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"THEN, VENOM, TO THY WORK": PATHOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION IN "PIERRE ET JEAN"

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man so little in his extra-fictional statements and yet have been strongly influenced by him. What is unusual for Faulkner is that he should have taken from a single source so many elements and used them in a single scene of his own,<sup>12</sup> though that he sometimes did just this is shown by Cecil Eby's demonstration that the Labove-Eula-Hoake McCarron trio of *The Hamlet* were influenced by the Ichabod Crane-Katrina-Brom Bones group of Washington Irving<sup>13</sup> (a writer, one might note, that Faulkner does not even mention in the collected interviews). That Faulkner was open to Housman's influence is suggested by his early appreciation of him and is shown by the Housman echoes in his fiction and poetry, from the time of *Soldiers' Pay* to *Go Down, Moses*; that "The True Lover" is his source for the Caddy-Quentin scene in *The Sound and the Fury* is evident from the many similarities of setting, characterization, and action the poem and the scene share. And no less interesting are Faulkner's transmutations of his source, particularly his ironic use of its romantic setting and his change of its hero to an antihero who fails at the romantic gesture of suicide. It seems clear, then, that Quentin Compson is in love with death in part because he inherits the passion from a progenitor—Housman's "true lover." Moreover, it is clear that in this his first great novel, and in one of the finest American novels of the twentieth century, Faulkner directly and by transmutation adapted the setting and action of "The True Lover" to the twilight scene of his young protagonist's and heroine's brush with love and death, and of Quentin's first, and unsuccessful, attempt to resolve his conflicts by way of suicide.

JOSEPH BROGUNIER

"THEN, VENOM, TO THY WORK":  
 PATHOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION IN  
*PIERRE ET JEAN*

One of the innovations of Maupassant the novelist that becomes immediately apparent on reading *Pierre et Jean* is that instead of analyzing

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<sup>12</sup> Usually Faulkner both was more eclectic in his use of sources and incorporated the various elements of a single source into various places in his fiction. As regards "The True Lover" itself, for instance, its protagonist, who "whistled soft and out of sight" to call his girl from home, may be the source for that unnamed boy in *The Sound and the Fury* who "skulk[s] along the fence trying to whistle [Caddy] out like a puppy" (p. 114).

<sup>13</sup> Among other parallels, Eby shows that each story focuses on the rivalry for the princess of a protected rural area and includes a vaguely delineated protagonist and a schoolmaster. The stories are similar even in some minor traits of characterization, such as the correspondence of Ichabod's detestation of pumpkins to Labove's dislike of sweet potatoes. See Cecil D. Eby, Jr., "Ichabod Crane in Yoknapatawpha," *Georgia Review*, 16 (1962), 465-69.

his characters for the reader in the traditional manner of the psychological novel, the author presents the reader with a character who analyzes himself: the author's presence, unusually subtle, does not call attention to itself. Where it is betrayed, however, is through the selection and rendition of images and metaphors. These clearly reveal the manner in which Maupassant colors the narrative of *Pierre et Jean*, conscientiously annotating the position of his protagonist, and by extension casting a moral judgment upon the world he has presented. As this is essentially a novel of obsession, the imagery which surrounds the obsessions<sup>1</sup> of Pierre has been chosen to demonstrate the manner in which it develops in parallel with his torment.

The images used to depict first the envy and jealousy directed at Jean, then the notion of his illegitimacy, evolve from the vague and nebulous toward more precise, more clearly defined representations, becoming more insistent as Pierre's mind ineluctably circles around these *idées fixes*. The first such image occurs after the news of Jean's inheritance is formally made known. Pierre leaves the house to walk in the port.

*Il se sentait mal à l'aise, alourdi, mécontent comme lorsqu'on a reçu quelque fâcheuse nouvelle. Aucune pensée précise ne l'affligeait et il n'aurait su dire tout d'abord d'où lui venait cette pesanteur de l'âme et cet engourdissement du corps. Il avait mal quelque part sans savoir où; il portait en lui un petit point douloureux, une de ces presque insensibles meurtrissures dont on ne trouve pas la place, mais qui gênent, fatiguent, attristent, irritent, une souffrance inconnue et légère, quelque chose comme une graine de chagrin. (p. 54)*

The central notion of a *petit point douloureux* tends to suggest both something very precise, the fact of Pierre's pain, as well as something vague and ambiguous, the location of the pain, its source (" . . . *meurtrissures dont on ne trouve pas la place, . . .*"). It is of course the indefinable quality of the *malaise* which is underlined in this passage. Pierre does not know what to think and does not know that it is the news of the inheritance which disturbs him. This is suggested by the use of the simile "*mécontent comme lorsqu'on a reçu quelque fâcheuse nouvelle*." The haziness is further enhanced by the fact that the entire passage tends to alternate between two domains, the physical and the psychological. Thus on the one hand the author presents the *point douloureux*, the *meurtrissure*, and on the other, verbs of psychological application: *gênent, fatiguent, attristent, irritent*. Finally there are figures which unite the physical and metaphysical worlds, the *engourdissement du corps* and the *pesanteur de l'âme*. The climax of the passage occurs at its concluding simile, *comme une graine de chagrin*. Drawing together the physical *graine* with the psychological *chagrin*, Mau-

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre's obsessions are of two types: 1. envy and jealousy of Jean because of his inheritance; 2. the illegitimacy of Jean. The turning point between these two areas is located on p. 99 (all citations are drawn from *Pierre et Jean* (Paris: Garnier, 1959): *Ce n'était plus la jalousie maintenant qui lui faisait chercher cela, ce n'était plus cette envie un peu basse et naturelle qu'il savait cachée en lui et qu'il combattait depuis trois jours, mais la terreur d'une chose épouvantable, la terreur de croire lui-même que Jean, que son frère était le fils de cet homme!*

passant suggests an image of growth, of expansion and development, which is the essence of *Pierre et Jean*.

The next figure builds upon the foundation laid by the first passage:

*Comme il n'était pas encore quatre heures, et qu'il n'avait rien à faire, absolument rien, il alla s'asseoir dans le Jardin public; et il demeura longtemps sur son banc, sans idées, les yeux à terre, accablé par une lassitude qui devenait de la détresse. (p. 72)*

The representation is again vague, again occurring during a solitary promenade by Pierre, and again plays on the blending of the physical (*lassitude*) and the psychological (*détresse*), linked by a verb of expansion (*devenait*). A bit farther on the *malaise* is somewhat more clearly defined: “*Et la pensée de l'héritage de son frère entra en lui de nouveau, à la façon d'une piqûre de guêpe; mais il la chassa avec impatience, ne voulant point s'abandonner sur cette pente de jalousie*” (p. 73). Here Maupassant is able to suggest two crucial ideas; he reinforces the notion of growth and development present in both preceding texts by employing the figure of a *pente*; and he changes the emphasis from the ambiguous balance between physical and psychological to a definitely physical point of view: *piqûre de guêpe*. In this respect Maupassant is fulfilling the requirements set forth in his study *Le Roman* which precedes *Pierre et Jean* (and which is too often referred to as the “preface”—it is not): that the inner man reflects his condition externally:

*. . . au lieu d'expliquer longuement l'état d'esprit d'un personnage, les écrivains objectifs cherchent l'action ou le geste que cet état d'âme doit faire accomplir fatalement à cet homme dans une situation déterminée. (p. 14)*

The progression of the *idée fixe* is enhanced by its next figurative representation:

*En toute autre occasion il n'aurait certes pas compris, pas même supposé possibles des insinuations de cette nature sur sa pauvre mère, si bonne, si simple, si digne. Mais il avait l'âme troublée par ce levain de jalousie qui fermentait en lui. (p. 90)*

This is a particularly effective image as it is again one of growth and development, blends the spiritual and physical worlds, and, further, because Maupassant introduces an element of moral stress: the contrast between the pure mother and impure suspicions of Pierre, between the neutral if not healthful *levain* and the unquestionably pejorative fermentations. Finally the jealousy is crystallized: “*Et cette pensée brusque, violente, entra dans l'âme de Pierre comme une balle qui troue et déchîne: ' . . . pourquoi a-t-il laissé toute sa fortune à mon frère et rien à moi?'*” (p. 97). Immediately one becomes aware that Maupassant is expanding an earlier image: *The piqûre de guêpe* (p. 73) has become a devastating bullet, tearing at the inner man:

*Et une souffrance aiguë, une inexprimable angoisse entrée dans sa poitrine, faisait aller son coeur comme une loque agitée. Les ressorts en paraissaient brisés,*

*et le sang y passait à flots, librement, en le secouant d'un ballotement tumultueux.*  
(p. 103)

Pierre experiences a catastrophic disintegration, here expressed in almost surrealist images: the shred of cloth waving, suggesting fragmentation, defeat; the mechanical view of the complete breakdown of the physical (and therefore spiritual) man. Pierre has entered into a nightmarish world: "*Alors, à mi-voix, comme on parle dans les cauchemars, il murmura: 'Il faut savoir. Mon Dieu, il faut savoir'*" (p. 103). Nightmarish, because he is aware that truth would destroy: "*Plus il songeait, moins il doutait. Il se sentait entraîné par sa logique, comme par une main qui attire et étrangle vers l'intolérable certitude*" (p. 110). Any revelation of truth is viewed as both inevitable, inexorable and destructive as suggested by Maupassant's choice of vocabulary: *étrangle, intolérable*. The representation of Pierre's obsessions thus far has followed increasingly physical lines, moving away from the vagueness and abstraction of the first figures of speech with symbols of growth and expansion.

The climactic image occurs as one would expect at the crisis point of the novel, when Pierre, unable to control himself, blurts out his findings to Jean while his mother listens from the next room:

*Mais il fallait qu'il vidât soi coeur! et il dit tout, ses soupçons, ses raisonnements, ses luttes, sa certitude, . . . Il parlait comme si personne ne l'écoutait, parce qu'il devait parler, parce qu'il avait trop souffert, trop comprimé et reformé sa plaie. Elle avait grossi comme une tumeur, et cette tumeur venait de crever, éclaboussant tout le monde.* (p. 162)

In this one passage Maupassant artfully unifies all the metaphorical structures which preceded it. Pierre, out of control (as on p. 110), is shown acting mechanically, almost in spite of himself, responding to the stimuli of *la fatalité*. What has been growing inside him can no longer be contained, the figures of growth, *graine, pente, levain, fermentation*, have reached their fruition. The growth, from *point douloureux, meurtrissure, piqûre, plaie*, has finally produced a *tumeur*. And this tumor, being malignant, must break or be broken. The swelling-up, *trop comprimé*, can no longer be tolerated, Pierre can contain his knowledge no longer. To underscore his extreme necessity Maupassant employs the verb *falloir* with the imperfect subjunctive. *vidât*, thus calling attention to the act of *vidange* and to its effect, *éclaboussant tout le monde*, Pierre, Jean, Madame Roland next door, and their entire universe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The pain and agony here expressed unify other structures of the novel, notably the theme of non-communication. Briefly, this is suggested by the person of Pierre himself as an *étranger*, acutely aware of his solitude, frequently taking walks alone, at night, or solitary boat trips, unable to communicate with his family, his "friends" the bar-girl and Marowske, with anyone. The theme is echoed in the scenes at the harbor, where Pierre watches the lighthouses attempting to communicate with ships and each other (p. 57 ff), and especially by the sound of fog-horns of ships in distress (p. 179 ff), closely paralleling Pierre's state, beside himself, drunk with the fermentations of jealousy, crying out in the night to communicate what is mushrooming up inside him, and knowing that he too, *bateau ivre*, must escape the situation at hand: "*Pierre alors comprit qu'ils [Jean and Mme Roland] avaient pleuré ensemble, mais il ne put pénétrer*

The efficacy of this metaphoric structure resides in the fact that it not only implies a part-whole relationship but also allows emphasis on visual and sensorial perception and, finally, because large-scale double meanings emerge when it is combined with other images. That the emphasis should begin with a delicately constructed balance between the physical and mental worlds and then gradually be slanted toward their insistence on pain, both physical and mental, and finally come to climactic fruition with the symbol of the tumor seems abundantly justified. When one considers that in this "new psychological novel," where the main narrative point of view is Pierre, and in particular the mind of Pierre, where the author does not analyze but where the character analyzes himself, the self-analysis is all the more enhanced by the fact that the metaphors do not simply appear gratuitously, but clearly originate from Pierre, and from a discipline which is his own: For Pierre's mind is that of a medical doctor, and in this context the figures of *point douloureux*, *meurtrissure*, *piqûre*, *plaie*, *tumeur*, acquire supreme relevance. It is a significant testimony to the art of Maupassant the novelist that he was able to maintain his esthetic distance and not intervene in the narration, but instead was able to present only that which was clearly pertinent, to the extent that even his use of imagery was determined entirely by his narrative point of view. This scrupulous adherence to this adopted vantage point, the insistence on subtly remaining in the background of the narrative and not intruding upon it, reveal Maupassant as anticipating the techniques of modern fiction as exploited later by Proust, Camus, and Robbe-Grillet.

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*leur pensée! . . . Il était envahi maintenant par un besoin de fuir intolérable, . . ."* (p. 181). The pain is all the more acute as it is impossible to vocalize the inner torments—there is simply no one with whom he can communicate. This recalls Dante's depiction of Pier delle Vigne in the Divine Comedy, *Inferno*, Cante XIII: The horror of his torment is heightened by there being no means of expression for his agony. For in Dante's *Inferno* Pier and the other suicides (and, unquestionably in Maupassant's novel, the exile of Pierre Roland should be considered as a spiritual suicide) are represented as trees and shrubs, with no means of expression unless someone breaks a branch, at which point the voice is discernible, with tears of blood.