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Wacław GRZYBOWSKI

Nature, Deluge and Being in William Faulkner's *Old Man*, The Case of the Metaphysical Fiction

The image of flood in *Old Man*, intended as a counterpoint to *The Wild Palms*, is one of Faulkner's most intriguing literary achievements. It possesses an affinity with the image of Old Ben from *Go Down, Moses*, the mythic grizzly, "the shaggy tremendous shape", which sped through the woods of Yoknapatawpha county, not "fast but rather with ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive", which "run the knowledge" of Ike McCaslin "before he ever saw it, not malevolent but just too big for the dogs which tried to bay it, for the men, for the very country which was its constricting scope"[1]. The waters of the famous 1927 Mississippi River flood, probably viewed by Faulkner himself, resemble this Moby-Dick-like ruthlessness and deliberation of Old Ben, the incarnation of nature's power. However, the scope and ineffability of the Mississippi river in *Old Man* surpasses the power of the "yearly pageant of Old Ben's furious immortality".

The anticipation of the flood is present also in Faulkner's other novels. In *As I Lay Dying*, fulfilling their mother's last will, the Bundrens attempt to carry her coffin to Jefferson through a turbulent river. However, it is not the confrontation with the physical power of water that brings one closer to the feeling evoked by the limitlessness and irrevocability of the flood, but rather a monologue of Dewey Dell, one of the Bundrens, who pursues her aims in this unbelievable exodus. In fact, she intends to abort her unwanted unborn baby. In her monologues, "we move in beneath the equable surfaces of her behavior to something else, a terror or sense of disaster by no means simple or

[1] W. Faulkner, *Portable Faulkner*, ed. M. Cowley, New York, 1969, p. 199.

simple-minded"[2]. As Gray notices, her "words act as objective correlatives for the unarticulated and otherwise inarticulable impulses running through the character's mind"[3]. The unspeakable is sensed in Dewey Dell's complaint over Addie's, her mother's, death which came "too soon": "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon"[4]. One senses in these words an anxiety of a young girl surprised by her femininity and suddenly deprived of her only point of support. The dramatic turn of events invites an air of doom. Earlier in the novel, Faulkner makes Dewy Dell speak in the language of the decadent metaphysics: "The dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness, farther away than seeing shapes the dead earth. It lies dead and warm upon me.... I don't know whether I'm worrying or not. I can or not. I don't know whether I can cry or not, ... whether I have tried or not"[5]. In *Old Man* the flood is also dark and comes too soon. All of a sudden it invades people's lives, threatening with death and covering the earth with darkness. But at the same time it brings liberation from the anxiety, from the tangle of contradictions, from the tension between desire and honesty. It redeems people from poignant consequences of their vices and idealism by radical reduction to existing on bare essentials.

The sense of a necessary cataclysm looms also in Benjy's rage, in *The Sound and the Fury*, in Joe Christmas's confused life, and in the concluding dialogue of Shreve and Quentin, in *Absalom, Absalom*: "'Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?' 'I don't hate it,' Quentin said, quickly, '*... I don't hate it*,' he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; '*I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*'"[6]

"The cold air" of "the iron New England dark" resembles the darkness and coldness of the waters of the Mississippi flood in *Old Man*. Shreve's ironical judgment of Thomas Sutpen's history, and its chronicler, Quentin, stems form his patrician "New England" sense of superiority. As Nelson Blake writes in *Novelists' America*, "Touchy pride and suspicion of the North were sentiments strongly held in Yoknapatawpha County"[7]. The North "was not even a geographical place but an emotional idea, a condition of which" the heroes of

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[2] R. Gray, *The Literature of Memory*, London, 1977, p. 226.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, New York, 1985, p. 78.

[5] Ibidem, p. 48.

[6] W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom*, New York, 1973, p. 303.

[7] N. M. Blake, *Novelists' America*, Syracuse, 1969, p. 109.

Intruder in the Dust "had fed from" their "mother's milk... not at all to fear not actually anymore to hate but just ... to defy"[8]. Paradoxically, Gavin Stevens's soliloquy on the incapability of Northerners to understand, still less to solve, the problems of The South, admits indirectly that the Yankee intrusion is an unexpected catalyst which forces Southerners to rethink their condition. Like the historical defeat, the 1927 flood also comes from the North, and becomes not even a catalyst but a destructive force which both buries the South and releases temporarily its inhabitants from the burden of their complexes[9].

Richard Gray emphasizes Faulkner's search of objective correlative. The author of *Old Man* chooses an image, a "situation and chain of events", that would release and communicate the original emotion and the experience which evoked it. Old Ben, Dewey Dell's apprehension of death, Benjy's fury, Quentin's ultimate confusion are all proper objective correlatives. However, all of them possess a potential for something more, an "inner space" open to, or even awaiting and attracting, a force that would tower over them.

In 1939, looking back into the past, Faulkner found the 1927 flood as that image and force which his earlier fiction seemed to anticipate. Nevertheless, the deluge in *Old Man*, possesses features which set it apart from its antecedents. With the image of Old Ben it shared, to a certain degree, an air of the mythic and the primordial. In the folk mythology of Southern Afro-Americans, the river and the flood are also "old". When the main hero of the story, a nameless tall convict, realizes that all the time, without recognizing it, he has been hearing "the sound" of the flood, he asks: "What's that? A Negro man squatting before the nearest fire answered him: 'Dat's him. Dat's de Ole Man'"[10].

However, here the similarities with other correlatives end. Unlike the mythic grizzly, the flood does not easily yield to mythologization, since what manifests itself in its crudeness is the factual merciless deterministic force of nature. The emotions of Dewey Dell, Quentin Compson and others belong to the world of the

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[8] W. Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, New York, 1971, p. 152.

[9] Last but not least there is Faulkner's own pain and frustration at the failure of his own marriage with Estelle and his love affair with Meta Doherty, by his alcoholism and other private disasters. In one of his letters he writes: "I have lived for the last six months in such a peculiar state of family complications and back complications that I am not able to tell if the novel is all right or absolute drivel. To me it was written just as if I had sat on the one side of a wall and the paper was on the other and my hand with the pen thrust through the wall and writing not only on invisible paper but in pitch darkness too, so that I could not even see if the pen still wrote or not" (D. Minter, *William Faulkner: His Life and Work,* Baltimore, 1981, p. 175). The phrase "pitch darkness" appears in *Old Man*: "... the skiff ran in pitch streaming darkness upon a roiling expanse" (W. Faulkner, *The Wild Palms and Old Man*, New York, 1959, p. 181) .

[10] W. Faulkner, *The Wild Palms and Old Man*, p. 164.

private, personal and familial affairs. They become public when they concern either segregation or religion, or the conflict between the South and the North. Bringing a sudden apocalypse to Mississippi and Louisiana, the flood annuls not only the world of personal affairs but also the public life of the region.

Nevertheless, like other literary images of essential experiences, "the vast expanses" of the Mississippi waters possess in themselves something compelling, a power of particular attraction. "What is that?", the tall convict asks. The question about the unexpected in the unleashed forces of the flood is the question about Being, real to the core, beyond the mythic, the private and the social. A metaphysician in American literature, Thomas Merton, claims that in his astonishment at the murmur of "de Ole Man" the convict "suddenly becomes aware that there is another *level* of being":

> The river here is *being-itself* – and "being and becoming" – and all that jazz you can think of as 'the metaphysical ground of being'.... This is an awakening, a realization, and enlightenment! – which Faulkner excels in recording! It is a kind of existential description of what happens to people in real life: all of a sudden you are fifty-two (or however many) years old, you wake up to find this immense roar that has been going on under your feet *all the time*! *Now*, everything is moving![11]

The experience of the mystery of the deluge becomes even more intense when the tall convict and the pregnant woman find themselves at the mercy of the dark immense force beneath the surface of water:

> After the thunder and lightning had spent itself, the skiff ran in pitch streaming darkness upon a roiling expanse which, if he could have seen, apparently had no boundaries. Wild and invisible, it tossed and heaved about and beneath the boat, ridged with dirty phosphorescent foam and filled with a debris of destruction.... If he who yesterday had known he was in a river, had accepted that fact in good faith and earnest, then had seen that river turn without warning and rush back upon him with furious and deadly intent like a frenzied stallion in a lane – if he had suspected for one second that the wild and limitless expanse on which he now found himself was a river, consciousness would simply have refused; he would have fainted.[12]

The image of the "wild", the "invisible" and the "limitless expanse", which "apparently had no boundaries", brings to one's mind an association with the philosophical Greek notion of *apeiron*, the limitlessness, which, formulated by Anaximander, was the first non-physical idea of the *arché*, the origin and the ground of all things, in pre-Socratic philosophy. Curiously enough, the idea of *apeiron*, as the first metaphysical concept, was formulated in agreement with

[11] T. Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, New York, 1985, p. 523.

[12] W. Faulkner, *The Wild Palms and Old Man*, pp. 181-182.

the Ionian physical understanding of the *arché* as a natural element. The vastness of the sea, the power of the wind and all-penetrating heat of the sun were the first compact pre-metaphysical symbols of the ultimate reality and the basis for the later extraction of the notion of limitlessness of the universe[13].

At the same time, in the background of Faulkner's story there is the Biblical narrative of creation, in which nature and transcendence are close and differentiated at the same time: "The earth was waste and void; darkness was on the face of the deep; and the sprit [breath] of God was moving over the face of the water" (Genesis 1:2). In the metaphors Faulkner uses to describe the untamed power of the flood one recognizes a poetic attempt to capture the formative force behind the unleashed element. The chaos brought by the flood, the surreal confusion of natural orders described by Faulkner suggests a particular answer to the question about being. The basic difficulty, however, is that nowhere Faulkner mentions the word being in its metaphysical, even nad've transcendentalist, meaning. The immediate associations evoked by his narrative point rather to the dark Calvinist notion of Providence. Ensuing from the un-Biblical dogma of predestination, there is the characteristic notion of God's will as unfathomable to human knowing. The dramatic changes of the flood's current, its accumulating waves, the inexplicable behavior of people and the unexpected demands of the pregnant lady found in the tree, are all accepted by the nameless convict "in good faith and earnest," as if they were, or because they are, the decrees of Providence[14].

Faulkner's depiction of the flood may be viewed as an obscure symbol of the disorder that affects natural reality and annuls borders between particular forms of existence (of things, animals and people), but on the other, it brings with

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[13] M. A. Krąpiec, *Metafizyka. Zarys teorii bytu*, Lublin, 1985, p. 79.

[14] It is a curious thing, however, that even in American Calvinism, at the moment of its most intense intellectual development, there does appear the question about Being. It is Jonathan Edwards who, even at the risk of infidelity to his native faith, asks and answers this question in his *Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World*, and two other essays: "On Being" and "Notes on the Mind". The semi-pantheistic notion of the created universe as God's extension or emanation, stated in *Dissertation* and implied in "On Being", leads Edwards to a conclusion that there must be something infinite and omnipresent which is the basis of all that exists (E. Vogelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, Baton Rouge, 1995, p. 138). In "On Being" he identifies the ground of all being with space: "It is self-evident, I believe, to every man that space is necessary, eternal, infinite, and omnipresent. But I had as good speak plain: I have already said much as that space is God." (E. Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, p. 138). It is a curious thing to notice that Edwards's metaphysical speculation stops exactly at the point of departure of the ancient Greek thought which starts from the question about the origin of things, the *arche*, as the ground of being. As Faulkner's vision of the flood, Edwards's notion of "space" is close to Parmenidean *Apeiron* and Aquinas's Pure Being.

itself a need for order. In fact, in *Old Man*, mythologization and symbolization give way to realism. Undifferentiated as it is, the sense of being is an inherent aspect of the novel's crudeness. The power of the flood is the self-evident manifestation of its reality. But it also makes the tall convict aware of anything else that exists, of his boat, of a pregnant woman with whom he is in a silent marriage-like conflict, of her baby, of the food, of the deer, of the Indian mound, of snakes, of the chipmunks, of the hawks, etc. His perception is usually blurred by exhaustion, but when a given thing appears in the focus of his attention, it acquires unexpected actuality.

> Still paddling with that spent hypnotic steadiness, he saw the swimming deer. He did not know what it was nor that he had altered the skiff's course to follow it, he just watched the swimming head before him as the wave boiled down and the skiff rose bodily in the old familiar fashion on a welter of tossing trees and houses and bridges and fences, ... as he and the deer shot forward side by side at arm's length, he watching the deer now, watching the deer begin to rise out of the water bodily until it was actually running along upon the surface, rising still, soaring clear of the water altogether, vanishing upward in a dying crescendo of splashings and snapping branches, it dump scut flashing upward, the entire animal vanishing as smoke vanishes.[15]

The deer vanishes, but for a moment it shows itself real and magnificent as it is pointing the way to an Indian mound. Its way of existence, its behaviour communicates a particular form inscribed in the being of the deer. It makes him available as an object of meditation. But what is more fundamental is the recognition of his existence. The sensory perception of the hero does not misguides him. The deer really exists. It is there. The existential judgement is an almost unnoticed point of reference in the convict's mind. At the same time, it is the first sign of certainty and order regained. Philosophical meditation allows one to recognize in a sensory image the necessary ingredient of existence as a special gift which actualizes the form of a being. Existence makes itself vivid as a factor constituting reality of a being in itself, for it is due to existence of a being, everything in a being is made actual, and manifests itself to knowing as existing. For that reason existence turns out to be absolute perfection of being, for ontologically a particular thing is perfect as far as it exists[16]. As

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[15] W. Faulkner, *The Wild Palms and Old Man*, p. 193.

[16] M. A. Krąpiec OP, *Filozofia w teologii*, Lublin 1999, s. 25-26: „Jawi się zatem istnienie jako czynnik konstytuujący realność bytu samego w sobie, albowiem to dzięki istnieniu bytu wszystko w tym bycie jest rzeczywiście istniejące i w poznaniu jawiące się jako realne. Istnienie więc jawi się jako absolutna doskonałość bytu, albowiem bytowo coś jest na tyle doskonałe, na ile ono rzeczywiście istnieje".

a hawk, deliberately exposed as a symbol of evil[17], the image of the deer also invites a number of symbolic associations. "The Song of Songs" employs the image of a deer as a symbol of the Messiah, the Divine Bridegroom (Sg 2, 8-9)[18]. In *Old Man*, the deer, showing the way to the mound, also performs a salvific function. However, in the most basic sense, the deer is just an animal, a living being. Its image saves the perception of the hero from the chaos of "tossing trees and houses and bridges and fences" in the accumulating wave, i.e. from the "waste and void" beneath the surface of water. The deer is the only thing which the convict can perceive in the darkness. At first it is just an obscure image. As the deer swims by the skiff, the convict grows certain that his senses do not delude him. As the animal emerges and runs on the firm ground, it fills the convict's perception with the awareness of its actuality. The deer allows the heroes to return to the firm land and, in a sense, to reality from the dramatic cruise through the void and chaos.

A similar role is performed by the new-born baby. If the deer revives the sense of reality, the baby appeals to the convict to return to the human world from the "monastic existence of shotguns and shackles":

> He watched her bathe the child with a savage curiosity and interest that became an amazed unbelief, so that at last he stood above them both, looking down at the tiny terra-cotta colored creature resembling nothing, and thought, *An this is all. This is what severed me violently form 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 a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am.*[19]

The convict is in an unknown place, but he is also in a world of human affairs unfamiliar to him. The child does not resemble anything, which means the convict perceives the uniqueness of this little new-born person. At the beginning of the story, after an agonizing struggle with the under-surface current the tall convict hears the woman's reproach – "It's taken you a while....

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[17] At first sight it seems that such phrases as "faithless Manipulator" or the description of hawk's "hard, vicious nose, patrician nose, the intolerant omnivorous eye" allude to the Calvinist vision of God. But when we set these fragments against the demonological passages of such texts as "Address to Pine Manor Junior College," they turn out to symbolize the "ruthless baseness" of evil and its historic "avatars," against whose ruthlessness and despotism humanity has revolted (W. Faulkner, *Address to Pine Manor Junior College*, in: *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, New York, 1979, p. 1853). As a symbolic image of the demon and his "gauleiters," the hawk is the only creature in *Old Man* which feeds on the living flesh and thus breaks the semi-edenic reconciliation of opposites precipitated by the flood.

[18] "Be still! My lover – here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag" (*The New American Bible*, New York, 1970, Sg 2: 8-9).

[19] W. Faulkner, *The Wild Palms and Old Man*, p. 196.

I thought for a minute you wasn't aiming to come back." – which spells to him her utter contempt for his dramatic struggle with the violent undersurface current, in fact her ignorance of it, and cures him of his young-bachelor's idealization of women. However, the baby makes him freer of the outrage at the woman's misunderstanding of him. Although he does not achieve full understanding of the other feminine mode of being, he is a step closer to it. He is still ironical in his words, but at the same time he is more ready to shield the baby and the mother against new dangers.

Destructive though it is, the flood itself is no less actual. However immense, it is also a particular being. As other natural things, it tends to spend its potential in accordance to its nature, in chaos and the dramatic simplification of life. In this way, it exposes the natural aims of living beings such as preservation of life and development of the virtues inherent in their natures. By posing a radical threat to life, the flood brings out a radical need for an actualization of the natural capacities for survival, for a struggle for life and an appreciation of it. In the case of people, it opens the need for solidarity and responsibility, which indicates a transcendental (universal, omnipresent) attribute of being as such. Existence means neither passivity nor disintegration, but full actualization of the potential latent in a given creature. By developing its natural virtues a singular being gets closer to the intuited and desired absolute fullness of being, which at the same time is the source from which it receives its reality and potentiality. "To be" means to participate in the actuality of being. For human person it means to pursue good through an effort of understanding and free choice. The effort quite often consists in sacrifice. Free will and sacrifice are human modes of participation in the stream of reality.

When the day after the birth of the child the woman asks whether they are "fixing to start now", the convict's answer spells a revenge for her earlier misunderstanding of him: "'Yah', the convict said. 'You ain't aiming to have another one this morning, are you?'"[20]. But within a minute he is forced to cast off his semi-ironic nonchalance. He shoves the skiff "clear of the land." Suddenly it turns out that the oar is missing, which makes the convict perform an unimaginable effort to save himself, as well as the baby and the mother.

> He did not hesitate. Grasping the grapevine end he sprang into the water, vanishing in the violent action of climbing and reappeared still climbing and (who had never learned to swim) plunged and threshed on toward the almost-vanished mound, moving through the water upon it as the deer had done yesterday and scrabbled up the muddy slope and lay gasping and panting, still clutching the grapevine end.[21]

[20] Ibidem, p. 198.

[21] Ibidem, pp. 198-199.

One wonders, though, whether the hero's dramatic reaction would have been sufficiently motivated, if the narrator would have left him alone in the boat.

When other prisoners tell the hero to burn his clothes and join them, he feels like bursting, because "his good name, his responsibility ..., 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"[22] do not allow him to cancel his past and his destiny. The heroic message receives here a deeper psychological explanation. It is natural of man to act in accordance with his sense of purpose. Faulkner's chivalric gospel, looming in the half-edenic and half-apocalyptic milieu of the flood, collaborates with the realism of his narrative and with the latent non-verbalized, perhaps even unconscious, metaphysics.

However, the human mode of participation in reality is narrated in *Old Man* only from one point of view, masculine. Quite naturally the narrator projected by Faulkner is a man, thus it is easier for the author to create a vision of man's personality. The woman found in the tree speaks very rarely and one never knows what she feels apart from rare moments when her emotions can be deduced from her words or gestures. However, the narrator is aware of the feminine alternative to the masculine temperament, and of the difference between the two. Moreover, the pregnant lady is found in the tree, which in the Faulknerian world is a privileged position. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the most favorite of the author's feminine figures, Caddy, is met for the first time in the pear tree[23]. A curious thing about the nameless pregnant woman in *Old Man* is that she does not express any longing for her husband or family. Like Caddy, she seems loyal and attached just to her femininity and motherhood. As such she is a perfect counterpart for the convict, the lonely and alienated young bachelor, loyal primarily to his natural sense of dignity. The loneliness of both his semi-monastic existence and her feminine being is what introduces the gap and misunderstanding between them, which are not completely overcome till the end of the novel.

However, the convict's half-conscious emotions fluctuate from initial naive "invincible dream" of rescuing an ideal woman, a Troyan "Helen", or a "living Garbo"[24], through the outrage and hatred of her, to pity, and wonder at the

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[22] Ibidem, p. 186.

[23] In one of his letters Faulkner talks about her as "a beautiful and tragic little girl," and compares her to the legendary vase kept by an old Roman at his bedside, whose rim was slowly worn away by his kisses. (see D. Minter, op. cit., p. 89).

[24] "Now he watched her move, gather herself heavily and carefully to descend – that heaviness which was not painful but excruciatingly careful, that profound and almost lethargic awkwardness which added nothing to the sum of the first aghast amazement which had served already for the catafalque of invincible dream since even in durance he had continued (even with the old avidity,

otherness of the feminine, and expectation of her help. It turns out that despite the tension between them there is a possibility of paradoxical mutual completion of their existences, if not in terms of intimate relationship, excluded from the start by their mutual disappointment, then at least in their responsibility for each other and shared "hill-bred" Southern sense of honor. Without being "the old married", as Faulkner names spouses with a long marital practice, they seem to understand each other without a word in the final episode in a Cajan alligator hunter haven. When the Cajan offers the convict his dirty worn out clothes, the convict demands form the lady: "Wash them. Good. I want all them stains out. All of them". She answers: "But the jumper. Aint he got ere old shirt too? That sun and them mosquitoes"[25]. Clearly the woman grows in the sense of empathy. An old shirt would protect the man from the sun and mosquitoes. The convict does not answer to her suggestion.

> And she said no more either, though when he and the Cajan returned at dark the garments were clean, stained a little still with the old mud and soot, but clean... and he would sit with his face expressionless as a wooden mask beneath the sweat while the Cajan doped his back with something on a filthy rag from a filthy saucer, she still saying nothing since she too doubtlessly knew what his reason was, not from that rapport of the wedded conferred upon her by the two weeks during which they had jointly suffered all the crises emotional social economic and even moral which not always occur even in the ordinary fifty married years, ... but because she too had stemmed at some point from the same dim hill-bred Abraham.[26]

Here the narrator touches upon the fundamental problem of love. For love, not as infatuation or a sentiment, but as an attitude and act of free will starts in marriage with the emotional and moral crisis. The mutual disappointment of the heroes of the novel corresponds to the critical moment when a man and a woman discover that they are called to love a real person, of blood and flesh, with his or her weaknesses as well as virtues. The nad've idealized vision of the partner vanishes at the touch of "this first aghast amazement" with the invincible limitations of the beloved person. Emotion fades away leaving place to the power of understanding and free will, free of intoxicating feelings too, free to overcome the negative emotions through understanding and acceptance, finally to restore the maturity of positive emotional aspect of love. Obviously,

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even though they had caused his downfall) to consume the impossible pulp-printed fables carefully censored and as carefully smuggled into the penitentiary; and who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragooned keep when he and his companion embarked in the skiff." (W. Faulkner, *Wild Palms and Old Man*, p. 175).

[25] Ibidem, 211.

[26] Ibidem, pp. 211-212.

in this sense the novel's narrator presents only a possibility of love which hangs in the air, never to be fully consumed, partially actualized in the empathy and responsibility of the two protagonists. Partial and imperfect as it is, this potential love is an essential mode of human participation in being. As the leitmotifs of Faulkner's chivalric dream, imperfectly realized in his own life too, love, compassion, faithfulness and sacrifice are recognized by the narrator in *Old Man* as important elements of human existence. If good and happiness are the attractive force propelling the actualization of human capacities, then the "formative force of reality", the Being in its absolute actualization must be absolute love. Even though the residue of the Calvinist vision of God's unattainable arbitrariness, stuck in Faulkner's mind, has very little to do with such notion of the Pure Being, it serves the purpose of alluding to transcendence as the limitlessness of the Absolute Person "who is love".

Obviously, Faulkner's puzzle is difficult. The variety of sub-tracks, erroneous paths and suspicions is misleading, perhaps even to the narrator himself. However, in the reality of the deer who, by rescuing himself from the flood, rescues the lost castaways, in their blurred imperfect acts of empathy and responsiveness, in the reality of a new-born child, there looms the sense of the ultimate fulfilment of human hopes and needs as actual and irrevocable.

NATURA, POWÓDŹ I BYT W *STARYM CZŁOWIEKU* WILLIAMA FAULKNERA. PRZYPADEK PROZY METAFIZYCZNEJ

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia drugą część dyptyku *Dzikie palmy*. Opis historycznej powodzi, która objęła ogromne połacie południowych Stanów w 1927 roku, jest tu zinterpretowany jako wstęp do medytacji nad kwestią bytu i istnienia. Chaos spowodowany powodzią jest zaprzeczeniem naturalnego porządku bytu. Lecz jednocześnie uświadamia poznawczą potrzebę porządku i głębszych podstaw tego, co istnieje. Fabuła stworzona przez Faulknera prowadzi bezimiennego bohatera tej noweli, więźnia, wypełniającego zadanie dostarczenia nieznanej kobiety na suchy ląd, która okazuje się być w stanie błogosławionym. Połączeni przez wspólne zmaganie się z kataklizmem, od chaosu i zniszczenia ku porządkowi bytu dostrzeżonemu w wyłaniającym się z wody jeleniu i indiańskim kurhanie, tworzącym jedyne bezpieczne miejsce, gdzie kobieta może urodzić dziecko. Porządek natury zostaje rozszerzony przez opis złożonych relacji między dwojgiem protagonistów. Choć nie łączy ich uczucie, przechodzą doświadczenia, które Faulkner określa jako doświadczenie tzw. starego dobrego małżeństwa. W ten sposób pierwsze obrazy chaosu, a potem wyłaniającego się z niego bytu, ustępują narracji przedstawiającej dwie formy bytu rozumnego, obdarzonego wolną wolą, przedstawiającej dwa sposoby istnienia, kobiecy i męski, i wzajemne odniesienia między nimi.