

The World of Love: A Study of *The Wild Palms* in Reference to Henri Bergson and Jeremy Taylor*

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Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* has been frequently misread and misunderstood. In his most exhaustive study of this novel, Thomas L. McHaney finds close parallels in the cyclic odysseys of both the convict and the lovers with the idea of Schopenhauer that life is an endless cycle of pain.¹ However, we can dispute McHaney's theory of meaninglessness of time when we refer to Henri Bergson and Jeremy Taylor by whom, as I presented in the previous paper, Faulkner was crucially influenced.² We can understand their odysseys as their way to get back into pure duration, God's reality. Thus the aim of this paper is a modest attempt to present a more convincing interpretation of the theme of the novel than McHaney's by referring to the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the theology of Jeremy Taylor.

In order to understand the theme, we have to clarify the relationship between the two parts of which the novel consists; "Wild Palms" and "The Old Man." According to *Biographical and Reference Guide* published on 19 January 1939, *The Wild Palms* was originally begun in November 1937 as a novel about Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer, and Faulkner added the "The Old Man" section to his conception of the book early in 1938.³ We know from Faulkner's statement in an interview that he never doubts the unity of *The Wild Palms* though it is made of the two sections seemingly divided:

I did not know it would be two separate stories until after I had started the book. When I reached the end of what is now the first section of *The Wild Palms*, I realized suddenly that something was missing, it needed emphasis, something to lift it like counterpoint in music. So I wrote the 'Old Man' story until 'The Wild Palms' story rose back to pitch.⁴

Together the two stories depict the desire for freedom in time as is shown in the original title: "If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem": from a psalm about the Babylonian captivity.⁵ It is an admonition to remember freedom and the past. The first pair, Harry and Charlotte, strive for freedom from the confinement of the morals and order of their society and in "The Old Man" the tall convict strives for security in confronting the natural forces of the huge scheme of time. They all are caught in a trap set by time. As if cast into a flood of time, each individual must seek one's way in the flood of time to ensure integrity as a human being. Here we will scrutinize their odysseys first in reference to Bergson and then to Jeremy Taylor in order to discern the theme of the novel.

Harry Wilbourne, a young intern, has been in the hospital almost two years without any private means. On the morning of his twenty-seventh birthday he thinks about his wasted life and he feels irritated with himself that he had not fully lived:

... on the morning of his twenty-seventh birthday he waked and looked down his body toward his foreshortened feet and it seemed to him that he saw the twenty-seven irrevocable years diminished and foreshortened beyond them in turn, as if his life were to lie passively on his back as though he floated effortless and without volition upon an unreturning stream. He seemed to see them: the empty years in which his youth had vanished—the years for wild oats and for daring, for the passionate tragic ephemeral loves of adolescence, the girl—and boy—white, the wild importu-

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nate fumbling flesh, which had not been for him. . . . (33–34)

It was when he met Charlotte Rittenmeyer, for whom “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” (48) that they happened to be in love. After finding “twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars in bills” (51) in the street, Harry quits his internship only a few months short of earning a medical degree. Curiously with the consent of Rittenmeyer, Charlotte’s husband, they run away together from the world of morals and order to Chicago, where they work irregularly and live as long as their money lasts. During the next two years Harry is more the disciple of Charlotte than a lover. Finally he is persuaded by Charlotte to perform an abortion on her, but he blunders and causes Charlotte’s death. Harry is turned over to the police, and though Rittenmeyer urges him to jump his bail and flee the country, Harry refuses. Again after his trial, Rittenmeyer offers him a cyanide tablet to kill himself, but Harry destroys it. When he is asked “Then how do you account for this failure?”, he wonders, “*Why? What have I done? What in the world can I have done in my life?*” (319), and he gets to his own definite answer, “*Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief*” (324). He refuses to run away or commit suicide because now memory of his love with Charlotte is all that is left to him.

Undoubtedly Harry is a failure. But how should we account for his failure? Harry is depicted from the beginning as a man trapped by the eyes of his lover “in which he seemed to blunder and fumble like a moth, a rabbit caught in the glare of a torch. . . .” (87). He is too timid to decide anything. Charlotte is the one who decides when and under what circumstances they will make love. So often Charlotte urges Harry “to get his clothes off.” He also thinks of her as a “better man” than himself because of her courage and unconventionality (105). He is less capable than she at earning for a living. While she finds employment by using her artistic talent, he is reduced to writing pornography and later he humbly counts and recounts their remaining cans of food, waiting passively for Charlotte. Thus even after eloping with Charlotte, he has difficulty finding a role for himself other than as her servant. He describes to his friend McCord his own miserable passivity toward his mistress in which he seems to be rushing out of himself into the womb–grave:

—Maybe you thought all the time that when the moment came you could rein back, save something, maybe not, the instant comes and you know you cannot, know you knew all the time you could not, and you cannot; you are one single abnegant affirmation, one single fluxive Yes out of the terror in which you surrender volition, hope, all—the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude, the shock, the death, the moment when, stopped physically by the ponderable clay, you yet feel all your life rush out of you into the pervading immemorial blind receptive matrix, the hot fluid foundation—grave–womb or womb–grave, it’s all one. . . . (138)

How different is this rushing from Bergsonian *élan vital* which is a free creative act!

As I have pointed out, Faulkner was influenced by Bergson, with whom he expresses agreement on time and the nature of reality.⁶ Bergson conceives the inner directing principle, which he called the *élan vital*, as an inexhaustible conscious force, a prolific energy that proceeds in a creative and altogether unpredictable manner without a definite direction and with no end in view. He characterizes the vital impulse (*élan vital*) as a free, creative act as he posits all creation as “merged . . . into growth” (CE 240–1). And he further claims that “To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration” (TFW 232).

Real duration Bergson defines as that irreversible succession of heterogeneous states melting into one another and flowing in indivisible process which we experience when we return to our essential being:

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it

does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. (*TFW* 100)

Thinking of Charlotte in reference to Bergson, we can say she is Bergsonian *élan vital* itself. However, it works completely differently from how Bergson conceives it ought to function. Here we have to clarify the religious concept of Bergson.

As James Street Fulton in “Bergson’s Religious Interpretation of Evolution” says, “What first figures in Bergson’s philosophy as a cunning display of living energy comes forth in the end as the progressive achievement of divine love;”⁷ Bergson has come to affirm a transcendent God of love who is creatively involved itself in human existence. Bergson writes that he goes “beyond the conclusions we reached in *Creative Evolution*” (*TS* 256) which defines God as “unceasing life, action, freedom” (*CE* 262) and in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* Bergson defines that “God is love, and the object of love: herein lies the whole contribution of mysticism” (*TS* 252). This love has an object, and that object is man:

As a matter of fact, the mystics unanimously bear witness that God needs us, just as we need God. Why should He need us unless it be to love us? And it is to this very conclusion that the philosopher who holds to the mystical experience must come. Creation will appear to him as God understanding to create creators, that He may have, besides Himself, beings worthy of His love. (*TS* 255)

Thus man is created to love God and to be loved by God:

Granted the existence of a creative energy which is love, and which desires to produce from itself beings worthy to be loved, it might indeed sow space with worlds. . . . Beings have been called into existence who were destined to love and be loved, *since creative energy is to be defined as love*. Distinct from God, Who is this energy itself, they could spring into being only in a universe, and therefore the universe sprang into being. (*TS* 256–7; italics mine)

Consequently in order to participate in the vast reality of God love for God is indispensable. Furthermore the direction of love should be the direction towards which the vital impetus unfolds itself. Man’s love should coincide with God’s love which has been the source of everything:

It [love of humanity] is not the extension of an instinct, it does not originate in an idea. It is neither of the senses nor of the mind. It is of both, implicitly, and is effectively much more. For such a love lies at the very root feeling and reason, as of all other things. Coinciding with God’s love for His handiwork, a love which has been the source of everything, it would yield up, to anyone who knew how to question it, the secret of creation. It is still more metaphysical than moral in its essence. What it wants to do, with God’s help, is to complete the creation of the human species and make of humanity what it would have straightaway become, had it been able to assume its final shape without the assistance of man himself. Or to use words which mean, as we shall see, the same thing in different terms: its direction is exactly that of the vital impetus. . . . (*TS* 234–5)

In the case of Charlotte it runs quite opposite to God’s order. Instead of directing toward life, it directs Harry to destruction and murder. In the first place, what they call love is not love at all. It is nothing but lust since Charlotte is another man’s wife. Though Harry senses that “There’s a part of her that doesn’t love anybody, anything” (82) and that she has hatred directed “*Not at the race of mankind but at the race of man, the masculine*” (11), he himself is led to hate man. Brooks points out that “there is more than a hint that Charlotte is half in love with death.”⁸ In fact she says that she would like to die in water:

Not in the hot air, above the hot ground, to wait for hours for your blood to get cool enough to let you sleep. . . . The water, the cool, to cool you quick so you can sleep, to wash out of your brain and out of your eyes and out of your blood all you ever saw and thought and felt and wanted and denied. (58)

She always makes Harry hurry; “I want it to be us again, quick, quick. We have so little time. In twenty years I cant [sic] any more and in fifty years we’ll both be dead. So hurry. Hurry” (210). Being out of duration, time is always getting shorter. And Charlotte is not a lovable woman at all! Consider how she ordered him to engage a drawing-room in the train and when he hesitates, she scolds him: “You fool!” (59). Also when he finds a job as a rankless W.P.A. school-crossing guard to earn ten dollars a week, she abuses him, saying, “Oh, you monkey, . . . You bastard! You damned bastard! So you can rape little girls in parks on Saturday afternoons!” (220) Apparently she is indifferent to law and morality. She is described as a “dark haired woman with queer hard yellow eyes in a face whose skin was drawn thin over prominent cheek bones and a heavy jaw” (20). Yellow symbolizes betrayal, inconsistency and adultery after the color of Juda’s dress.⁹ He seems swept along by her uncontrollable passion; there is no question of his being able to resist her. It is when she was dying that Harry comes to himself with a bitter realization; “*Maybe I would have thrown away love first too*” (195). Following élan vital which is against God’s order, Harry is completely out of duration, God’s reality.

In contrast to Harry, the tall convict in “The Old Man” is said to have accomplished what he has to do. He is sent onto the flood of the Mississippi to help rescue parties during the great Mississippi flood of 1927. In a skiff with a plump convict he is instructed to pick up a woman stranded in a tree and a man on a cottonhouse, but the skiff is caught in a current and overturned. The plump convict, picked up along with the man on the cottonhouse, reports that the tall convict has been drowned. Actually, the tall convict manages to recover the boat which has smashed into his nose. During the next few weeks he fights and labors for his very existence and that of the pregnant woman, who soon gives birth to her baby in order to get back to the prison.

We can say that the convict is torn away from his peaceful, secure routine, and thrust alone upon the raging waters which is another symbol of Bergsonian élan vital. He has so little control of his circumstance that the only decision that he can deliberately make is to keep struggling against the overwhelming forces, or quit the effort and be submerged by them. His sole source of strength is his desire to endure and his determination to fulfill his mission. More exactly speaking, I believe it is his moral strength that guarantees his survival.

This is evident when we see his sense of responsibility for the woman he rescued. At first, buffeted by the violent and force and speed of the flood, the convict had felt merely “that he had accidentally been caught in a situation in which time and environment, not himself, was mesmerized,” and that “he was being toyed with by a current of water going nowhere . . . when it was done with him it would spew him back into the comparatively safe world he had been snatched violently out of and in the meantime it did not much matter just what he did or not do” (147). But at the sight of a woman “who was very probably somebody’s sister and quite certainly . . . somebody’s wife” (148) with “the swelling and unmanageable body before him,” “it seemed to him that it was not the woman at all but rather a separate demanding threatening inert yet living mass of which both he and she were equally victims” (154). He wanted nothing for himself but for the woman to do the right thing:

He wanted so little. He wanted nothing for himself. He just wanted to get rid of the woman, the belly, and he was trying to do that in the right way, not for himself, but for her. (161)

Though he had two chances before the woman’s child is born to be relieved of his burden, to be able to give the woman over to other men, he was rejected both times. Then he knew “He was doomed. That is, he knew now that he had been doomed from the very start never to get rid of her” (168).

Being “toy and pawn on a vicious and inflammable geography” (162) and not knowing his direction, all he could do was to keep paddling in order to save the woman:

He did not know whether he simply could not see it [the channel] or if it had vanished some time ago and he not aware at the time; whether the river had become lost in a drowned world or if the world had become drowned in one limitless river. So now he could not tell if he were running directly before the wave or quartering across its line of charge; all he could do was keep that sense of swiftly accumulating ferocity behind him and paddle as fast as his spent and now numb muscles could be driven, and try not to look at the woman, to wrench his gaze from her and keepit away until he reached something flat and above water. (163–164)

So “gaunt, hollow-eyed, striving and wrenching almost physically at his eyes as if they were two of those suction-tipped rubber arrows shot from the toy gun of a child, his spent muscles obeying not will now but that attenuation beyond mere exhaustion which, mesmeric, can continue easier than cease” (164), he continued paddling until he saw the land. There he did his best to carry out his furious unflagging will to assist with the childbirth:

... he held her, panting, sobbing, and rushed again at the muddy slope; he had almost reached the flat crest with his now violently unmanageable burden ... and with the indubitable last of his strength he half pushed and half flung the woman up the bank as he shot feet first and face down back into that medium upon which he had lived for more days and nights than he could remember and from which he himself had never completely emerged, as if his own failed and spent flesh were attempting to carry out his furious unflagging will for severance at any price, even that of drowning, from the burden with which, unwitting and without choice, he had been doomed. (176–7)

The convict finally lands on the Indian mound in the reptilian age, emerging from the waters. Here in the prehistoric world where the snake predominates, shadows of civilization are all cleared off and man’s basic reality, the struggle for existence is exposed in order to survive by means of his spiritual strength. The convict supports the woman and the baby, providing the wood and the dead rabbit, kneeling in the mud to blow and nursing his meagre flame (231), “learning to watch for stooping hawks and so found more rabbits and twice possums” (235), hunting alligators with his Cajan partner (255). He knows his mission. On the first sight of the infant, he said, “*And this is all. This is what severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am*” (231). While Harry from his fatal weakness cannot let his own child be born, the convict through his continuous sufferings preserves and nurtures the life of the infant that is not even his own. The convict becomes a St Joseph-like figure. In other words while Harry has now nothing to cherish but his dead love, for the convict there remains always in life something worth the price of cherishing and upholding—“his good name, his responsibility not only toward those who were responsible toward him but to himself, his own honor in the doing of what he was asked of him, his pride in being able to do it, no matter what it was” (166).

Through his odyssey the convict learned that all a man should do is what he has to do:

... it was not a surrender, not a resignation, it was too calm, it was a part of him, he had drunk it with his mother’s milk and lived with it all his life: *After all a man cant [sic] only do what he has to do, with what he has to do it with, with what he has learned, to the best of his judgment.* (258)

And he did this most admirably!

If we refer to Bergson we can say because the convict lives in duration, the convict is a success. As I clarified in the previous paper, Bergson claims that intuition is the way to enter duration. By intuition

Bergson means “an disinterested instinct” (CE 186), a rightly oriented *élan vital* within man, an “intellectual sympathy” by which one places oneself in successive duration and “externalize our concept in relation to one another, reveals to us the objectivity of things” and “foreshadows and prepares the way for social life” (TFW 236). In short intuition, by sympathetic communication treats everything organically (CE 174) and introduces us into life’s own domain:

Intelligence remains the luminous nucleus around which instinct, even enlarged and purified into intuition, forms only vague nebulosity. But, in default of knowledge properly so called, reserved to pure intelligence, *intuition may enable us to grasp what it is that intelligence fails to give us, and indicate the means to supplementing it.* On the one hand, it will utilize the mechanism of intelligence itself to show how intellectual moulds cease to be strictly applicable; and on the other hand, by its own work, it will suggest to us the vague feeling, if nothing more, of what must take the place of intellectual moulds. Thus, *intuition may bring the intellect to recognize that life does not quite go into the category of the many nor yet into that of the one; that neither mechanical causality nor finality can give a sufficient interpretation of the vital process. Then, by the sympathetic communication which it establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of our consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life’s own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation.* (CE 187–8; italics mine)

Thus by sympathetic action the convict enters duration. We need sympathetic actions to be introduced into this vital flux since as Bergson asserts, society is an organic whole where each one of us is connected:

... we should compare it [society] to an organism whose cells, united by imperceptible links, fall into their respective places in a highly developed hierarchy, and for the greatest good of the whole naturally submit to a discipline that may demand the sacrifice of the part. . . . It should be noted that all habits of this nature lend one another mutual support. Although we may not speculate on their essence and on their origin, we feel that they are interrelated, being demanded of us by our immediate surroundings, or by the surroundings of those surroundings, and so on to the uttermost limit, which would be society. . . . Society, present within each of its members, has claims which, whether great or small, each express the sum-total of its vitality. (TS 9–11)

Further Bergson continues to claim that, “to cultivate social ego is the essence of our obligation to society”:

Even if we were only in theory under a state of obligation towards other men, we should be so in fact towards ourselves, since social solidarity exists only in so far as a social ego is superadded, in each of us, to the individual self. To cultivate this social ego is the essence of our obligation to society. (TS 15)

Faulkner also suggests that we have to do our duty because we are interdependent as if we are “on the same loom.”¹⁰ By doing one’s duty Faulkner says we can recover our fundamental self because man has free will and should exercise both his social and moral responsibilities.

The convict’s one goal is to get back to prison as soon as possible with the woman and his rowboat, the very property of the state. He finally completes his seven-week journey by meeting the deputy with the words, “Here’s your boat, and here’s the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse” (326). Though he had been officially discharged from the penitentiary as drowned, he is given an additional ten-year sentence for attempting escape—which the tall convict accepts philosophically: “All right. . . . If that’s the rule” (331). Thus abiding by the law, the convict tries to carry his duties out to the last, which, as Faulkner comments, is in accord with his philosophy:

That additional ten years was simply another quantity in fate just like the flood that he ran into. Once he was in it he had to accept the extra ten years just as he accepted the flood and worked through it and survived it. There was no more injustice than there was to the flood. It was just something that was in the culture, the economy of the land he lived in, just like that flood was inherent in the geography and the climate, and he was a man that said, Well, if this is what it is I'll do the best I can to cut through it. That would have been his philosophy. (FU 176)

Consequently if we interpret the odysseys of Harry and the convict in reference to Bergson, Harry is a failure because he is driven by his desire, the wrong *élan vital*, while the convict is a success by choosing the way by intuition, by accomplishing his duties with his sympathetic communication. The result is that in Harry's section, babies die while in the convict's section a new life is born.

How do we account for their odysseys if we refer to Jeremy Taylor? We understand that as Faulkner's own comment suggests, because of his faith the convict becomes a success with "his own honor in the doing of what was asked of him, his pride in being able to do it, no matter what it was" (FU 166). In fact Christian symbols are abundant in his story. He is described several times to have clung to a piece of grapevine which is a symbol of Christ [Jn 15:1]:

Holding to the end of the vine, he warped the skiff around the end of the jam. . . (149); he released his hold on the vine. That was all he had to do for even while he held it by the vine in the comparatively dead water. . . (150); he lengthened the painter with a piece of grapevine and returned to the fire and tied the grapevine about his wrist and lay down. (232); Grasping the grapevine end he sprang into the water. . . (234); He . . . still clutching the grapevine end (234); attentively tugged at the grapevine tied about his wrist. . . (236); though he still held to the end of the vine—spliced painter until the skiff was hoisted onto the boiler deck (239); the grapevine painter wrapped several times about his wrist. . . (239); he and the woman standing on the empty levee, the sleeping child wrapped in the faded tunic and the grape vine painter still wrapped about the convict's wrist. . . (250); and he stood with the grapevine painter in his hand. . . (337)

Also the boat which he never deserts to the last connotes Noah's ark and symbolized Christ, the Savior.¹¹ And he is always immersed in water which symbolizes baptism. It is as if he followed the words of Nancy in *Requiem for a Nun*; "Trust in Him. . . you got to trust in Him. Maybe that's your pay for the suffering."¹² It was "just an invincible and almost fanatic faith" in the inventiveness and innate viciousness of that medium on which his destiny was cast (163).

In order to prove that the convict is in God's reality by doing his duty, here we will examine the convict's relationship with time. For him the Old Man "a known stream, a river known by its ineradicable name to generations of man" and "a harsh steady unrepitive stream" was the symbol of "the living and fluid world of his time" (25) against which he finally knows that he is fighting. Faulkner describes three kinds of stream: 1. smooth surface, 2. the rush and fury of the flood itself and 3. the original stream beneath, flowing in the opposite direction.

It was as if the water itself were in three strata, separate and distinct, the bland and unhurried surface bearing a frothy scum and a miniature flotsam of twigs and screening as though by vicious calculation the rush and fury of the flood itself, and beneath this in turn the original stream, tickles, murmuring along in the opposite direction, following undisturbed and unaware its appointed course and serving its Lilliputian end. . . (62–63)

And though it is repeated that the convict does not know where he is: "He did not know he was now upon the River" (159); "He did not know where he was" (245); "I [*the convict*] dont know where I am and I dont reckon I know the way back to where I want to go. . ." (233), in the turmoil of his struggle to survive,

the convict is hearing continually the river's "bass whisper deep, strong and powerful" (72), "a sound so much beyond all his experience and his power of assimilation" (71) through the dead wood of his skiff he can feel the Old Man's pulling current "of eager gleeful vicious incorrigible wilfulness" (146), and all about him he can see the river's reach, the "wild and limitless" expanse of water (159). In short, undisturbed by the turmoil of the surface, the convict hears "the original stream" which symbolizes God's time.

Furthermore, it is said that "for the first time he looked at the River within whose shadow he had spent the last seven years of his life but had never seen before" (73), and thus the convict has come to know that the Old Man is "ineradicably a part of his past, his life:"

The lake was behind him now; there was but one direction he could go. When he saw the River again he knew it at once. He should have; it was now ineradicably a part of his past, his life; it would be a part of what he would bequest, if that were in store for him. But four weeks later it would look different from what it did now, and did: he (the old man) had recovered from his debauch, back in banks again, the Old Man, rippling placidly toward the sea, brown and rich as chocolate between levees whose inner faces were wrinkled as though in a frozen and aghast amazement. . . . (277)

We can say that by doing his duty faithfully, the convict is in God's reality. Jeremy Taylor expresses the teleological quality of time, that by doing good, we have to make much of time. In Section I of Chapter I of *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, he points out "The first general instrument of holy living," which is "care of our time:"

God hath given to man a short time here upon earth, and yet upon this short time eternity depends. . . .

For we must remember that we have a great work to do, many enemies to conquer, many evils to prevent, much danger to run through, many difficulties to be mastered, many necessities to serve, and much good to do, many children to provide for, or many friends to support, or many poor to relieve, our private and our public cares, and duties of the world which necessity and the providence of God hath adopted into the family of Religion. (*Works III 9*)

Back to the novel, Harry, on the contrary, confesses he did not live in time:

"I was in eclipse. . . . I was outside of time. I was still attached to it, supported by it in space as you have been ever since there was a not-you to become you, and will be until there is an end to the not-you by means of which alone you could once have been—that's the immortality—supported by it but that's all, just on it, non-conductive, like the sparrow insulated by its own hard non-conductive dead feet from the high-tension line, the current of time that runs through remembering, that exists only in relation to what little of reality (I have learned that too) we know, else there is no such thing as time. You know: *I was not*. Then *I am*, and time begins, retroactive, is was and will be. Then *I was* and so I am not and so time never existed. It was like the instant of virginity. . . ." (137)

His sense of guilt destroys his "is," so for him there is neither "was" nor "will be." We know that Harry himself never forgets law and morality, though at the beginning of his relationship with Charlotte, overcome by sensuous joy, Harry denies his sense of sin, saying, "*I dont believe in sin. It's getting out of timing*" (54). He desperately justifies himself by convincing himself that it is love for which they strive (83), however, at the bottom of his heart he is really afraid:

It was because I found out one day that I was afraid. And I found out at the same time that I will

still be afraid, no matter what I do, that I will still be afraid as long as she lives or I live.” (135–6)

He is afraid because in truth he is well aware of his own sin for he knows her husband’s deep suffering, repeating to himself; “*Why, he’s [her husband is] suffering, he’s actually suffering...*” (55), “*He is suffering*” (56).

Harry describes his sense of transgression as a smell:

“It’s a Bad Smell,” she said. Then he understood. “That’s all it is, just a bad smell. . . .” . . . “Hunger’s up there. . . .” (95) I was fired from a job which existed because of moral turpitude, on the ground of moral turpitude. . . .” (96)

Because of his sense that they are committing a moral transgression, “he seemed to see their joint life as a fragile globe, a bubble, which she kept balance and intact above disaster like a trained seal does its ball” (92). Also because of his sense of sin time becomes an obsession with him. He realizes that time is wearing away the food he stored as proof of his existence:

That was when the thing happened to him. He sat looking at what he had made in a gleeful and amazed amusement at this own cunning in contriving for God, for Nature the unmathematical, the overfecund, the prime disorderly and illogical and patternless spendthrift, to prove his mathematical problem for him, . . . It seemed to him that he could see the actual numeral, incontrovertible and solitary, in the anonymous identical hierarchy of the lost days; . . . into that stagnant time which did not advance and which would somehow find for its two victims food as it found them breath, now in reverse to time, time now the mover, advancing slow and irresistible, blotting the cans one by one in steady progression as a moving cloud shadow blots. (114)

Harry burns the calendar in his desperate attempt to be free from time, but in vain. He has sinned against his own deepest conviction and finally he is drawn to destruction by his tyrannical mistress.

Here we have to point out that Harry knows crucial facts regarding time. As has been quoted, he knows that we are on the current of time which is supported by immortality, and time exists only in relation to the reality of “is” (137). He also knows the crucial fact that the substance of time is Christ who says “I am the Alpha and the Omega” [Rev 1:8]. Since for Faulkner time is Christ,¹³ in referring to time, Harry refers to Christ:

Wilbourne said. “I wasn’t afraid then because I was in eclipse but I am awake now and I can be afraid now. Because this Anno Domini [After Christ] 1938 has no place in it for love . . . to conform, or die.” (140)

And he comes to know the essence of time that is love and action. By saying that we have eliminated love just as we got rid of Christ, Harry identifies Christ with love:

“. . . I mean us. Love, if you will. Because it cant last. There is no place for it in the world today, not even in Utah. We have eliminated it. It took us a long time, but man is resourceful and limitless in inventing too, and so we have got rid of love at last just as we have got rid of Christ. . . . If Jesus returned today we would have to crucify him quick in our own defense, to justify and preserve the civilization we have worked and suffered and died shrieking and cursing in rage and impotence and terror for two thousand years to create and perfect in man’s own image. . . .” (136)

With all this knowledge he betrays Christ. That is why his grief and pain is so touching to us. Taylor writes that “[Sin] pleases the senses, but diseases the spirit, and wounds. . . . It is gravel in the teeth” (*Works IV* 240). Thus by the interpretation in reference to Jeremy Taylor, we can say that Harry is a failure because he betrayed Christ, while the convict is a success by sticking to his faith.

Nevertheless we should not think that Harry is cast out of God's reality eternally. In the final passages are impressive images that reflect Faulkner's view of the human condition. They are wild palms swayed by the black wind along the Mississippi coast where Charlotte dies and Harry is imprisoned for life:

Wilbourne could now hear the gray wife at the stove in the kitchen and he could hear the black wind again, risible, jeering, constant, inattentive, and it even seemed to him that he could hear the wild dry clashing of the palms in it. (291)

Now he could hear the threshing of the invisible palms, the wild dry sound of them. (295)

... more of the shabby palms ... he could hear the palms rustling and hissing again as if they were being played upon by a sand-blower and he could smell the sea still, the same black wind, but not so strong since the sea was four miles away. ... (297)

According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, sacred association of the palm tree is abundant in the Bible.¹⁴ As is referred to in Psalm 92:12: "The righteous flourish like the palm tree," the wild palms, swaying yet resisting, become a symbol of the soul of Harry Wilbourne who is tormented in his agony. Wind symbolizes desire. Consequently the wild palms swayed by the black wind symbolize humanity swayed by constant temptation, but since there is God's victory they do not collapse.

In conclusion, this paper disputes McHaney's explanation by saying that it is not time that is meaningless but man's sense of guilt that nullifies the time. Both the interpretations of Bergson and Taylor support the perspective that for we who are cast in élan vital, to be free is to enter God's order, real duration, by way of intuition which is love for God, by casting aside our selfish desire and doing our duty faithfully as the convict did. Furthermore, God's love is omnipresent, thus Harry Wilbourne who has seen the hell of desire with the bitter realization of his failure, remains still in God's love as a purgatorial pilgrim in the world of God's love.

Notes

Text: William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms* (New York, 1939). The page references are to the book and are in parentheses in the paper.

N.B. — The following abbreviations are used followed by the page number:

TFW for *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Paris: Felix Alcan, 1889. Translated as *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, by F.L. Pogson. New York: Macmillan, 1910.

CE for *L'Évolution créatrice*. Paris: Flex Alcan, 1907. Translated as *Creative Evolution*, by A. Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt, 1922.

TS for *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. Paris: Flex Alcan, 1932. Translated as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, by R. A. Audra and C. Brereton. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

Works for *The Whole of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor, D. D. with a Life of the Author*. 10 vols. Edited by Reginald and Eden, Charles. London: Longman, 1847—52.

FU for *Faulkner in the University*. Edited by Joseph Blotner and F.L. Gwynn. Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959.

1. Thomas Laffayette McHaney, *William Faulkner's The Wild Palms: A Study* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1975), pp. xiii—xiv.

The cyclic adventures of both convict and lovers underscore Schopenhauer's view that life is an endless cycle of pain and boredom to be escaped only by contemplation of the ideal, through art, or by retreat into the oblivion of willlessness.

2. "The Access to Life's Flux: A Study of Hightower in *Light in August* in reference to Henri Bergson and Jeremy Taylor" in *Kwansei Gakuin University Humanities Review* Vol. 6.
3. *William Faulkner: Biographical and Reference Guide*, ed. Leland H. Cox (Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1982), p. 198.
4. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926—1962*, eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New

York: Random House, 1968), p. 247.

5. By the waters of Babyron,
 there we sat down and wept,
 when we remembered Zion.
 On the willows there
 we hung up our lyres.
 For there our captors
 required of us songs,
 and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
 “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How shall we sing the Lord's song
 in a foreign land?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
 let my right hand wither!
 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
 if I do not remember you,
 if I do not set Jerusalem
 above my highest joy! (Psalms 137:1-6)

6. *Lion in the Garden: Interwiews with William Faulkner 1926-1962*, p. 70.
7. James Street Fulton, “Bergson's Religious Interpretation of Evolution,” *Rice Institute Pamphlet* 43 (no. 3), p. 21.
8. Cleanth Brooks, *Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 215.
9. *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, ed. Ad de Vries (North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1974), p. 512.
10. You get born and you try this and you dont [sic] know why only you keep on trying it you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont [sic] know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug. . . (William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* [New York: Random House, 1955], p. 127).
11. . . . the guard shouted. “Can you fellows paddle a boat?”
 “Paddle a boat where?” the taller convict said.
 “In the water,” the guard said. “Where in hell do you think?”
 “I aint going to paddle no boat nowhere out yonder,” the tall convict said, jerking his head toward the invisible river beyond the levee behind him.
 “No, it's on this side,” the guard said. . . . “Follow them telephone poles. . . . Follow the bayou until you come to a cypress snag with a woman in it. Pick her up and then cut straight back west until you come to a cotton house with a fellow sitting on the ridgepole—” (74-75). “I aint going without my boat” (272).
 “Which is the way to Vicksburg?”
 “Vicksburg? Vicksburg? Lay alongside and come aboard.”
 “Will you take the boat too?” (238)
 “All right,” the leader said to him. “Here you are.”
 “The boat,” the convict said.
 “You've got it. What do you want me to do—give you a receipt for it?”
 “No,” the convict said. “I just want the boat.”
 “Take it. Only you ought to have a bookstrap or something to carry it in.”

...

He (the tall one) told that: how he and the woman disembarked and how one of the men helped him haul the skill up out of the water and how he stood there with the end of the painter wrapped around his wrist and the man bustled up, saying, “All right. Next load! Next load!” and how he told this man too about the boat and the man cried,

“Boat? Boat?” and how he (the convict) went with them when they carried the skiff over and racked, berthed, it with the others and how he lined himself up by a coca-cola sign and the arch of a draw bridge so he could find the skiff again quick when he returned. . . . (275)

“He got swept away against his will. He came back as soon as he could and surrendered.” “He even brought that damn boat back,” the deputy said. “If he’d a throwed the boat away he could a walked back in three days. But no sir. He’s got to bring the boat back. ‘Here’s your boat and here’s the woman but I never found no bastard on no cotton-house’ ” (326).

12. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York, 1950), p. 236.
13. See “The Triumph of Time As Seen in *The Sound and the Fury*” in *Kwansei Gakuin University Sociology Department Studies* No. 81, pp. 93–101.
14. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 646.

Jericho is frequently referred to as the “city of palms” (Deut. 34:13; Judg. 1:16; 3:13; II Chr. 28:15; cf. Jos. War IV. viii.2–3). Several charred palm logs were found during the excavation of Khirbet Qumran by the Dead Sea. The essences, according to Pliny, lived “in the company of palm trees.”

There were “seventy palm trees” in Elim, a desert oasis on the route of the Exodus (Exod. 15:27; Num. 33:9). Elath, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba on the wilderness route (Deut. 2:8), is believed to have derived its name from its “lofty trees,” probably referring to palms (II Kings 14:22; 16:6; also Elath in I Kings 9:26; II Chr. 8:17; 26:2). They are abundant in Aqaba today.

The palm appears in figurative language in Ps. 92:12: “The righteous flourish like the palm tree”; in Song of S. 7: 7–8 as a figure of the stateliness of the bridge; in Isa. 9.14 (cf. 19:15) as a symbol of the rulers of Israel; and in Joel 1:12 in an oracle of destruction.

Sacred associations with the palm are found throughout the ancient Near East, especially in glyptic art. It often appears as the Tree of Life on cylinder seals and in other forms of art. The “palm of Deborah” (Judg. 4:5) may have been a sacred tree. The frequent occurrence of the palm tree carved in relief on the walls, doors, door-jambs, and other parts of Solomon’s temple (I Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36) and the visionary temple of Ezekiel (Ezek. 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; 41:18–20, 25–26) suggests more than mere decorative coincidence. Similar decorations are found on Assyrian temples and royal buildings.

The association of palm tree fronds with the Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15) is carried into the decoration of ancient Jewish synagogues by reliefs (a well-preserved one is still at Capernaum) and mosaics. The palm figures prominently on the coins, especially those of Vespasian and Nerva.

Christian traditions and legends refer frequently to the palm tree and its leaf. Palm Sunday received its name from the use of the fronds during Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as recorded in John 12:13. In the vision of John of Patmos (Rev. 7:9) the white-robed multitude stands before the throne with palm fronds.

The World of Love: A Study of *The Wild Palms* in Reference to Henri Bergson and Jeremy Taylor

ABSTRACT

In *The Wild Palms*, Thomas L. McHaney finds close parallels in the cyclic odyssey of both the convict and Harry with the idea of Schopenhauer that life is an endless cycle of pain. The aim of this paper is a modest attempt to dispute McHaney's view by presenting a more convincing interpretation of the theme of the novel in reference to the two dominant influences on Faulkner, the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the theology of Jeremy Taylor. In comparing the odyssey of Harry with the convict, we come to know that it is not time that is meaningless, but rather man's sense of guilt that nullifies the present time. Bergson and Taylor support the interpretation that for we who are cast in *élan vital*, to be free is to enter God's order, *real duration* by way of intuition which is love for God by casting one's selfish desire aside to do one's calling faithfully as the convict did.

Key Words: Bergson, love, time