire to win social acceptance, but she managed to earn instead a place in rumor, "relegated into adultery by public opinion." The ambiguity that characterized Minnie's public behavior carries over into her private life and the present tense, as she sits on her porch during middle age in a "lace-trimmed boudoir cap" and translucent voile dresses.

Section 4, the reader's next view of Minnie, takes place in the narrative present, and enacts the hidden ambiguities Faulkner hints at in section 2. Her excitement as she dresses, her trembling as she walks with her friends towards the movie house, her tingling
lips, her attempt to "hold back the laughing so it would not waste away so fast and so soon," all suggest that becoming the object of rumor has stimulated her senses. She dresses for visibility and anticipates a vision of sorts—the picture show "was like a miniature fairyland with its lighted lobby and colored lithographs of life..." The "silver dream" focuses her longing.

Sexuality and visibility are accompanied by voyeurism. Her friends watch Minnie dress, their eyes "bright... with a dark glitter," and the people who watch her enter the movie house muffle their reactions in "undertones of low astonishment." The women who take her home after her collapse are very curious about her. Their initial reactions—"'You must tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything'" becomes "'Do you suppose anything really happened?' [they asked] their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate." What Minnie sees, in accordance with her "furious unreality," as Faulkner describes it in section 2, is "life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations."

Ironically, the dramatic moment in 4 where these ambiguities manifest themselves also leads to Minnie's moment of integration, in which the eccentric becomes, once again, a social focus. She assumes for a moment, her place in the center of the group as she enters the square with her friends, and "even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed."

The laugh at the end of the section serves as a dramatic climax, suggests that Minnie's sensual excitement has reached an analogous climax, and stresses the irony of her momentary centrality. Her absurd laugh, which seems to begin as an expression of pleasure and end in echolalia, evades interpretation. The rape rumor that branded Minnie at the beginning of the story serves to grant her perverse satisfaction in 4, but this satisfaction does not exist in reality; her sexual experience partakes of fantasy, resembles the silver dream. Yet the young men have it both ways—they first act, by lynching Mayes, and then indulge in sexual speculation when Minnie walks by.7

If Minnie's visibility yields her some measure of satisfaction and security, however, the black man's does not. Will Mayes is the second marked character in the story, and the reasons for his marking and his lynching are only too obvious. In addition to his blackness, which makes him a potential scapegoat, he has tried to integrate himself into his community—he has a job, behaves respectfully and passively. That he should become the lynch mob's choice suggests that attempts at integration, invisibility, and sobriety only make
the Negro more of a threat to the men of Jefferson. Mayes does not know his place, in effect, as an outcast, and when McLendon and his followers lynch him, they take care of two problems at once—they ritualistically eliminate their projected fear of the black man as a sexual threat, and they force once again the visible separation of castes; lower caste members are simply not permitted to act like white men.

The third marked character in "Dry September," who becomes the most problematic for the reader, is Hawkshaw. In the first section of the story, he seems to function as an impartial observer, but as his impartiality becomes visible, he becomes socially unacceptable. The men in the barbershop imply that he is a northerner and a "nigger-lover." He tries to hide behind this pose of impartiality, even when he follows McLendon into the street. But the other barbers point out Hawkshaw's conflict, as well as his danger, by swearing "Jees Christ" four times. "'I'd just as lief be Will Mayes as Hawk, if he gets McLendon riled.'" one of the barbers states. Hawkshaw's visibility casts him out, like Mayes, for potential crucifixion.

Hawkshaw's motivation for accompanying McLendon is not perfectly clear. The narrator hints that, although his desire to stop the lynching may be strong, he experiences an equally strong curiosity, a compulsion to witness. Thus, to McLendon, he maintains an agreeable appearance, although the war veteran detects protest in his silence: "'What's the matter, Hawk' . . . 'Nothing.'" That Hawkshaw strikes Mayes with the others may be interpreted as his attempt to strengthen his position with McLendon, but the action may also suggest Hawkshaw's own inner conflict—that even the barber shares some of the white man's fear. But when he protests in the car ("'John,' the barber said") and receives implicit encouragement from Mayes ("'Mr Henry'"), he can no longer retain his invisibility; Mayes places a claim on him, asks him to become an outcast in his defense, and Hawkshaw reacts by jumping out of the car.

At the crucial moment, he refuses to share the black man's visibility, and when he retches into the ditch, reveals a complex of emotions. The narrator states, "Dust puffed about him, and in a thin, vicious crackling of sapless stems he lay choking and retching." On one hand, Hawkshaw has shown himself to be just such a sapless stem; he has been powerless to stop McLendon. On the other hand knowledge of what is going to happen to Mayes becomes physically experiential for Hawkshaw as he just avoids a similar fate. And yet, finally, he also achieves a cathartic reaction to the initial rumor by witnessing the lynching from a particular position of danger. This brings on the physical release, turns his stomach.
Hawkshaw's action leads to a technical question: why does the barber literally drop out of "Dry September" when he jumps out of the car? His subsequent absence produces a lack of mediation for the reader throughout the rest of the story. Yet there seems little place in sections 4 and 5 for the presence of an observer. The highly evocative language of section 4 requires unmediated ambiguity; and the narrator hints in the last sentence of section 5 that greater powers than Hawkshaw observe the community—"The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars." A partial answer to the technical question might be that, throughout, Faulkner needs to preserve ambiguity for full effect; and the unbalancing force of McLendon, who reduces ambiguity for the men in the barbershop by making rumor fact, requires the balance of Hawkshaw to reestablish this ambiguity. When Hawkshaw himself becomes a marked character, he potentially changes the direction of the narrative. He must cast himself out of the car in order to retain his invisibility of whiteness in a white and black world; and Faulkner must eliminate Hawkshaw from the story in order to prevent his observer from becoming a major focus.

But the influence of Hawkshaw's powers of observation remains within the story; the reader's unmediated, immediate response in 4 and 5 replaces the observer in sections 1 and 3. The reader sees with the other observers—the voyeuristic friends who surround Minnie and the wife McLendon thinks has been spying on him. Hawkshaw's perverse release reduces the aesthetic distance; the reader moves uncomfortably close to the story. And Faulkner thus raises other questions: What is the relationship between the seer and the viewer? Where does the fiction writer stand in a work like "Dry September"? Is he observer or voyeur?

Even McLendon becomes a marked character by the end of "Dry September," but unlike the other three, his marking exists only for the reader, not for the townspeople of Jefferson. In his social context, McLendon certainly "stands out" in section 1 by "standing up" for the women and children of Jefferson, by issuing his war call; but his visibility is the only acceptable kind. Since he is the whitest southerner in the town, and the most powerful catalytic agent for eliminating social deviance, the people of Jefferson do not mark him, but grant him invisibility. In section 5, McLendon's wife has waited up for him; she is an impartial observer but he views her as inquisitor, as voyeur, and he shows her violence instead of love. There is public release for the town in "Dry September"—the social deviant is eliminated. But there is no private release for McLendon; the inner ambiguities remain.
"Red Leaves" is also a study of the alien, but from a metaphysical perspective as well as a social one. There is no mediating observer in "Red Leaves"; Faulkner employs instead a combination of historical distance and Eastern philosophical detachment, depicts the slaveholders as both Indian and American Indian, and forces aesthetic distance from social reality. Thus, the reader does not respond physically, as he may to sections 4 and 5 of "Dry September." "Red Leaves" compels our intellectual sympathy, our contemplation of the metaphysical significance of social sacrifice rather than our witness to the physical immediacy of lynching.

The ritualistic quality of action in "Red Leaves" contributes to the aesthetic distance. The Indians exclude and kill the nameless Negro body servant only to fulfill the requirements of ritual—they do not physically mark him in any way, no more than they do his fellow Negroes—and in this particular society, where Indian women receive no emphasis, sexual tension between upper and lower castes does not seem to exist. "Red Leaves" is not, then, a study of racism, or an evocation of white man's fear. The Negro is marked out to be put to death because whenever the Man dies, by tradition so must his horse, his dog, and his body servant. Implicit in the ritual is the race. When Doom died, it took the Indians three days to catch his body servant, and although the narrator does not state that these Indians expect the body servant to run, they take no precautions against his doing so, and do not seem particularly surprised when they find him gone. The meaning of the body servant's mark derives not from his caste, but from the ritual he performs, for both himself and the Indians, in his race from and against death.

The first section of "Red Leaves" explicitly fails to explain. The language is decidely vague: I count sixteen relative pronouns, or phrases that function as relative pronouns, that do not relate specifically to previous information in the text. For example, the first Indian says, in the second paragraph, "'I know what we will find,'" The second answers "'What we will not find.'" If we look back at the first paragraph of the story, however, which immediately precedes this interchange, we find no explanation for what the pronoun "what" refers to. Another example of this same device occurs a few paragraphs later, when the first Indian states, "'I have said all the time that this is not the good way,'" and further on, "'I do not like slavery. It is not the good way. In the old days there was the good way. But not now.'" The second Indian answers, "'You do not remember the old way either.'" The phrases the good way and the old
way (my italics) function as relative pronouns; but we do not learn what they refer to, except in terms of what it is not. It is not slavery, and it is not sweating—"I have listened to them who do. And I have tried this way. Man was not made to sweat." The confusion here is not just the reader's—the Indians' own ignorance of the legendary "good way" and their inability to describe it any further than with these inadequate phrases create the confusion. This particular linguistic pattern enforces ambiguity, creates an atmosphere of inscrutability.

In addition to the inscrutability, the first section also establishes a pattern of excessive negation, of defining things in terms of the things they are not, conspicuous in the imagery as well as in the dialogues between the two Indians. "There was no sign of life," we learn in the first paragraph. "The lane was vacant, the doors of the cabins empty and quiet; no cooking smoke rose. . . . In the old days there were no quarters, no Negroes."

A third pattern qualifies the process by which the Indians perceive reality and the narrator creates the fictional world—objects are masked, hidden, covered up. For example, the doorsteps at the Negro quarters are "neat with whitewash" and "patinaed." When the two Indians enter the central cabin, the Negroes "seemed to be musing as one upon something remote, inscrutable." The masking ranges from the physical image of the whitewashed slave quarters and the later mud mask with which the body servant covers his face to the connotations of the Indians' "blurred serenity" or their analogy to carved heads "looming out of a mist." The Indians respond inscrutably to their environment; they mask it with ritual and artifact (the red shoes, the gilt bed, and the steamboat); and unable to perceive what it is, they notice only what it is not.

The dramatic action in the story focuses on the death and funeral of Issetibbeha and the subsequent race the body servant runs. Because we do not see Issetibbeha in life, but only read about his funeral, and because the man who replaces Issetibbeha, Moketubbe, is almost dead himself, the story becomes an exploration of what life means by examining its conceptual opposite. The body servant is marked out as the person who will actually experience the death, and the Indians invest this ritual with the cumulative meaning of Issetibbeha's life—the body servant must run his (Issetibbeha's) life's race. This interpretation finds support in the comment an Indian makes to the Negro when they catch him, "'You ran well. Do not be ashamed.'" Exploration of the meaning of life becomes, for the marked man, a movement toward experiencing dying, and for
Moketubbe and the Indians, the ritualistic pursuit of the body servant in his race for life.\textsuperscript{13}

There is a physical parallel between the race and the death of Issetibbeha as well as the ritualistic one. On the day the Indians find the Negro’s blood ("He has injured himself"), Issetibbeha begins to smell (section 5). For the first time the fact of Issetibbeha’s death becomes more than a concept—it is a tangible physical presence. The end of section 4 clarifies the parallel. The Negro’s own understanding of death remains similarly conceptual until the cottonmouth bites him. From that point on, death is inevitable and real to him. The poison provides a tangible reason for his dying and for his "rank smell." The Negro’s flight, then, is a symbolic, ritualistic counterpart to Issetibbeha’s dying. It enables the Indians to vicariously understand Issetibbeha’s death, and, indirectly but more significantly, their own lives by the process of perception that the language of the first section reveals as definition by negation.

The Negro, familiar with the traditional ritual, knows that when Issetibbeha dies, he will be as good as dead also. His vigil in the loft becomes his own death watch. The reader learns that for the body servant, "a fire would signify life," so that when the doctor emerging from the steamboat and lights two sticks, the Negro knows Issetibbeha is still alive.

"So he is not dead yet," the Negro said into the whispering gloom of the loft, answering himself; he could hear two voices, himself and himself:

"Who not dead?"
"You are dead."
"Yao, I am dead," he said quietly.

The lighting of the clay-daubed sticks only postpones the actual moment of Issetibbeha’s death, and of the body servant’s own, and it is the conception of his own death that he tries to understand. He knows he is dead also, rather will shortly be, and tries to imagine the moment of dying. "He imagined himself springing out of the bushes, leaping among the drums on his bare, lean, greasy, invisible limbs. But he could not do that, because man leaped past life, into where death was; he dashed into death and did not die, because when death took a man, it took him just this side of the end of living. It was when death overran him from behind, still in life." Man does not choose death, but death takes man, and takes him "just this side of the end of living." This, for the Negro, would be the desirable way to die—to be fully alive until the moment of death, then be "taken," in all the force and immediacy of the word. At the same time, how-
ever, he understands that his own death will not happen in this way. The final sentence in the passage is left unfinished. The worst kind of dying, the Negro seems to feel, would be, still alive, to watch death catch up from behind—to experience a state of death in life. He understands that he will die this way—and because he has not experienced it, yet conceptually knows it, he is afraid.

The passage suggests that the body servant’s race is symbolic for him as well as for his pursuers—death chases him in the form of the Indians. But his fear makes it real. He finds it strange, after Issetibbeha dies, “that he was still breathing ... that he still breathed air, still needed air.” His life processes, which the breathing represents for him, become exaggerated. He has become more conscious than ever of living, in the face of death.

When he allows himself to be bitten by the cottonmouth at the end of section 4, he seems to feel that, since he is doomed to imminent death, the snake can do him no more damage. But it is only after the existential moment, after the snake has bitten him three times and there now exists a physical cause for death, that he comes closer to understanding by experience what has been up to this point in his life only a concept, a ritual.14 "'Ole, grandfather,' the Negro said. He touched its head and watched it slash him again across his arm and again, with thick, raking, awkward blows. 'It's that I do not wish to die,' he said. Then he said it again—'It's that I do not wish to die'—in a quiet tone, of slow and low amaze, as though it were something that, until the words had said themselves, he found that he had not known, or had not known the depth and extent of his desire.” Death, for him, becomes understandable in terms of life—"'It's that I do not wish to die'”—and only after he says the words, articulates the understanding for himself, does he know the "depth and extent of his desire” to live. He has approached an understanding of death by understanding what it means to be alive.

At one point in the Negro’s race, he comes face to face with an Indian. “They were both on a footlog across a slough—the Negro gaunt, lean, tireless and desperate; the Indian thick, soft-looking, the apparent embodiment of the ultimate and the supreme reluctance and inertia.” In the contrast between Negro and Indian, Faulkner manifests the significance of his story. For the Negro not only acts out Issetibbeha’s death for the Indians by running life’s "race" with death in sight, but he also illuminates the nature of the Indians’ lives. Moketubbe, now the Man, is a paradigm for the Indian slaveholder’s condition—death in life—and the Negro’s race becomes symbolic of the kind of race Moketubbe also runs.
Part of the ritual involves the necessity for the new Man to lead
the hunt in search of the predecessor’s body servant. This ritual
becomes a pivotal transition from death back into life—it is the act
that earns the living Man the right to the dead Man’s title. But the
Negro experiences death in life, the worst possible form of either
living or dying. And in so doing, he describes precisely the nature of
the Indians’ lives, which the figure of Moketubbe markedly indi­
cates.

We learn that from his birth, Moketubbe has seemed “to exist in a
complete and unfathomable lethargy,” and that “he might have
been dead himself. It was as though he were cased so in flesh that
even breathing took place too deep within him to show.” As we see
elsewhere, none of the Indians likes to sweat or to work; Moketubbe
is not an exception—and in his own extreme way, he embodies, in
all the physical as well as symbolic connotations of the word, what is
deathlike about the Indians.

At the end of “Red Leaves,” after the Negro has been captured, the
Indians wait “patient, grave, decorous, implacable” while the
body servant tries to drink.

Then the water ceased, though still the empty gourd tilted higher
and higher, and still his black throat aped the vain motion of his
frustrated swallowing. A piece of water-loosened mud carried away
from his chest and broke at his muddy feet, and in the empty gourd
they could hear his breath: ah-ah-ah.

"Come," Basket said, taking the gourd from the negro and hanging
it back in the well.

The story ends at the moment just before the one in which the Negro
will actually die, completely and irrevocably, the moment of utter
darkness when death in life will become simply death. This moment
comments on Moketubbe; for every time he tries to wear the red
shoes, he begins to faint, and when the Indians remove the shoes,
"Moketubbe’s face would not alter, but only then would his brea­
thing become perceptible, going in and out of his pale lips with a
faint ah-ah-ah sound."

In “Red Leaves,” marking is the means by which the Indians try
to understand the inscrutable; and by which Faulkner explores the
experiential meaning of words like “life” and “death.” He studies
markedness at its farthest remove from the physical—the
metaphysical. Even the physical badge that the body servant puts
on—his mud mask—becomes a symbolic veil. In the moment just
prior to his death, the mask drops off—and just as the story does not
view death, neither does it reveal the secrets behind his mask.
Faulkner offers us his title—"red leaves"—as a way of guiding our interpretation of his story, but the title itself requires interpretation. Faulkner himself once stated that the title derives from what he termed the process of "deciduation." In the process of dying, leaves on a deciduous tree become very beautiful. They are reddest and seem to be most alive just prior to the moment in which they fall. The body servant's race against death is analogous to the reddening of the leaves; and like the leaves, in the moment of death, his mask falls off. But Faulkner leaves us with the metaphor. Even at the end of the story, its meaning is masked. Its title both obscures and reveals.

In spite of the atmosphere of detachment in "Red Leaves," the story ultimately achieves an intensity as great if not greater than "Dry September," analogous to the comparable intensity with which Moby-Dick succeeds White-Jacket. Faulkner's inner view of the marked man, in "Red Leaves," compels the reader's sympathy. By distancing his fiction from social reality, he avoids layering his portrait of slavery with contemporary attitudes. The reader approaches the body servant without the stereotype of racial stigma—the man does not become Faulkner's "Negro character." Thus Faulkner permits the human response. The result lends the reader the mask of the mark: and he achieves a vision of the black servant's visibility.

The thematic explorations of social marking and transcendental vision in "Red Leaves" seem to resemble the concerns of Hawthorne and Melville more than those of modern fiction. Within the fictional worlds of both stories, communities are essentially closed, like Hawthorne's Boston: the road that leads out of town in "Dry September" and the park-like forest surrounding "Red Leaves" both serve to isolate the enclosed fictional environments. Such is particularly the case in "Red Leaves," where the body servant runs blindly, "since there was nowhere for him to go." Even the social deviant, the ritual scapegoat, remains within the closed community, just as Hester Prynne becomes part of the daily life of the Puritan townspeople.

In Light in August, the closed community emphasizes Joe Christmas's metaphysical isolation. Joe's murder of Joanna Burden becomes a sociological version of the transcendental method that leads Hawthorne to allegory and Melville to qualify Ishmael's "resurrection" of Ahab's tragedy. It is not until Ralph Ellison, as I will discuss, that the marked man leaves the closure and goes North to find that his stigma is invisibility. Light in August continues to underline the isolation of the individual within American community. McLendon and Moketubbe are the representative men of this isolation. And in such a social system, only the scapegoat achieves nobility and truth.
Notes

1. Except for brief comments within larger studies of Faulkner's work, there have been few comprehensive attempts to deal with these stories. This is not to say that no studies exist but rather that, in my view, they are inadequate. Among the dozen articles that have appeared on "Dry September" in recent years, John B. Vickery, "Ritual and Theme in Faulkner's 'Dry September,'" Arizona Quarterly, 18 (Spring 1962), and Howard J. Faulkner, "The Stricken World of 'Dry September,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 10 (Winter 1973) are the best. Joseph W. Reed, Jr., gives "Dry September" space in his useful book, Faulkner's Narrative (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), as does Hyatt H. Waggoner, in William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959). Arthur L. Ford's early essay, "Dust and Dreams: A Study of Faulkner's 'Dry September,'" College English, 24 (December 1962), interprets the presence of the dust but does not deal with the story's sociological implications.

2. Bibliography on "Red Leaves" is even more limited than that available on "Dry September." In his essay "The Descent of the Gods: Faulkner's 'Red Leaves' and the Garden of the South," Studies in Short Fiction, 11 (Summer 1974), Gilbert H. Mullen notes: "Given the remarkable calibre of this short story, and the proliferation of Faulkner criticism in the past two decades, it is curious that this story remains unexplicated; to a large extent, this failure is a reflection of the cursory treatment of Faulkner's short fiction in most major studies of his work" (p. 244). In a footnote to this statement, Mullen goes on to specify the limitations of criticism on the story: "The only valid exception to this remark is Michael Millgate, who in The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1965) makes an incisive evaluation of the significance of Faulkner's short fiction. Although he does not elaborate on 'Red Leaves,' Millgate thinks that the story is one of the best in These Thirteen. [Millgate makes the same statement about "Dry September."] In William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York: Vintage, 1962), Irving Howe goes further than Millgate and terms the story one of the three best in contemporary American fiction, but Howe also fails to analyze 'Red Leaves' closely. Far more typical reactions to 'Red Leaves' are expressed by William Van O'Connor, who in The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954) is frankly confused by the symbolism of the story; and by Hyatt Howe Waggoner, who . . . doesn't mention the story at all."


5. Robert Funk supports this reading to a point but insists that the story becomes a "universal comment on human mortality" (p. 348). I agree more with Robert W. Funk, "Satire and Existentialism in Faulkner's 'Red Leaves,'" Mississippi Quarterly, 25 (Summer 1972).

4. Howard Faulkner suggests that Minnie originated the accusation of rape (p. 48). He states, further: "It is as if in their attempt to destroy another human being, Minnie Cooper and McLendon have succeeded in destroying their own humanity as well" (p. 49). Ralph Haven Wolfe and Edgar F. Daniels, in "Beneath the Dust of 'Dry September,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (Winter 1964), suggest, more blatantly, that "Minnie Cooper . . . is surely motivated by something far more specialized than the desire, as Professor Ford says, 'to recapture her past glory'. . . . [W]ith whisky and with her determined association with the young people, she has managed until this moment to hide from herself the increasingly evident truth that her 'Dry September' . . . has reached a crisis fully sexual in its meaning" (pp. 158-59).

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However, there is no evidence in the text to support the interpretation that Minnie originated an "accusation" against Will Mayes. Who can trace the origin of a rumor? And Faulkner makes it clear that the men in the barbershop do not even know what they are talking about until McLendon utters the word "rape."
to avoid unnecessary notation in the text, I have omitted page references in this chapter only. I have generally specified section numbers instead, and the reader who is familiar with the context of each story should have no difficulty locating particular lines.


7. Wolfe and Daniels propose a sexually oriented interpretation that moves far beyond my own suggestions here. They argue: "Behind the facade of social indignation lies this immensely powerful sexual preoccupation. The actual lynching ... is not a community action... [T]he degree of emotional involvement in the affair of the supposed rape is in direct proportion to the degree of the characters' own sexual maladjustment" (p. 158).

This is a tendentious reading of the story that does not consider that the barbershop acts as a microcosm for the community as a whole. The only people in the community who do not have representatives in the barbershop are women and Negroes. As Reed states, "The bond of the barbershop here cements a lynch mob; the community's concern for its inhabitants here only alienates and isolates Minnie. The boundary of the small town, in other stories marking the closeness of familiarity, here turns everything sour, septic, promotes rumor, and makes inevitable the violence of reaction" (p. 51).

It is possible to infer from Wolfe and Daniels's reading sexual motivation on the part of all the main characters. Wolfe and Daniels conclude their essay by stating that "the accusation ... gives Minnie momentary respite from sexual death, the lynching ... gives perverted sexual release to McLendon; the fraudulent protest ... allows the 'virtuous' barber vicarious participation in the lynching" (p. 159). Although this motivation may be one aspect of the forces that build to the lynching, certainly Wolfe and Daniels do not mean to suggest that racial prejudice, what Reed terms "the violence of reaction," and the dry heat itself do not contribute in even more substantial ways to produce tension in the story.

8. Charles Nilon writes, "Will Mayes ... is any Negro man. Like Hawthorne, and his attitude toward Hester's sin, Faulkner is more interested in examining the causes and results of lynching than he is in the crime itself. For this reason he does not give the details of Will Mayes' death" (p. 44). However, Mayes is not just any Negro man. As I point out in the text, he has tried to integrate himself into the community and therefore becomes a likely target of McLendon's wrath. Nilon is correct, I think, when he focuses on the lynching rather than the crime—particularly since, again, the crime originates not in direct accusation but in rumor.

9. Here again Wolfe and Daniels offer a distorted reading of the text. They accuse Hawkshaw of insidiously introducing Mayes's name into the conversation in the first place because he wants him to become the focus of the mob. "Once the name has entered the discussion, he is able to deny Will's guilt and protest against the proceedings to his heart's content, knowing full well that he is merely fanning the flames" (p. 159). If this is the case, McLendon certainly does not know it, and Hawkshaw risks his security in the town at the same time as he betrays his cowardice when he jumps into the ditch, refusing to accompany the mob any further.

10. Howard Faulkner focuses on the symbolism of the moon in "Dry September" and offers this interpretation of Hawkshaw's actions: "Only once in the story does the moon rise above its connection with Jefferson's physical and moral landscape ..."—when Hawkshaw walks back to town after jumping from the car. Howard Faulkner concludes, "If Hawkshaw has not been able to save Will Mayes, he has at least been able to save himself" (p. 48). This reading partially corrects Wolfe and Daniels's interpretation, but it does not completely exonerate Hawkshaw of moral responsibility.

11. Hyatt Waggoner's interpretation of the story is well stated: "In the largest sense, the story may be seen as a parable of what happens to man in the wasteland where, driven by an intolerable sense of insecurity and isolation, faced by an overwhelming threat, he turns to sadistic violence as a means of asserting his existence. The story develops the insight that sadism and a sense of insecurity are closely linked" (From Jefferson to the World, p. 196).

13. Charles Nilon states of the Indians that "it is learned from their conversation that they were powerless to take him against his will: 'But you turned him back?' 'He turned back. We feared for a moment'" (p. 42). In the context of the story the Indian states, "'we could smell something else, which we did not know. That was why we feared..." In my interpretation of the story, any fear the Indians have other than the fear of death itself is the fear that the body servant will turn back and not complete his race, their ritual.

14. Nilon supports this point. "It is as if his flight from the Indians was merely an abstraction to which his intelligence had not given meaning, for he does not realize that he does not wish to die until the poison bite of the snake has given him an immediate fear of death" (p. 43). Mullen calls this the body servant's "moment of absolute dignity" in which "he manages to hold the horror of death in abeyance" (p. 247).

15. Nilon interprets the story differently at this point. "After he discovers through the snake's bite that he wants to live, he is afraid of dying. The slave gives up flight, not because he has fear of the Indians, but as an acceptance of the inevitable" (p. 42). We see the body servant sitting on a log singing at the end of section 5. Faulkner writes, "His voice was clear, full, with a quality wild and sad. 'Let him have time,' the Indians said, squatting, patient, waiting. He ceased and they approached." The Negro does not give himself up, as Nilon implies, but recognizes that he has been captured by the Indians, who praise him: "'You ran well. Do not be ashamed.'"