

detection of crime and have Gavin Stevens as their central character: "Knight's Gambit" is primarily the story of how Stevens came to marry the widow of a millionaire bootlegger. There are occasional characters and situations which might be moving if differently treated—Jackson Fentry in the story "Tomorrow," for example—but the detective-story convention and the persistent intrusion of Stevens as the self-appointed embodiment of justice prevents any of the stories from coming properly alive. At the same time, they are extremely poor detective-stories: Stevens, who nearly always knows the answer before the story starts, has a habit of hugging the clues to himself and of revealing them with infuriating slowness as the story proceeds.

Gavin Stevens, a character very important to Faulkner but rarely attractive to the reader, appears again in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), where he becomes the embodiment not so much of justice as of conscience. In *Requiem for a Nun*, which is a sequel to *Sanctuary*, Faulkner takes up and develops those themes of justice, retribution and guilt which increasingly occupied his attention towards the end of the earlier novel. The "Greek" nature of these themes is emphasised by the highly formal, even ritualistic nature of the language and structure. The central action, revolving upon Temple Drake, now the wife of Gowen Stevens—who has "paid" by marriage for the sin of deserting her at the Old Frenchman place—is presented in the form of a play in three acts, complete with dialogue and stage-directions. Preceding each act is a long exercise in impressionistic history which recounts the story of the act's main setting—in turn, the courthouse at Jefferson, the state capitol at Jackson, and the jail at Jefferson. These historical sections are written in a fluid style, reminiscent of *Absalom, Absalom!*, and presumably meant to suggest the continuity of historical processes as contrasted with the ritual formality of the action which is played out against, and in terms of, this socio-historical

background. For it is clear that the expository sections and the scenes of the central drama are intended to be inter-related in quite intricate ways.

"The past is never dead. It's not even past," says Gavin Stevens,¹⁰ and this is the lesson to be learned both from the story of Jefferson and from the story of Temple Drake. The building of the courthouse is the result of nothing more honourable than the attempt of the early settlers of Jefferson to shuffle off responsibility for the loss of a piece of government property (the lock on the mail-pouch), and the taint of this original corruption never leaves it. Beyond the courthouse stands the state capitol at Jackson, beyond that the vast man-made abstraction of the United States itself—"one towering frantic edifice poised like a card-house over the abyss of the mortgaged generations"¹¹—and by erecting these symbols of legality and justice men attempt to shift off their own shoulders the burdens of personal responsibility. A legal act is not necessarily a moral act, however, as the trial of Goodwin in *Sanctuary* clearly showed; and although Nancy Maningo is technically guilty of the death of Temple's child, the question of guilt and responsibility cannot be left there but must be traced back to its source.

It is Gavin Stevens who undertakes this task and the play section of the book is taken up with his search. Stevens had defended Nancy at her trial, despite the fact that he is Gowen's uncle, and it is he who takes Temple to the State Governor in Jackson, apparently to plead for Nancy's pardon, but actually to give Temple an opportunity to confess her own sins, to tell the truth about her past, and thus, as Stevens believes, to give meaning to Nancy's act and death. Temple admits that she had become thoroughly corrupted during her stay in the Memphis brothel and had written violent love-letters to Alabama Red, whom Popeye killed. When, eight years later, Red's brother attempted to blackmail Temple with the letters, her infatuation with Red was reawakened and

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Dear Harold,

Each "Cover-up" is wedging the Government make firmly to "The Lone Assassin" myth.

The discredited lie must be unrepudiated to restore present or future lies. A cycle of deceit.

That's why the Faulkner quote is so symbolic of your work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'L' followed by several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.