

Bayard's guns



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The appearance of guns in Bayard's story in *The Unvanquished* personify turning points in his life, and each of these events holds remarkable significance in the journey as a whole. Bayard's encounters with firearms parallel his journey from adolescence to adulthood, from old to new, from son of the Sartoris to the Sartoris himself. Bayard first encounters a gun in the novel as he and Ringo decide to shoot at a passing Yankee. Faulkner describes the scene as an awkward and juvenile one: the boys knock down furniture trying to reach the Sartoris family musket and carry it "like a log, one at each end, running" (26). They then work together to cock the gun and recklessly fire upon the soldier, as they have seen John Sartoris do many times. To the boys, this act is no different than playing with toy soldiers in the dirt. They mirror the world around them, yet by doing so recognize something monumental about the occasion—right before preparing the shot, Bayard asks Ringo twice "Do you want to be free?" (26). As ironic as these connotations may be, considering the Yankees' ultimate role in freeing the slaves, something in Bayard recognizes the connection between killing and creating freedom. His young spirit relishes in it. This, however, does not remain the case. Bayard's second encounter with a gun is a direct result of Granny's murder. He and Ringo, with the guidance of Uncle Buck, form a makeshift manhunt in pursuit of Grumby immediately following Granny's burial. Buck refuses to surrender his pistol to the boys when Bayard asks and insists upon accompanying them, saying "Me and the pistol, or you and this damn nigger horse thief and a fence rail" (159). He keeps the gun in his britches at all times during their journey. However, Uncle Buck is shot and grows ill, and eventually must leave the boys. Bayard has grown since his last rendezvous with gunpowder; this time he engages in no clumsy thievery

but an almost ceremonious transfer of firearm from Uncle Buck's neck to his own. Bayard finally takes the leap from larger-than-life puppeteer to actual toy soldier, from accidental horse killer to active blood-thirst. At the moment he messily shoots Grumby, Bayard is living in a vision of what his life would be like if he lived in the old ways. This is what makes their quest an underworld more than the dank colors and grave references, for what is an underworld if not a place where one can see the possible next step in one's own story? Bayard lives what before he dreamed, and this would change him before his final encounter. Bayard's third and final encounter with guns radically counterbalances his previous two, though the circumstances are almost identical to the second: avenging the death of a loved one. Following John Sartoris' murder, Bayard returns from school to a home laden with expectations. The young man is not even allowed time to mourn his father's death before being presented with firearms right and left. Drusilla offers him his father's dueling pistols in a manner comparable to seduction; this grown Bayard no longer has to scramble over furniture or wait for the authorities to leave to have what he once so desperately wanted. She tells him, " Take them...I give them to you. [I] put into your hands what they say is an attribute only of God's, [I] took what belongs to heaven and gave it to you" (237). Drusilla confirms that insightful childish notion Bayard held in his first encounter with guns, when he asked Ringo if he wanted to be free. Things stolen from heaven and given to man—whether it be the fire-and-knowledge package deal or some forbidden fruit—have always led to man's freedom. However, Bayard challenges the appeal of that freedom, and his following actions confirm his transformation from the first and second encounters. He takes the guns Drusilla forces upon him, but he does not use them. His

situation has completely reversed from his horse-shooting days; he is in a changed time; he is a changed man. His guns hold the unfired evidence. Each time Bayard faces a firearm, he finds himself face to face with a decision—such decision is inherent to the very nature of a firearm. However, because of the nature of the epic journey, this decision isn't simply a matter of spark igniting powder and metal propelling through the air. These moments stand for something, each one of them somehow leading to the next, each another step in the story and the journey. By connecting these happenings, we connect two worlds and bring them together to form one, just as epic itself connects the natural and the supernatural. Once these two are one, change can occur and eyes can be opened, and we have been given a gift of understanding beyond what we had before. This is the epic realm. Here be dragons.