THE SHADOW OF THE BRANCH:

DEFAMILIARIZATION AND READER-RESPONSE

IN THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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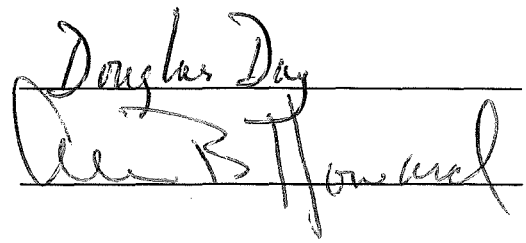

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ABSTRACT

"The Shadow of the Branch: Defamiliarization and Reader-Response in the Novels of William Faulkner" examines the ways Faulkner disrupts habitual patterns of reading and forces active reader participation in the creative and re-creative processes. First I establish a historical context (e.g., Zeus/Semele, Sterne, Dickinson, Tolstoy, Symbolists, Modernists) and a theoretical framework (e.g., Shklovsky, Iser) by which to understand defamiliarization in its many forms and how it functions in the reading process. I then argue that Faulkner arrived at these aesthetics via the novels of Tolstoy and particularly the poetry of the French Symbolists. The third section traces the evolution of these theories and practices through Faulkner's first three novels; then, close readings of The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom! show the importance of defamiliarization in shaping the narrative world of his major contributions. Each novel obviously dictates the nature of its chapter, but my approach is generally the same: close readings of cruxes attempt to show how various kinds of indirection and defamiliarization work on both the story and discourse levels. I argue that and attempt to explicate how and why Faulkner defamiliarizes diction (neologisms, portmanteau and compound words, etc.), semantics

(catachresis, synaesthesia, idiolect, etc.), syntactics (fragmentation, fusion,anacolutha, etc.), points of view (stream of consciousness, interior monologue, indirect free style), mechanics and chronologies on the discourse level, and characters, settings, events, and conventions on the story level. The readings illustrate in detail how the Symbolist influences function in specific novelistic contexts to both engage full reader participation and develop particular narrative and thematic concerns.

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I

THE SHADOW OF THE BRANCH

> I couldn't describe [the ideal woman] by color of hair, color of eyes, because once she is described then somehow she vanishes. That the ideal woman which is in every man's mind is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand. Just like the most beautiful description of anyone . . . is by understatement. . . . And every man has a different idea of what's beautiful. And it's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree. (LIG 127-28)

This study--and indeed much of William Faulkner's fiction--may be understood as an explication and elaboration of the terms in the quotation above. Semiotically, Faulkner's statement reveals an interesting ambivalence: his "ideal woman" testifies to a belief in some transcendental signified, some metaphysical "Truth"; however, the fact that this "Truth" can only be approached indirectly, by evocation, implies a clear distrust of the signifier's ability to signify adequately. One does not have to read far into Faulkner's canon to reach this same conclusion: his work reveals a suspicion of this "faulty instrument" called language, while at the same time affirming "eternal verities" of the human heart. The problem facing the writer, then, is how to get the most out of a fallen sign, how to revalue this "paper currency" (as Emerson called it) that has been devalued through repetition, habituation, automatization.

The solution lies in "the gesture, the shadow of the branch." In one sense, "the shadow of the branch" encompasses a wide variety of indirect discourse, intimation, suggestion, evocation. In short, the familiar is made defamiliar in order that it be revitalized and seen anew. In another (and related) sense, "the shadow" is the result or effect of an unnamed cause. The reader of a Faulkner novel frequently encounters a series of gradually revealed effects from which he must infer, deduce, puzzle out, or work back to a plausible cause. Often key information, scenes, and even characters are absent or withheld; hence indeterminacy arises from a loss or a lack. But often we are given an overabundance of data, like the clocks in the jeweller's window, each showing a different time (TSAF 102-04), or the clues, speculations, and possible interpretations in Absalom, Absalom!; then we have indeterminacy resulting from overdetermination.

But whether borne of deficit or surfeit, indeterminacy in Faulkner is a function of his modernist sensitivity to the elusiveness of truth: in a relativistic, subjective world, truth becomes less a product to be packaged, marketed, and consumed, and more a process to be experienced. As we shall discuss in the next chapter, "meaning" is no longer conceived of as residing simply in the work, but rather in the interaction between the text which guides the reading and the reader who experiences and recreates

within those textual guidelines. If truth cannot be directly stated, it perforce must be suggested; in an almost Heisenbergian sense, to depict the branch lessens the branch, while the evocative force of the shadow energizes the text, allowing for the plenitude of imagination.

In Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss, Gail L. Mortimer explains this process in terms of the figure-ground reversal, those optically illusive pictures "in which two faces in profile facing one another become, in an alternate view, a vase, the same boundary defin[ing] both entities" (51). By delineating the field, one implicitly defines the object, and, as Mortimer points out, Faulkner

> often turns to the less important thing (the field or ground) of the two possible focuses because the obliquity of such a description allows the important thing (the object, whichever thing he wants to preserve) to retain its vitality. The object is thus experientially potent for the reader because it is never limited by the inherent finitude of direct description. It is evoked instead. (51-2)

The result of this technique is a dual and shifting focus: background becomes foreground and vice versa.[1] There is a

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[1] This figure-ground analogy also provides a rather elegant narrative model: "realism" may be defined as that mode of narrative in which the focus remains on the figure; the background remains just that, the language transparent (Great Expectations?). Modernism heralds the shifting focus: language often becomes foregrounded, as much the subject as the figure itself--though we never completely lose sight of the figure--and the reader's focus shifts back and forth between the two (Ulysses?). And much of what is called postmodern fiction seems characterized by the radical change of focus: language is foregrounded, deliberately opaque, and holds fast to its

complementary relationship of content and form, each reinforcing the other, which parallels the perfect complement of text and reader.

This foregrounding of language, of form, naturally invites a formalistic analysis. And the chain of influence linking Russian Formalism with New Criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, and reception or reader-response theory provides the broad outline of my approach.[2] As the subtitle of this work indicates, my focus also will be dual and shifting, between "Defamiliarization" and "Reader-Response," between the text and its reception and recreation. This neo-formalist approach seems appropriate for a number of reasons: 1. Faulkner's stylistic techniques are classic examples of defamiliarization. 2. Faulkner, like the Russian Formalists, widens

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privileged position; the reader is guided to the profiled faces, and sees the vase hardly at all. In fact, the vase barely seems to exist except as ancillary plaything of the language--as such fiction constantly reminds us by deliberately undercutting the "reality" of the figure (Lost in the Funhouse?). Faulkner (like Joyce and Barth) cuts across these lines, at times looking back almost nostalgically toward realism (Soldier's Pay), at times clearly anticipating postmodernism (Absalom, Absalom!), generally appearing firmly ensconced in main currents of modernism--frequently all within the covers of the same work. In the sense that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, it might be suggested that Faulkner's canon evolves through the various stages of recent literature: realism, symbolism, naturalism, modernism (experimentalism, surrealism, expressionism, cubism), and postmodernism. To be more precise, however, most of these "isms" coexist to inform the works we will be examining.

[2] For examinations of the similarities and differences among these schools, see Scholes 1-16, or Holub 13-52.

the aesthetic focus to encompass not only the text, but also the reader's perception, actualization, recreation of the text. 3. There tends to be a close relationship between form and content in Faulkner's novels, hence, close examinations of the cruxes of the text--ironies, ambiguities, indeterminacies, gaps--yield insights into the meanings of the texts. 4. Those meanings will more often than not turn back upon the act of reading itself, i.e., meaning will ultimately reside in the recreative imagination of the reader.

It seems clear that the difficulties we readers find in Faulkner originates in what Victor Shklovsky called ostranenie, i.e., "making strange," or the perhaps less cumbersome, "defamiliarization." Defamiliarization takes many forms in Faulkner's work: ornate, poetic diction; unorthodox punctuation; long,complex syntactic arrangements--they are not always "sentences"--that often yield their meaning through indirection, periphrasis, or evocation; bizarre points of view; unusual, often cubistic, narrative arrangements which generally force the reader to transform the sujet in order to reconstruct the fabula ; violations of narrative conventions; subversion of epistemological and/or ontological status of characters and events--a practice that tends to deconstruct the fiction in some decidedly postmodern ways; and ultimately, revelation of the very mechanisms of narrative itself and

its concomitant reader-response (another area in which Faulkner seems at least to anticipate postmodernism). These are the techniques that make Faulkner so difficult; but they are also techniques that activate reader participation.

Despite Faulkner's sometimes cavalier attitude toward the reader, his major fiction is concerned, both implicitly and explicitly, with the problems of language and characterized by devices that are designed to grab the attention of the reader and force the reader to become involved in the creative or re-creative processes. The Sound and the Fury, among many other things, is an examination of the difficulties of signification; As I Lay Dying carries on that concern and attempts to overcome the fundamental semiotic problem of reference, the separation of word and deed; and Absalom, Absalom! seems to offer a possible "overpassing" through recourse to the phenomenology of reading. Many of Faulkner's important works are stories told and re-told, and, indeed, Absalom,Absalom! is virtually a case study or paradigm of reader-response--all orchestrated via techniques (linguistic, narrative, thematic) of defamiliarization. Before we closely examine the ways defamiliarization functions in Faulkner's novels, we must first take a look at defamiliarization in general--and indirection in particular--to ascertain how and why such techniques work in our culture, our language, and our

literature--and especially in our process of reading. And we will also examine some of the sources of this aesthetic in Faulkner's literary career.

II

TELLING IT SLANT:

Defamiliarization and Reader-Response

> Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--
> Success in Circuit lies
> Too bright for our infirm Delight
> The Truth's superb surprise
> As Lightning to the Children eased
> With explanation kind
> The Truth must dazzle gradually
> Or every man be blind--(1868)

When Emily Dickinson advocated the oblique approach to "Truth," she articulated a critical position perhaps as old as literary discourse itself, a position reaching back to the very roots of Western culture. Our first "critic" of indirection was the Greek god Zeus who knew well enough to disguise his radiant splendor when wooing mortal women. For Leda he assumed the form of a swan and fathered a civilization (as well as a modern poem of Symbolist indirection by William Butler Yeats). With Semele he appeared variously as a lion, a leopard, a snake, a white bull. Semele became pregnant with young Dionysus, and everything seemed fine until green-eyed Hera sowed her seeds of discord, telling poor Semele that "Many an honest well-designing maid,/ Has been by these pretending gods betray'd" (Ovid III,353-4), thus prompting the unsuspecting expectant to trick her lover into revealing himself.

Caught at a vulnerable moment--"when next he sought her bed" (362)--Zeus swore by the river Styx to grant Semele's every wish. He was later horrified to learn what she was really after, for no mortal could look upon the god in his "awful glory" and survive (Hamilton 55); but he could not break his word. He appeared "in a storm of Light" (Ovid 391), and Semele, "too feeble to engage/ The lightning's flashes and the thunder's rage,/ Consumed amid the glories she desired,/ And in the terrible embrace expired" (392-95).

The Judeo-Christian tradition has its own examples: there is Adam, who "dared to eat a peach," as Eliot might say, who dared to directly obtain Absolute Knowledge, and the rest is, quite literally, the history of fallen man; there is Moses perceiving God as a burning bush; there is Lot's wife presuming to look upon forbidden truth and being turned to salt. Only some of the more famous lessons in indirection, they teach us that Absolute Truth lies beyond the capacities of mortal man. Truth can only be "approached" in this life, and approached only "gradually" and "circuitously." Modernists and postmodernists teach much the same thing: truth, if such a thing exists at all, is elusive, ephemeral, fleeting. As we shall see, this is a major theme and dominant concern of William Faulkner: he too recognized that "no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you" (FIU 273).

But the lesson of indirection is not only a metaphysical one; it applies to the very nature of narrative itself. It is the life blood of poetic language,"inexpressibility topoi," periphrases, and all manner of tropes and metaphors. The aesthetic was articulated in the thirteenth century by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in words prefiguring those of Emily Dickinson, Stephane Mallarme, Victor Shklovsky, and William Faulkner:

> To prolong the work you must avoid naming things by their names. Use other designations; reveal not a thing entirely but suggest it by hints; nor let your words course through your subject but rather take a long and circuitous route around what you were going to say briefly. (Curtius 277)

And in 1759, Laurence Sterne understood that indirection was fundamental to active reader-response:

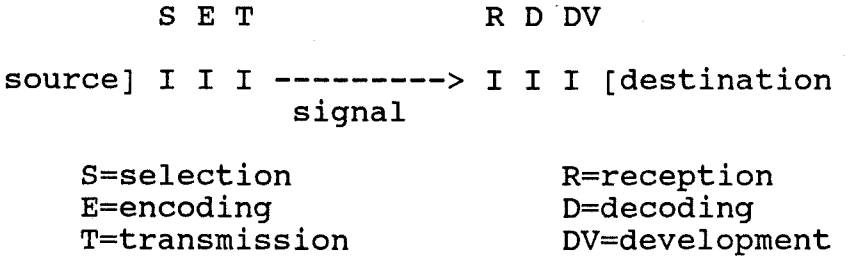
> The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.
>
> For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own. (Tristram Shandy II,XI,83)

In fact, the rise of the novel and modern literatures is replete with implicit as well as explicit warnings that "Truth" or "Knowledge" is relative, subjective, uncertain, communication always difficult and faulty, and best attempted both obliquely and with the full cooperation and attention of all parties concerned. Balzac gives us Balthazar and Seraphita, two characters whose pursuits of Truth result in paralysis and death for one, insanity for

the other. Melville gives us Ahab who becomes progressively manic as he closes with the Absolute, and upon the apprehension of his quarry suffers a fate as final as Semele's. There is Thomas Mann's Aschenbach--and Conrad's Kurtz in his heart of darkness.

Baudelaire shows us how awkwardly his albatross "flounders upon the deck" when "torn from his native space." Mallarme, whom we shall discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Three, calls for intimation and evocation, "le tonnerre muet epars au feuillage: non le bois intrinseque et dense des arbres" (Oeuvres 276). Writers and critics from Flaubert to the Russian Formalists to Pound, Eliot, and Stevens tell us that we must break out of tired old habitual ways of seeing: "received ideas" must be avoided; we must "make things strange" and "abstract" in order to "see anew." This is the context in which to understand William Faulkner. But we must also understand the role of indirection and defamiliarization in the process of reading.

As we read any written text we perform a series of semiotic and phenomenological functions. I.A. Richard's model serves as a useful introduction:



The author (source) selects the message (concept) he wants to communicate, translates that message into an encoded semiotic form, and transmits that signal via the written text; the reader receives a percept from the text and must decode or translate that percept into an appropriate concept which is then located in the larger context of previously received messages. If the text is non-fiction, we are engaged in a process of perception and objectification: we may be able to verify our reading in the referential world. But if we are dealing with a fictional text, we must ideate, i.e., bring into "existence" something that has no referential reality. As Wolfgang Iser states, "perception requires the actual presence of the object, whereas ideation depends upon its absence or nonexistence" (Act 137). And the production of a literary creation depends upon the process of ideation.

Obviously, one reader's ideation of a sign may not coincide exactly with the author's original one--nor, for that matter, with those of other readers of the same text or even with his own at subsequent readings. Add the play of paradigms (synonyms, antonyms, inflected forms,i.e., words on the vertical axis outside the particular utterance) and syntagms (related words on the horizontal axis within the utterance), the deconstructive play of differance and the Derridean trace, and we find ourselves in what appears to be a leaky boat indeed on the rocky

seas of ambiguity. But what might seem to be a source of frustration and even linguistic nihilism is actually the key to the creation of meaning: in fact, the recent critical focus on the reader and reader-response has taught us that meaning is not simply an intrinsic, determinate, and hence static aspect of the text itself, but an "event" (Fish), a "dynamic happening" (Act 22). And it is just those areas of ambiguity that make this "dynamic interaction between text and reader" (Act 107) both possible and necessary. Indeed, we may say that,to a reasonable extent, the greater the indeterminacy and ambiguity, the more active the reader participation, and, consequently, the more meaningful and pleasurable the experience of re-creation.

In his Psychoanalytical Explorations in Art, Ernst Kris notes that "ambiguity is not a disease of language, but an aspect of its life process--a necessary consequence of its adaptability to varied contexts" (245). Kris sees linguistic signs (which he calls "symbols") as "overdetermined, loaded down with a variety of meanings" (254), and therefore creatively provocative. But there must be some measure of control in the reading process; otherwise the aesthetic re-creation may become "simply a form of 'recreation,' a game like finding shapes in the clouds and stars" (260).

Wolfgang Iser, perhaps the leading theorist of the

"Constance school" of reception theory, argues that the "verbal aspect [of the text] guides the reaction and keeps it from being arbitrary" (Act 21). Noting that literary signs are by nature only self-referential, Iser points out that

> if iconic signs do denote anything at all, it is certainly not the qualities of a given object, for there is no given object except for the sign itself. What is designated is the condition of conception and perception which enable the observer to construct the object intended by the signs. . . . The iconic signs of literature constitute an organization of signifiers which do not serve to designate a signified object, but instead designate instructions for the production of the signified. (Act 65)

Furthermore, the bipolar nature of the text serves to prevent purely capricious readings. Since "the work itself cannot be identical with the text [the artistic pole] or with the concretization [the aesthetic pole], but must be situated somewhere in between" (Act 21), the resulting dialectic tension between the poles keeps the reading honest. As the reader receives, concretizes, and creates under the guidance of the text,i.e., under "the intersubjectively verifiable instructions for meaning production" (Act 25), the dialectical process yields its tertium quid: the aesthetically meaningful artistic work.

But there is yet another interchange in the phenomenology of reading: what Iser calls "the dialectic of protension and retention" (Act 112). As we proceed through a text, decoded messages pass into short- and long-term memories, thereby making room for new data. Each new

signal is decoded and evaluated in terms of the stored context, and that context is, in turn, being continuously altered to assimilate new information. These changes in the data base effect our expectations of messages to come, and when these expectations are thwarted by a surprising or unexpected occurrence, we are forced to reformulate and reevaluate both the expectation and the stored context. Because of this "continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories. . . , the aesthetic object is constantly being structured and restructured" (Act 111-12).

As we read, we apprehend the text through "gestalt groupings," projections based upon our interactions with the objectively-interconnected (or potentially so) textual signs (Act 119-20). These gestalten give us the sense of participating in the text: "we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event" (Act 129). The intensity of this experience is directly proportionate to the intensity of our involvement in the reading process; a vivid, palpable re-creation is dependent upon a competent and active reading.

In The Cognition of The Literary Work of Art, Roman Ingarden writes:

> Every reading,of course,is an activity consciously undertaken by the reader and not a mere experience or reception of something. Nevertheless, in many cases the whole effort of the reader consists

> in thinking the meanings of sentences he reads without making the meanings into objects and in remaining, so to speak, in the sphere of meaning. There is no intellectual attempt to progress from the sentences read to the objects appropriate to them and projected by them. Of course, these objects are always an automatic intentional projection of the sentence meanings. In purely passive reading, however, one does not attempt to apprehend them or, in particular, to constitute them synthetically. Consequently, in passive reading there is no kind of intercourse with the fictional objects. (37-8)

Ingarden calls for "special acts of consciousness," active readings which can alchemize the word and transform what he refers to as "literary objects." "Such objects are, to be sure, purely intentional or, if we prefer, 'fictive'; but, precisely as a result of the particular activity of the creative acts producing them, they attain the character of an independent reality" (40).

The kind of active reading that can produce an "independent reality" is truly a dynamic interaction, a dialogue requiring the cooperation and encouragement of both parties. The reader must be "competent," for as Jonathan Culler has noted, "To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a <u>tabula rasa</u> and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for" (113-14). That understanding must involve the ability to deal effectively with at least five levels of interpretive strategies:

> (1) Strategies of perception--recover the propositional aspects, semantic and syntactic structures, ambiguities etc.;

> (2) Strategies of comprehension--synthesize perceived data;
>
> (3) Strategies of interpretation--recover authorial intention;
>
> (4) Strategies of significance--relate the work to a larger context (literary and extra-literary);
>
> (5) Metastrategies--determine which of the previous four are appropriate for a given situation.
>
> (Kintgen 14-15)

But even granting reader competence, we still must have a text that encourages or activates the active reading. Many theorists agree that we become more engaged with a given text when allowed the freedom to interpret and re-create the aesthetic experience in ways commensurate with our individual needs, desires, obsessions, etc. We take pleasure in the experience and see it as significant to the extent that it puts us in contact with new, perhaps even subconscious aspects of our personalities and satisfies (or partially so) our conscious and unconscious needs (see Holland, Iser,and Lesser). Consequently, we learn as much about ourselves as about the text. Wolfgang Iser points out that "this process is all the more effective if what we are supposed to experience is not explicitly stated but has to be inferred" ("Indeterminacy" 44). Hence, indeterminacy is "the fundamental precondition for reader participation" ("Indeterminacy" 14).

One source of indeterminacy is, as noted above, the

non-referential nature of the literary text. As Iser points out,

> If a literary text presents no real objects, it nevertheless establishes its reality by the reader's participation and by the reader's response. The reader, however, cannot refer to any definite object or independent facts in order to judge whether the text has presented its subject rightly or wrongly. This possibility of verification that all expository texts offer is, precisely, denied by the literary text. At this point there arises a certain amount of indeterminacy which is peculiar to all literary texts, for they permit no referral to any identical real-life situation. ("Indeterminacy" 8)

We could call these "intrinsic" indeterminacies: they are inherent in both the semiotic and fictive natures of literary texts. But many indeterminacies could be described as "extrinsic": they enter the text (both accidentally and deliberately) through the author's narrative and stylistic choices. These extrinsic indeterminacies may be conscious or unconscious on the writer's part--the effect upon the reader is the same: such indeterminacies generate a multi-faceted textual surface over which the reader's re-creative imagination is not only invited but compelled to play. It is at this point that defamiliarization performs its significant role in the reading process.

In their Psychology of the Arts, Hans and Shulamith Kreitler write that "remoteness from the habitual may be a means for drawing attention to peculiarities of language or content and may thus facilitate experience" (224). In this generality, the Kreitlers are alluding to the concept of defamiliarization as Shklovsky articulated it in his

seminal essay "Art as Technique":

> If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time and compares that with his feeling at performing the action for the ten thousandth time, he will agree with us. Such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed. (11)

But what may be a kind of social lubricant easing the daily turning gears, can become a creative oil slick causing the wheels of the re-creative processes to spin idly. As we read habitually we fail to see, fail to create; instead we simply respond formulaically to cliches or received ideas. In an Orwellian sense, we are adopting hand-me-down thought patterns and relinquishing intellectual sovereignty; in a semiological sense we are responding to what Walker Percy has recently called a "devaluation" of the sign (105). Percy's existential prescription calls for ordeal, the "recovery" of the signified through catastrophe. But he acknowledges the poetic recovery, and even cites Shklovsky as one "most acutely aware" of the ways "a poet can wrench signifier out of context and exhibit it in all its queerness and splendor" (106). As Shklovsky writes,

> art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone <u>stony</u>. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make

> objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (12)

We have become so inured to the devaluated sign that often we are not aware of our abilities--and even obligations--to create, to "make the stone stony" through our ideation of the sign. Defamiliarization "reminds" us, one, by forcing us to deal with strange new percepts, and, two, by calling attention to the medium of expression itself. Even though he disagrees with some of the theories underlying Shklovsky's argument, Wolfgang Iser recognizes defamiliarization's essential function in the phenomenology of reading:

> The whole process of comprehension is set in motion by the need to familiarize the unfamiliar . . . . In short, the reader will only begin to search for (and so actualize) the meaning if he does not know it, and so it is the unknown factors in the text that set him off on his quest. (Act 43)

This is exactly the way Faulkner's narratives engage us. The strangeness of his language forces us to work--reading Faulkner is seldom easy--and these techniques call attention to themselves, making us aware of the verbal textures and play of language, as well as the fictionality of the fiction itself. His language reaches out and grabs us, compelling our attention and participation as the only alternative to closing the cover. As a conscious artist, he may truly have only been trying "to crowd and cram everything, all experience, into each paragraph, to get

the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience, of all the recaptured light rays into each paragraph. That's why it's clumsy and hard to read. It's not that we deliberately tried to make it clumsy, we just couldn't help it" (LIG 107). But he was also a writer who believed that "disaster is good for man" (108), and who understood that "it takes two to make the book" (116). Furthermore, many of his works are explicitly concerned with the devaluation of the sign and the need for a revaluation in the recreative mind of the reader. Early in his career, Faulkner realized "the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words," the way "[i]deas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead" (Mosquitoes 186). He understood that "words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (AILD 163). But he also understood that language was the writer's instrument, albeit "the damndest clumsiest frailest awkwardest tool he could have been given" (Blotner 1305), and that a writer "must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better" (LIG 248). So he uses language, in good Symbolist fashion, to approximate the evocative expressivity of music, and to make the reader's perceptions prolonged and difficult. The techniques of defamiliarization engage the reader and enable the art to exist and endure, for William Faulkner was in many ways a much more deliberate and conscious

artist than he let on, and he believed that "the aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life" (LIG 253).

III

BACKGROUNDS AND INFLUENCES:

Southern Temperament and the Symbolist Connection

Just how did this young Mississippian come to such an extensive and characteristic practice of defamiliarization? Certainly the answer to such a question is complex and almost hopelessly overdetermined. Still, we may cite his Southern heritage as one line of influence. W.J. Cash has noted that one manifestation of "the rising flood of romanticism" in the ante-bellum South was a "fondness for rhetoric": "A gorgeous, primitive art, addressed to the autonomic system and not to the encephalon" (53); Southern rhetoric "every day became less and less a form of speech strictly and more and more a direct instrument of emotion, like music" (82). Waldo W. Braden's description of Southern oratory as "ornate, grandiloquent, and myth-laden" (ix) could clearly apply to Faulkner's style as well. Both forms of discourse are characteristically opaque: language is foregrounded, implying that meaning resides more in the use of language itself, in the sounds and rhythms and connotations, rather than in some objective referents behind the flow of words. Or, to put it formalistically, the importance lies not in the tale as much as in the telling, not in the <u>fabula</u> as much as in

the sujet.

But speech and writing are not the only forms of language: ritual, manners, and formalized codes of behavior speak as eloquently as words; and perhaps nowhere in America has this form of indirect discourse been as prominent as in the South. John T. Matthews points out that

> unlike some modern novelists, Faulkner rarely troubles his books with plots about writing fiction . . . .. But the novels regularly center their crises on the capacity or failure of characters to interpret, explain, master--in a word, to articulate--the common predicaments of loss, change, or desire. It is not only that storytelling is like hunting, but that hunting--like trade, or games, or rituals--is a kind of language. (17)

In the South, these complex social "languages" provided means of self-definition, which invariably was in terms of honor or reputation, i.e., one's standing in relation to the community at large. Ritualistic codes of behavior served to identify who did and who did not belong to that community. These "languages" may be compared to the Calvinist notion of outward signs of inward grace: they signified the elect.

Though certainly not monolithic, William Faulkner's South had long been a community (or communities) under seige: social, political, and economic pressures; war; reconstruction; urbanization; industrialization; assimilation--all threatened the autonomy, identity, and very life of much of the region. The indirect languages of manners

and rituals served as passwords, admitting insiders while identifying and alienating strangers. In his recent work on the political culture of the South, Kenneth S. Greenberg relates the story of a duel fought in 1880 between the son of Virginia's governor and a man who had insulted both his father and Jefferson Davis. As one observer noted in a letter to the ex-Confederate President,

> "Just before the order was given to fire, Col. Smith took his cane which you had given him . . . and suspended it to an overhanging limb. . . . When his adversary fell, he took down the cane, upon which your name was engraved, and putting it to his lips bowed to his adversary--The scene to those who understood it was very touching." (26)

The telling phrase here is the restrictive clause: "to those who understood it"; for to understand was to belong.

We may also read the code duello itself as a kind of ritualistic social language, or "social drama" as Greenberg calls it: "The participants in a social drama recognize that there has been a significant breach in their relations, but their participation in the performance allows them publicly to reaffirm their unity by engaging in ritual forms of behavior that embody common ideals" (23). Bertram Wyatt-Brown points out that these common ideals centered around the "encoded system" of honor, or public opinion, and were best affirmed indirectly: "Honor . . . was . . .a matter of interchanges between the individual and the community to which he or she belonged. Meaning was imparted not with words alone, but

in courtesies, rituals, and even deeds of personal and collective violence" (vii-viii). According to the code, the challenge itself was a sign of social equality, and the refusal to accept a challenge, like the refusal to drink or gamble, was a social affront, clearly implying that the challenged party did not consider the challenger "worthy of recognition in an affair of honor" (Greenberg 29). Consequently, one could refuse the challenge of a social "inferior" and not only retain but confirm one's honor; and challenges from strangers of an "undetermined position in the social structure" (35) were often refused or delayed until the challenger's social status became clarified.

The code duello is like the tip of an iceberg: for "those who understood," it evoked an entire ethos that remained unseen and unsaid yet ever-present beneath the surface. It serves as a particularly apt paradigm in Faulkner's case because of its role both in the life and death of his great-grandfather and in the way that aspect of family history appears in the fabula of Yoknapatawpha County. But for our immediate purposes, the duel exemplifies the way a close tribal society defines its behavior and boundaries, the way it uses indirect languages to communicate much more than what is superficially apparent. We could, for instance, examine hunting or gambling or drinking or saying "m'am" and arrive at similar con-

clusions. These social languages are the litmus tests of community membership.

In short, Southerners are acculturated to be anything but literal readers; the extra-literary influences of Faulkner's South insured a fertile ground receptive to the nuances of suggestion, intimation, and indirection. In his particular case, this regional temperament surely helped shape and reinforce his personal one, and given Faulkner's biography, we might even venture a psycho-linguistic explanation for his use of defamiliarization: if language reflects who and what we are, indirection seems the appropriate rhetorical strategy for a writer almost obsessed with obscuring the truth about himself; whose youth was largely spent hiding behind masks and veils of fictions, innuendo, and misdirection; whose mature career was still characterized by evasiveness and misinformation about his motives, influences, and personal life.

But if Faulkner came by defamiliarization "honestly," he was also greatly influenced by the literature he read as a young aspiring writer. Many tributaries fed the Yoknapatawpha River, and one important stream of influence had its source a continent away, in cultures that while foreign and exotic, nevertheless were as fluent as the South in the indirect languages of ritual and manners. In order to locate the purely literary sources of Faulkner's brand of ostranenie, we must look to the fiction and

poetry of nineteenth-century Russia and France.

Most likely the young Mississippian did not read Shklovsky, but he did read one of Shklovsky's models: Leo Tolstoy. Asked in a Japanese interview (1955) to describe his ideal woman, Faulkner replied:

> Well,I couldn't describe her by color of hair, color of eyes, because once she is described, then somehow she vanishes. That the ideal woman which is in every man's mind is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand. Just like the most beautiful description of anyone, a woman, since we are speaking of women, is by understatement. Remember, all Tolstoy said about Anna Karenina was that she was beautiful and could see in the dark like a cat. That's all he ever said to describe her. And every man has a different idea of what's beautiful. And it's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree. (LIG 127-8)

If we check on Faulkner's memory, we find that it is accurate in spirit if not in detail; Tolstoy did say a bit more than that. However, it is significant that the introduction of Anna is presented largely in terms of her effect upon Vronsky:

> The trained insight of a Society man enabled Vronsky with a single glance to decide that she belonged to the best Society. He apologized for being in her way and was about to enter the carriage, but felt compelled to have another look at her, not because she was very beautiful nor because of the elegance and modest grace of her whole figure, but because he saw in her sweet face as she passed him something specially tender and kind. When he looked round she too turned her head. Her bright grey eyes which seemed dark because of their black lashes rested for a moment on his face as if recognizing him, and then turned to the passing crowd evidently in search of some one. In that short look Vronsky had time to notice the subdued animation that enlivened her face and seemed to flutter between her bright eyes and a scarcely perceptible smile which curved her rosy lips. It was as if an excess of vitality so

> filled her whole being that it betrayed itself against her will, now in her smile, now in the light of her eyes. She deliberately tried to extinguish that light in her eyes, but it shone despite of her in her faint smile. (56)

The passage begins in Tolstoyan omniscience ("The trained insight of a Society man") but quickly shifts into indirect free style, presenting the narrative consciousness of Vronsky. Tolstoy's use of qualifiers ("he saw," "seemed," "seemed to," "It was as if") renders the objective status of the description somewhat problematic, and indicates that we are witnessing a subjective reaction, an emotional effect. We cannot be sure whether Anna's "bright eyes" and "rosy lips" exist at all except in the impressions of the young soldier. Moreover, we are asked implicitly to re-create the kind of woman who would have such effects upon us.

Faulkner's library also contained a copy of War and Peace, the novel Shklovsky cites frequently for examples of ostranenie, particularly the theater scene in which Natasha "sees anew" by refusing to accept the conventions of the stage:

> In the second act there was scenery representing tombstones, and there was a round hole in the canvass to represent the moon, shades were raised over the footlights, and from horns and contrabass came deep notes while mant paople appeared from right and left wearing black cloaks and holding things like daggers in their hands. They began waving their arms. Then some other people ran in and began dragging away the maiden who had been in white and was now in light blue. They did not drag her away at once, but sang with her for a long time and then at last dragged her off, and behind the scenes something metallic was

> struck three times and everyone knelt down and sang a prayer. All these things were repeatedly interrupted by the enthusiastic shouts of the audience. (622)

The reader of Faulkner should instantly be reminded of the opening of The Sound and the Fury: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. . . . They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit," etc. (1). While clearly there is a vast difference between the characters of Natasha Rostova and Benjy Compson, the authors' techniques of defamiliarizing the familiar are strikingly comparable.

But perhaps even more important than Tolstoy were the poets who influenced and helped shape a young and aspiring Mississippi poet who would, in fact, become a major modern novelist. Of particular interest here are the French Symbolists, for they seem to have been in his artistic imagination from early on, and their influence pervades much of his later work.

On 6 August 1919, The New Republic printed the first published literary work of William Faulkner: "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faun," a poem adapted from the masterful eclogue by the French Symbolist Stephane Mallarme. Over the next ten months Faulkner published thirteen poems in The Mississippian: a revised version of the Mallarme poem, four translations and adaptations from Paul Verlaine, and eight

original poems clearly bearing the Symbolist stamp. It was a period of intense literary apprenticeship encouraged by his friend, mentor, and personal lending library, Phil Stone, as well as by his Ole Miss French studies. Much has been written about this period in Faulkner's development, about his decadent, dilettantish persona, and about the pervasive influence of the Symbolists on all of his later verse; but not enough attention seems to have been paid to the remarkable imprint left on the poete manque, to the manifestations of this Symbolist apprenticeship in the body of prose fiction comprising Faulkner's major literary contribution. An examination of defamiliarization in Faulkner must begin with the Symbolist influence, to see just how their aesthetics thrive and evolve when transplanted from the exotic realm of French poesie to Faulkner's "own little postage stamp of native soil" (LIG 255).

Any discussion of literary influence is tricky at best and even more so when dealing with a writer as evasive and noncommittal as William Faulkner. We know that Stone introduced him to the works of Verlaine, Laforgue, Mallarme, and others, and we know that he was reading the Symbolists long after his initial apprenticeship was over--Faulkner called Verlaine and Laforgue "old friends" (as he also called Tolstoy) he came back to again and again (LIG 217). We also have evidence that he read Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature (Kreiswirth

430), a work containing translations of some poems by Verlaine and Mallarme (some very close to Faulkner's own translations) as well as commentary on the lives and theories of these poets. But Faulkner never wrote or said anything about the nature or extent of his Symbolist debt. Instead we have a kind of universal mea culpa, honest no doubt, yet too broad to be of any tangible consequence:

> A writer is completely rapacious, he has no morals whatsoever, he will steal from any source. He's so busy stealing and using it that he himself probably never knows where he gets what he uses . . . . he is influenced by every word he ever read, I think, every sound he ever heard, every sense he ever experienced: and he is so busy writing that he hasn't time to stop and say, 'Now, where did I steal this from?' But he did steal it somewhere. (LIG 128)

So we must come back to his reading and to his adaptations and translations (our approximation of a "smoking gun"). Through Symons and the poems themselves Faulkner had full access to the theories and practices of Symbolist aesthetics, the lyrical, elaborate, often synaesthetic verbal imagery designed to evoke and suggest rather than directly state, to capture the mystery and evanescence of experience in language seeking the purity and expressiveness of music. He was a good student. We can see these ideas incorporated in his novelistic style and vision, providing those elements H.E. Richardson refers to in calling Faulkner " a regional writer with a difference" (188). This difference permeates his major work, manifesting itself not only in language but also in form,

content, and theme.

We can examine aspects of Symbolism in Faulkner's translation of Paul Verlaine's "Clair de Lune" that appeared 3 March 1920, in The Mississippian:

> Your soul is a lovely garden, and go
> There masque and bergamasque charmingly,
> Playing the lute and dancing and also
> Sad beneath their disguising fanchise [sic].
>
> All are singing in a minor key
> Of conqueror love and life opportune,
> Yet seem to doubt their joyous revelry
> As their song melts in the light of the moon.
>
> In the calm moonlight, so lovely fair
> That makes the birds dream in slender trees,
> While fountains dream among the statues there;
> Slim fountains sob in silver ecstasies.
> (Early Prose 58)

First of all, Verlaine equates soulscape with landscape, a technique Faulkner will adapt later in what Andre Bleikasten calls "the reversible metaphor girl=tree." This coupling appears in The Marble Faun, The Marionettes (the Symbolist dream-play that, as Noel Polk points out [xii], follows the general outline of "Clair de Lune"), Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and Sartoris. It reaches its apotheosis in The Sound and the Fury in which Caddy's equation and association with trees acts as a barometer of her maturation in the mind of her idiot brother Benjy. The nymph-like Caddy is also associated with water, fire, wind, and moonlight. Bleikasten explains that "insofar as she must remain the ambiguous and evasive object of desire and memory, she can be approached and apprehended only in

oblique ways. Caddy cannot be described; she can only be circumscribed, conjured up through the suggestive powers of metaphor and metonymy" (217-18 n. 45). This is precisely the Symbolist method.

Also in "Clair de Lune" we see the Symbolist preoccupation with music and the musicality of language. The song ostensibly masking the sadness and melancholy is in a "minor key," the "sad" key of poignantly evocative flatted thirds, the key associated with ballads and blues (the minor third and dominant seventh tones being called "blue notes"). The song is imitated by the rhythm and rhyme, the alliteration, and the onomatopoeic repetition of "l" and "o" sounds throughout the poem. (The "l" sounds are even more prominent in the definite articles and plural possessives of Verlaine's French.) It is a lyrical, purely Symbolist poem in which complementary and contradictory elements blend as the song "melts" synaesthetically into the moonlight. The merging and interplay of the senses attempts to express a unity, a oneness of experience that is somehow greater than the simple accumulation of sensory data. It is a way of defamiliarizing language, giving it the fluidity and suggestive range of music. Such language is typical of Faulkner's poetry, and it is characteristic of his prose as well.

"The Hill," a prose sketch from 1922, previews the way Faulkner would use his Symbolist education in works to

come. In his massive biography, Joseph Blotner calls this short piece "an important transition between the poetry behind and the fiction ahead." It is an experiment in prose, a description of his native landscape that reveals "in an early and elemental form the central fact about his style as a fiction writer: he thought and wrote in poetic terms within a realistic framework which provided sufficient room for Symbolist techniques" (332). Notice the alliteration, assonance, and lyrical rhythm of the prose:

> From the hilltop the valley was a motionless mosaic of tree and house; from the hilltop were to be seen no cluttered barren lots sodden with spring rain and churned and torn by hoof of horse and cattle, no piles of winter ashes and rusting tin cans, no dingy hoardings covered with the tattered insanities of posted salacities and advertisements. There was no suggestion of striving, of whipped vanities, of ambition and lusts, of the drying spittle of religious controversy; he could not see that the sonorous simplicity of the court house columns was discolored and stained with casual tobacco. In the valley there was no movement save the thin spiraling of smoke and the heart-tightening grace of the poplars, no sound save the measured faint reverberation of an anvil.
> (Early Prose 91)

The highly sensuous language achieves a kind of impasto, a layering effect of sensory information. Faulkner plays with sounds and meanings (e.g., "sonorous") and uses words as much for sound as for meaning. In the final paragraph Faulkner aims for a verbal and musical coda, invoking the nymphs and fauns of Verlaine and Mallarme: "The sun plunged silently into the liquid green of the west [cf., "As their song melts in the light of the moon."] and the valley was abruptly in shadow. . . Here, in the dusk,

nymphs and fauns might riot to a shrilling of thin pipes, to a shivering and hissing of cymbals in a sharp volcanic abasement beneath a tall icy star" (92).

In Sartoris, the first of the Yoknapatawpha novels, we find the following passage, typically Faulknerian, describing a group of Negroes gathered ritualistically at a sorghum mill. The lyrical, Symbolistic prose contains dark echoes of "Clair de Lune" as well as the opening lines of Verlaine's "A Clymene" ("Mystical chords / Songs without words" [Early Prose 61, Faulkner's translation]) :

> old men and women sitting on crackling cushions of cane about the blaze which one of their number fed with pressed stalks until its incense-laden fury swirled licking at the boughs overhead, making more golden still the twinkling golden leaves; and young men and girls, and children squatting still as animals, staring into the fire. Sometimes they sang--quavering, wordless chords in which plaintive minors blent with mellow bass in immemorial and sad suspense, their grave dark faces bent to the flames and with no motion of lips. (227)

In Sanctuary, Horace Benbow examines a photograph of his stepdaughter, and his senses fuse synaesthetically as the images of Little Belle and Temple Drake blend into one nauseating horror:

> Communicated to the cardboard by some quality of the light or perhaps by some infinitesimal movement of his hands, his own breathing, the face appeared to breathe in his palms in a shallow bath of highlight, beneath the slow, smokelike tongues of invisible honeysuckle. Almost palpable enough to be seen, the scent filled the room and the small face seemed to swoon in a voluptuous languor, blurring still more, fading, leaving upon his eye a soft and fading aftermath of invitation and voluptuous promise and secret affirmation like a scent itself.
>
> Then he knew what the sensation in his stomach

> meant . . . he gave over and plunged forward and struck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs. (215-16)

Such synaesthesia is characteristic of Faulkner's portrayals of innocents and idiots. Characters like Vardaman Bundren, Benjy Compson, and Ike Snopes confront experience directly, without the mediating influence of superego or social consciousness. In As I Lay Dying, Vardaman "can hear the bed and [his mother's] face" and "smell the life running up from under [his] hands" (49-50). Benjy, in The Sound and the Fury, can "smell the bright cold" (5) and hear trees and grass "buzzing" (45). Ike Snopes of The Hamlet is able to "smell the waking instant" as his cow arises and can almost "see her. . .the warm reek of urgent milk a cohered shape amid the fluid and abstract earth" (180).

This profuse synaesthesia, like the blending of past and present, is an attempt to describe the indescribable, to grasp the synchronic experience in a diachronic medium--it is one of the many tools Faulkner uses in shaping his overall literary plan: "to put the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin" (FIU 84). In Light in August he goes even further, experimenting with "pinpoint" synaesthetic forms by compressing such experiences into new coinages and compound words: "pinkwomansmelling" (114) "dryscented" (140), "thwartfacecurled" (164), "hardsmelling" (177), "symbolwords" (265) that try to reduce and

render experience as precisely as possible. Such compounds either proved too restrictive or too awkward, for Faulkner uses them sparingly in his other works. Their proliferation in Light in August represents a stage in his continuous experimentation with language, a practice that was certainly encouraged by the Symbolists' example.

One experiment that proved more fruitful was the use of extravagant facial imagery, particularly ocular imagery reminiscent of Surrealism (a movement greatly influenced by the works of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarme). In Sanctuary, the dehumanized Popeye (Pop-eye) has eyes that "looked like rubber knobs" (5), "round and soft as those prehensile tips on a child's toy arrows" (305), and Temple appropriately has eyes "like two holes burned with a cigar" (89). In Absalom, Absalom! Thomas Sutpen's eyes "looked like pieces of a broken plate" (51), recalling his fractured dynastic ambitions; in The Unvanquished, Ringo's eyes are "like two eggs" (66); Eula Varner of The Hamlet has a mouth resembling a "ripe peach" (127)--the catalogue goes on and on. These elaborate similes give the reader an effect, an impression, rather than a realistic description; and, while these are extreme examples, it must be remembered that Symbolism seeks not to describe but to suggest and evoke sensations in the reader's mind comparable to direct experience. Within this aesthetic is a wide spectrum ranging from the delicate, subtle images of

Verlaine to the more startling ones of another "old friend," Jules Laforgue. Notice the similarity between Faulkner's similes and those found in the first three quatrains of "Pierrots":

> It's, on a stiff neck emerging thus
> From similarly starched lace,
> A callow under cold-cream face
> Like hydrocephalic asparagus.
>
> The eyes are drowned in opium
> Of universal clemency,
> The mouth of a clown bewitches
> Like a peculiar geranium.
>
> A mouth which goes from an unplugged hole
> Of refrigerated levity,
> To that winged transcendental aisle
> And vain, the Gioconda's smile. (83)

(A direct link between Laforgue's poetic images and Faulkner's novelistic ones can be found in a 1921 Faulkner poem bearing the lengthy, Laforguian title "Pierrot, Sitting Beside the Body of Columbine, suddenly Sees Himself in a Mirror": "And he dropped his eyes to the couch between him and the mirror / Like two worn pennies." [Sensibar 231 n. 8].)

But Faulkner adapted much more than the poetic language of the Symbolists. Through Verlaine and Laforgue he was acquainted with the characters from the commedia dell'arte, characters such as Pantaloon, used as an ironic commentary on racial stereotyping in "Pantaloon in Black," and, of course, Pierrot himself who appears in various guises throughout Faulkner's early works and in some of his later fiction. In The Origins of Faulkner's Art,

Judith Sensibar traces the evolution of Pierrot and the "pierrotique mask" through The Lilacs, The Marble Faun, The Marionettes, and Visions in Spring. She also suggests certain affinities--introspection, narcissism, and nympholepsy--that link Pierrot to Horace Benbow and Quentin Compson. For the most part, however, Sensibar is concerned with Pierrot as he was developed in Faulkner's poetry, and the connections with Verlaine and Laforgue are rather distant (20, 30, 76, 161-63).

One Symbolist subject who appears quite substantially in Yoknapatawpha County is the faun of Verlaine and Mallarme. In fact, Verlaine's eight line poem, "Le Faune," could very well serve as an epigraph to The Sound and the Fury, foreshadowing the faun-like Benjy howling on the golf course as well as the overall theme of decay:

> An aged faun of old red clay
> Laughs from a grassy bowling green,
> Foretelling doubtless some decay
> Of mortal moments so serene
>
> That lead us lightly on our way
> (Love's piteous pilgrims have we been!)
> To this last hour that runs away
> Dancing to the tambourine. (Symons 391)

But Benjy is even more like the faun of Mallarme's eclogue: subrational, not fully human, driven to action by bestial instincts, and unable to distinguish fantasy, memory, or dream from reality. Mallarme's faun reflects upon an erotic adventure of the previous afternoon. He is perplexed: it may have been only a dream. Experimenting

with point of view, Mallarme has his subject relive the events in three present-tense recollections (one ostensibly narrated by the setting) signaled by the use of italics. Judith Sensibar has pointed out that these two formal features, the experimentation with and the typographical signalling of both time and point of view shifts, are the very features characterizing the structure of The Sound and the Fury (71).

In his adventure, the faun pursues groups of nymphs; some flee, but two are caught and carried away to a bed of roses. The morning after he ponders their reality, wondering if they weren't only roses metamorphosed by his imagination. Like Pan, he is left only with flowers as the tangible vestige of his quest; but his fertile imagination has the power to transport him once more out of reality, and as he sees Venus appear above Mt. Etna, the faun fancies possessing the ultimate nymph.

In The Sound and the Fury, Benjy pursues the young children who flee in fear. Like the faun he does not understand the nature of his "adventure," and like the faun is left with only a flower, the jimson weed, as an ironic symbol of his ironic and radical "deflowering." In The Hamlet, Faulkner describes Labove as having "legs haired-over like those of a faun" (118). The teacher lustily pursues his bovine nymph, Eula, his "Venus," and is rewarded with an elbow to the chin. Another faun in the

novel proves more successful.

On 12 May 1920, a parody of Faulkner's "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faun" and "Une Ballade des Femmes Perdue" appeared in The Mississippian. Entitled "Une Ballade d'une Vache Perdue," this parody inspired Faulkner's short story "Afternoon of a Cow," which evolved into Ike Snopes' romance. Similarities between Ike's story and Mallarme's suggest the possibility that Faulkner returned to this early influence, for the romantic escapade with the cow expands the short story by adding elements of the faun/-nymph adventure.(See also The Marble Faun.) Let us consider one "memory" from Mallarme's poem:

> 'My eye, piercing the reeds, shot at each immortal
> 'Neck, which drowned its burning in the wave
> 'With a cry of rage to the forest sky;
> 'And the splendid bath of their hair disappears
> 'In the shimmer and shuddering, oh diamonds!
> 'I run, when, there at my feet, enlaced, lie
> '(Hurt by the languor they taste to be two)
> 'Girls sleeping amid their own casual arms;
> 'Them I seize, and not disentangling them, fly
> 'To this thicket, hated by the frivolous shade,
> 'Of roses drying up their scent in the sun
> 'Where our delight may be like the day sun-consumed.'
> (Poems 113)

And compare this passage with one from The Hamlet in which Ike waits for his truly bovine nymph:

> he would lie drenched in the wet grass, serene and one and indivisible in joy, listening to her approach. He would smell her; the whole mist reeked with her; the same malleate hands of mist which drew along his prone drenched flanks palped her pearl barrel too and shaped them both somewhere in immediate time, already married. He would not move. He would lie amid the waking instant of earth's teeming life, the motionless fronds of water-heavy grasses

> stooping into the mist before his face in black, fixed curves, along each parabola of which the marching drops held in minute magnification the dawn's rosy miniatures, smelling and even tasting the rich, slow, warmbarn-reek milk-reek, the flowing immemorial female, hearing the slow planting and the plopping suck of each deliberate cloven mud-spreading hoof, invisible still in the mist loud with its hymeneal choristers.
>
> Then he would see her. (165)

In his lyrical, synaesthetic language Faulkner elaborates on the opening of the faun's adventure. Ike peers through the wet grasses, his faun-like "flanks" already united with the cow by the sensual moistness that acts as a physical and spiritual binding fluid, a Mallarmean "splendid bath." All five senses are totally involved in a kind of orgiastic, linguistic fury of euphemism and double entendre; and at the same time, the elevated style creates an aesthetic distance, lifting the action above the baseness of perversion or bestiality. As Cleanth Brooks observes, "Ike Snopes, as idiot-faun, participates in the poetry of nature" (Toward Yoknapatawpha 25), and indeed this passage gives the reader a direct experience of that poetry. We, too, participate in the harmony of the scene, lured in by the evocative language before we fully grasp the nature of the action.

As the epithalamium continues, Ike presents his bride with the "abortive diadem," the garland of "ravished petals" (184) that disintegrates, becoming their flowered nuptial bed. (cf., Mallarme's "Je les ravis," referring to nymphs and also flowers.) The consummation itself is

depicted metaphorically, the "poetry of nature" providing the Symbolist indirection which keeps the union within certain aesthetic (as well as publishable) bounds: "It was as if the rain were actually seeking the two of them, . . . finding them finally in a bright intransegent [sic] fury. The pine-snoring wind dropped, then gathered; in an anticlimax of complete vacuum the shaggy pelt of earth became overblown like that of a receptive mare for the rampant crash, the furious brief fecundation which, still, rampant, seeded itself in flash and glare of noise and fury and then was gone, vanished; then the actual rain" (184). After the "storm," Ike drinks from "the reversed drinking of his drowned and faded image" in the spring. Like the faun's imagination, this "well of days . . . holds in tranquil paradox of suspended precipitation dawn, noon, and sunset; yesterday, today, and tomorrow" (186). In his idiot consciousness all experience is one indivisible and indecipherable present. Unlike the faun, Ike has no moments of lucidity to frustrate his dream-like existence; he lies beside the cow to peacefully sleep beneath the "fierce evening star" (Venus).

The kind of indirect language that can raise barnyard humor to one of Faulkner's few stories of successful love proves useful in dealing with other forms of perverse sexuality that are so common in his works. For example, Temple Drake's brutal rape is portrayed obliquely,

filtered through the consciousness of Horace Benbow. "She watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body" (216), we are told. Corn shucks and corn cobs are mentioned incidentally in the course of the novel, and hints are dropped that Popeye is somehow "not even a man" (224). But it is late in the novel, when the dark-stained cob is presented as evidence at the trial, that the reader fully understands the nature of what has transpired.

But Symbolist indirection, as noted in the previous discussion of Caddy Compson, is much more than a method of handling indelicate matters: the aesthetic of suggestion and intimation is at the very heart of Symbolism; it is the foundation upon which the superstructure of lyricism, symbolism, and synaesthesia is built. If any one statement could actually be called the Symbolist manifesto, it would certainly be Mallarme's famous dictum: "To name an object . . . is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem . . . to suggest it, there's the dream. The perfect use of this mystery constitutes the symbol: to evoke little by little a mood, or, inversely, to choose an object and to disengage from it a mood, through a series of decipherings" (Peschel 3). If Faulkner did not read Mallarme's Oeuvres Completes, he had a distillation of this aesthetic in Symons' book: "to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create" (196). It is a concept he took to heart. While it is considered very difficult to talk about

"a Faulkner aesthetic," his one statement that could be taken as such--the Japanese interview quoted earlier--sounds remarkably like Mallarme: "once she is described, then somehow she vanishes. . . the ideal woman . . . is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand. Just like the most beautiful description of anyone . . . is by understatement . . . it's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree" (LIG 127-28).

In The Wild Palms, we find a definitive example of the kind of indirection and suggestion so typical of Faulkner. Describing an alligator hunt, he maintains suspense and conveys the convict's uncertainty by the skillful use of intimation and the avoidance of direct statement:

> Then he felt the motion of the pirogue . . . and glancing downward saw projecting between his own arm and body from behind the Cajan's hand holding the knife, and glaring up again saw the flat thick spit of mud which in turn seemed, still immobile, to leap suddenly against his retinae in three--no, four--dimensions: volume, solidity, shape, and another: not fear but pure and intense speculation. (257-58)

It is three pages later before the beast is named.

Intimation places strenuous demands upon the reader, forcing participation in the creative processes. In Faulkner these demands are in parallel layers or strata, ranging from the word or phrase to the long, involved, often periodic sentences to the frequently unresolved conclusions, with the reader forced to decipher and

contribute each step of the way. It is this complex interaction that renders the novels so intimidating yet so ultimately rewarding. Irresolution and paradoxical suspensions of meaning tend to deny or subvert interpretation, but the result is the delegation of hermeneutic responsibility to its rightful province: the individual subjective consciousness. The elusive, subjective nature of truth could arguably be called the theme of Faulkner's major work, and it is certainly the central concern of Absalom, Absalom!, perhaps his greatest achievement. After hearing various and often contradictory versions of "truth," Quentin and Shreve must create their own, a poetic, mythic truth animated by their individual needs and obsessions. Ultimately, however, it is the reader who must sort out, evaluate, and create the final version--it is the perfect achievement of the Symbolists' desire for direct reader experience.

The Symbolist aesthetics discussed here are such an integral part of what is sometimes loosely termed "Faulknerian" that it is easy to think of these concepts and techniques as indigenous to Yoknapatawpha County. That is a tribute to the genius and "rapacity" of William Faulkner, to the ability of the "gentleman farmer" to nurture and assimilate that influence into his own unique voice. It may have been coincidence that the young writer discovered the French Symbolists at a receptive stage in

his development, but it is certainly no coincidence that the French have so widely discovered him. They can recognize the universal resonances in his regional stories, and find familiar verdure in the landscape of his novelistic vision.

IV

FORAYS IN THE NOVEL:

Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and Flags in the Dust

1925-1927 was a period of growth and transition for William Faulkner. He was developing as an artist, becoming dissatisfied with his poetry and discovering his "best medium to be fiction." But he did not abandon poetry; on the contrary, he incorporated his own verse into his early novels and even quoted from one of his Verlaine translations. But more important, he was learning how to use poetic language and technique to defamiliarize his fiction, to evoke and suggest, and to create a novelistic voice both unique and engaging. "My prose is really poetry," he once told an interviewer (LIG 56), and at least in this instance we can take one of his comments without that proverbial grain of salt. He was growing from dilettante to artist, from poete manque to romancier poetique. And he was returning closer and closer to home, discovering his real subject, his "apocrypha," his "own little postage stamp of native soil" (LIG 255). In his first three novels, Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and

Sartoris/Flags in the Dust,[1] we can observe the confluence of the tributaries forming Faulkner's genius and trace the course leading toward his "most splendid failure."

Soldier's Pay opens with an epigraph taken from Poem XXX of A Green Bough and goes on to expand and develop the tragic story of a wounded airman Faulkner used in Poem I of that collection. Moreover, early in the work we see the young novelist's poetic concern with the unification of sound and sense, of form and content:

> Mrs. Powers lay in her bed aware of her long body beneath strange sheets, hearing the hushed night sounds of a hotel--muffled footfalls along mute carpeted corridors, discreet opening and shutting of doors, somewhere a murmurous pulse of machinery--all with that strange propensity which sounds, anywhere else soothing, have, when heard in a hotel,for keeping you awake. (35-6)

Faulkner uses alliteration--particularly alliterative pairs--to simulate the strange sounds of an unfamiliar place; and in the process, he is providing the reader with strange sounds of his own: poetic language in prose fiction draws attention to itself; it defamiliarizes the "hotel" and keeps the reader awake. If language be truly an opiate, "like morphine," as the Semitic man says in Mosquitoes (319), language must also contain an antidote, the possibility of its own rejuvenation. In that work, such an antidote is suggested by Fairchild, the novelist:

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[1] Because in many ways Sartoris does not represent Faulkner's complete intention, I will concentrate on FID in this chapter.

> "Probably Gordon feels the same way about stories that I do about sculpture, but for me . . . . . when the statue is completely nude, it has only a coldly formal significance, you know. But when some foreign matter like a leaf or a fold of drapery (kept there in defiance of gravity by God only knows what) draws the imagination to where the organs of reproduction are concealed, it lends the statue a warmer, a--a--more-- . . .--speculative significance which I must admit I require in my sculpture." (321)

Faulkner frequently uses alliteration as a means of drawing the reader's imagination to concealed and suggested meaning. Sibilance imitates the "nervous spidery script sprawled" across a note from Cecily to George Farr in Soldier's Pay (213), a "saw" that "scraped fretfully, monotonously" in Mosquitoes (45), and "a faint breeze" that "soughed in the cedars like a long sigh" in Flags in the Dust (364). And alliteration is but one poetic means of attracting the reader's imagination. Catachresis is another favorite device, usually in the form of strained diction (improper usage,archaism,neologism, compounding, negation), strained and/or hyper-extended metaphor, synaesthesia, and oxymora.

We encounter "prehensile" faces and mouths (SP 212; Mos 84, 332), hats and hair that "skirl" (Mos 45; FID 47), ashes that "shale" (FID 19), and "a voluption of dark and heat" (Mos 336). After scurrying to the dictionary, we find we must fall back on our own imaginations if we are to make sense of such passages--and the very fact that we somehow do make sense of them reinforces one of Faulkner's major points: truth has very little to do with cold,

lifeless facts; connotation, sound, and rhythm may tell us more than denotation. Not as baffling, but equally as effective are such archaisms as "quirring" (FID 23, 133) and compounds like "agechilled" (Mos 336) and "girlwhite" (FID 173). And Faulkner's use of negation is an especially interesting tactic for engaging reader imagination. His use of the prefix "un" forces the reader to perform at least two processes of recreation: we must first translate the affirmative value of the word before we can negate it. Thus, negations such as "the long unemphasis of the Pontalba building" (Mos 14), or "their placid chewing unhaste" (FID 149), present the reader with virtually a double image, one which emphasizes what something is not by showing what it could possibly have been. The following passage from Flags in the Dust is almost a locus classicus of the ways Faulkner would later use various forms of negation in his major works:

> Along [the street] lines of Negroes labored with pick and shovel, swinging their tools in a languid rhythm, steadily and with a lazy unhaste that seemed to spend itself in snatches of plaintive minor chanting punctuated by short grunting ejaculations which died upon the sunny air and ebbed away from the languid rhythm of picks that struck not; shovels that did not dig. (344)

Many of these words are concerned with loss or the lack of something: the "languid rhythm," lacking vitality; the "lazy unhaste" that "spends itself"; the "short grunting ejaculations" that "died" and "ebbed." Even the song is "plaintive," expressing a sense of loss; and a "minor" may

be understood as a "negation" of a major--it is formed by "losing" a half step from the major key. All of this emphasizes the sense of languor, despair, work not done.

In addition to a poetic sense of diction, these early novels exhibit a youthful exuberance of metaphor. In Soldier's Pay, Cadet Lowe's eyes are "like two oysters" (37), while Gilligan's are "slimy as broken eggs" (39); and we find this morass of metaphor:

> The light from the veranda mounting was lost, the house loomed huge against the sky: a rock against which waves of trees broke, and breaking were forever arrested; and stars were golden unicorns neighing unheard through blue meadows, spurning them with hooves sharp and scintillant as ice. . . .her taut body prone and naked as a narrow pool sweetly dividing: two silver streams from a single source. (196)

As a poetic novelist searches for his voice, excess is to be expected. But even here language serves as a kind of objective correlative, breaking over the reader with dizzying force.

That same power comes across in the epigraph to Mosquitoes, a passage using metaphor and simile to indirectly evoke the persistance of the pests whose name appears nowhere in the novel but the title:

> In spring, the sweet young spring, decked out with little green, necklaced, braceleted with the song of idiotic birds, spurious and sweet and tawdry as a shopgirl in her cheap finery, like an idiot with no money and no taste; they were little and young and trusting, you could kill them sometimes. But now, as August like a languorous replete bird winged slowly through the pale summer toward the moon of decay and death, they were bigger, vicious; ubiquitous as undertakers, cunning as pawnbrokers, confident and unavoidable as politicians, They came cityward

> lustful as country boys, as passionately integral as a college football squad; pervading and monstrous but without majesty: a biblical plague seen through the wrong end of a binocular: the majesty of Fate become contemptuous through ubiquity and sheer repetition. (8)

By Flags in the Dust, Faulkner learned to control his poetic exuberance; his extended figures, while still calling attention to themselves, reveal a subtler hand:

> in the headlong violence of [Bayard] [Narcissa] had been like a lily in a gale which rocked it to its roots in a sort of vacuum, without any actual laying on of hands. And now the gale had gone on; the lily had forgotten it as its fury died away into fading vibrations of old terrors and dreads, and the stalk recovered and the bell itself was untarnished save by the friction of its own petals. The gale is gone, and though the lily is sad a little with vibrations of ancient fears, it is not sorry. (368)

One subtle metaphorical tactic involves the use of synaesthesia. Cross-sensory evocation serves some definite thematic purposes in Faulkner, uniting, in effect, disparate phenomena into a whole greater than its parts. As with the other forms of defamiliarization we have examined, there is a clear progression and refinement of technique from Soldier's Pay to Mosquitoes to Flags in the Dust. Here is an example of synaesthesia run amuck:

> Tree-frogs . . . resumed their monotonous molding of liquid beads of sound; grass blades and leaves losing shapes of solidity gained shapes of sound: the still suspire of earth, of the ground preparing for slumber; flowers by day, spikes of bloom, became with night spikes of scent; the silver tree at the corner of the house hushed its never-still never-escaping ecstasy. Already toads hopped along concrete pavements drinking prisoned heat through their dragging bellies. (SP 272)

In Mosquitoes and Flags, Faulkner finds more delicate appropriations of this conceit, giving us three "priests, barefoot, in robes the color of silence" (Mos 336) and "sunlight become audible" (FID 47).

Closely related to synaesthesia--insofar as both are paradoxical--are oxymora. These conceits, juxtaposing contradictory images, take three predominant forms in the early novels: adjective/noun combinations; neither/nor constructions; and passages that describe contradictory phenomena. A tree is seen as "carven water" (SP 247), the statue of Andrew Jackson as "plunging stasis" (Mos 49), Aunt Sally's voice as a "quavering monotone" (FID 157). Mrs. Powers sits "neither hearing nor not hearing" as Gilligan reads to Donald Mahon (SP 169); Patricia Robyn and the cabin boy cross "a quaking neither earth nor water" and the sun rises from "a low vague region neither water nor sky" (Mos 174, 175); and Bayard Sartoris' room is "sharp with ghosts that neither slept nor waked" (FID 41).

In Mosquitoes and Flags in the Dust we find the novelistic genesis of one of Faulkner's favorite oxymoronic themes, that of "fluid, passionate fixity" (Mos 321) or "motion without progress" (FID 9). Traceable to Faulkner's near obsession with Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," this conceit--as well as the plethora of oxymora in general-- adumbrates the kinds of paradoxical tensions of

cross-purposes and irresolvable suspensions that characterize much of his major work. In Mosquitoes--and indeed almost all of Faulkner--there is tension between art and life; in Flags, between free will and the overwhelming pressures of history, blood, genealogy. Oxymora create an atmosphere of paradox, of tension, as in the following encounter between Jenny Steinbauer and Ernest Talliaferro: "she became utterly static beside him and without moving at all seemed to envelop him, giving him to think of himself surrounded, enclosed by the sweet cloudy fire of her thighs, as young girls can do" (Mos 189); and in this excerpt from Flags, which incorporates many of the techniques we have been discussing:

> The fine and huge simplicity of the house rose among its thickening trees, the garden lay in the sunlight bright with bloom, myriad with scent and with a drowsy humming of bees--a steady golden sound, as of sunlight become audible--all the impalpable veil of the immediate, the familiar; just beyond it a girl with a bronze skirling of hair and a small, supple body in a constant epicene unrepose, a dynamic fixation like that of carven sexless figures caught in moments of action, striving, a mechanism all of whose members must move in performing the most trivial of action, her wild hands not accusing but passionate still beyond the veil impalpable but sufficient. (47)

Here we see Faulkner's fondness for alliteration, poetic diction, synaesthesia, negation, and oxymora. These are his most common poetic modes of defamiliarization, but certainly not all. In Flags, for example, we find chiasmus, "doomed immortality and immortal doom" (113),

pathetic fallacy, "petulant scented flesh" (168), and periphrasis:

> In the background of [Narcissa's] sober babyhood were three beings . . . a lad with a wild thin face and an unflagging aptitude for tribulation; a darkly gallant shape romantic with smuggled edibles and with strong hard hands smelling always of a certain thrilling carbolic soap--a being something like Omnipotence but without awesomeness; and lastly, a gentle figure without legs or any inference of locomotion, like a minor shrine, surrounded always by an aura of gentle melancholy and an endless delicate manipulation of colored silken thread. (159-60)

Thus Faulkner evokes Narcissa's brother Horace and her late father and mother. Periphrases, or more precisely, what we should call permutations and variations on the periphrastic theme, form one of Faulkner's most important legacies from the Symbolists. Indirection, intimation, evocation, and suggestion provide the kinds of indeterminacies that draw the reader into the recreative process, that force the reader to utilize fully his intellectual and imaginative faculties. We have seen how Faulkner most likely discovered the art of indirection, and in his first three novels we can see how he honed and perfected his art.

Sometimes indirection is, as we have just seen, a function of poetic diction, of semantics; it may also be a function of syntax. Simple anastrophe, the inversion of expected word order, can defamiliarize, call attention to itself, and suggest ranges of meaning beyond semantic interpretations. Dr. Peabody's "room resembl[es] a minia-

ture cyclonic devastation mellowed peacefully over with dust ancient and long undisturbed" (FID 90, my emphasis). By placing the modifiers after the noun, Faulkner gives the reader a sense of the sentence settling in the manner of the dust; it is a rhythmic and syntactic correlative of the room itself. Conversely, "a tunnel rigid and streaming and unbroken" (105) gives an opposite impression: the combination of anastrophe and polysyndeton creates a sense of continuity after the noun, a sense of "streaming" unbrokenness.

Sometimes syntax is simply ambiguous, posing for the reader the difficult problem of determining just who or what is being modified. Here's a good example from Soldier's Pay: "[Mrs. Powers] thought of her husband youngly dead in France in a recurrence of fretful exasperation with having been tricked by a wanton Fate: a joke amusing to no one" (36, my emphasis). Syntactically, it could be either Mrs. Powers or her husband who is the victim of Fate; indeed, the obvious answer is that they both are. Faulkner, in effect, kills two birds with one stone, a neat rhetorical move by a writer not known for economy.

A more common means of indirection involves ambiguous pronoun reference, specifically the omission of antecedents. In Soldier's Pay, we often encounter pages upon pages of narrative in which an agent is simply referred to as "she" or "he"; we must read carefully, looking for

imagistic clues, and even backtrack in order to determine the referent. In one specific case, we witness the theft of a steel rod from the boat's steering gear. "He needed a bit of wire" (88), we are told. Sixteen pages later we learn that the nephew is making a wooden pipe (104); but it is another eight pages before we know for sure that Mrs. Maurier's nephew, Theodore, is indeed the culprit. In Flags we find a subtler antecedent problem:

> Horace had seen her on the street twice, his attention caught by the bronze splendor of her hair and by an indefinable something in her air, her carriage. It was not boldness and not arrogance exactly, but a sort of calm, lazy contemptuousness that left him seeking in his mind after an experience lost somewhere within the veil of years that swaddled his dead childhood; . . .[Later], as he lay in bed thinking of Belle and waiting for sleep, he remembered it.
> (290-1)

The narrative continues with the childhood experience: Horace's frightening encounter with "an old tiger and toothless" at his first circus. As we read of the woman who triggers this remembrance, we first think of Belle; when we read that Horace too is "thinking of Belle," we feel that our suspicion has been confirmed: this seems to be an account of their meeting. Even the imagistic clues do not subvert this reading--if we remember that Belle's hair is "not brown not gold" (171), we might conclude it to be "bronze." Nevertheless, when the woman is finally named (293), we find she is Joan Heppleton, Belle's sister. Even though the sisters apparently do not "look alike," they do share a lusty seductiveness that touches

the same sensitive nerve in Horace Benbow. This comes across more effectively through suggestion and indirection than it would if stated directly.

These modes of indirection involve what Conrad Aiken calls "the whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning, of progressive and partial disclosure, which so often gives the characteristic shape to the novels themselves" (Three Decades 138). Such indirection defamiliarizes by calling attention to the text, or more specifically, by calling attention to what is not in the text. The reader becomes a kind of detective, searching the text for clues and solutions; the temporary--and quite often the permanent--withholding of meaning truly forces us to use our reading and imaginative skills and rewards us with the pleasures of discovery, of game playing (recreation/re-creation), of artistic creation in our own right. If and when we figure out a solution, our response is quite similar to the response to subtle irony: we feel as though we have been let in on an inside joke; we share something intimate with the author that is forbidden to the casual or inactive reader. Even if we do not arrive at a clear solution, even if a clear solution is an impossibility, we still have the pleasures of a stimulated imagination, and we still have the opportunity to create usable and satisfying interpretations. Faulkner expressed it this way:

> I believe that what drives anyone to write is the discovery of some truth that had been in existence all the time, but he discovered it. It seems so moving to him, so necessary that it be told to everyone else in such a way that it would move them to the same extent that it moved him.
> (LIG 204, my emphasis)

Consequently, it is necessary to recreate the process and the moment of discovery. It could almost be called a "gentlemen's agreement" between author and reader, as the following conversation between Horace and Narcissa Benbow would indicate:

> "Your Arlens and Sabatinis talk alot, and nobody ever had more to say and more trouble saying it than old Dreiser."
> "But they have secrets," she explained. "Shakespeare doesn't have any secrets. He tells everything."
> "I see. Shakespeare had no sense of discrimination and no instinct for reticence. In other words, he wasn't a gentleman," he suggested.
> "Yes . . . That's what I mean."
> "And so, to be a gentleman, you must have secrets." (158)

Horace, a man both in love with and "ordered by words" (156, 340), is playing a game with them, flapping "his flaming verbal wings" (154) so to speak by twisting his sister's. Nevertheless, Faulkner's point is well-taken: for all of his avowed intention "to crowd and cram everything, all experience, into each paragraph, to get the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience, of all the recaptured light rays, into each paragraph" (LIG 107), Faulkner often best achieves this by leaving things out, by "playing the silence" like a Zen musician, by

giving "the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let[ing] the mind create the tree" (LIG 128).

This process may be as obvious as the omission of the "phrase" Patricia Robyn learns from Jenny Steinbauer and uses on Gordon (Mos 144-7, 271)--her getting "the genders backward," the only real clue we have, may lead the reader to conclude with Cleanth Brooks that she called the sculptor a "bitch of a son" (Toward Yoknapatawpha 131)--or the omission of the wedding of Bayard and Narcissa (FID 266). It may be strictly "inside," like the "small round metal box" labeled "Agnes Mabel Becky" that appears in Mosquitoes (and later in The Sound and the Fury). It may be insinuation and intimation, the way Byron Snopes' inappropriate perspiration and "covert evasive eyes" (FID 93-4) implicate him as Narcissa's anonymous pen pal, the way gossip and innuendo reveal Horace's affair with Belle (189-92)--not by direct statement, but by our puzzling out a viable subject of gossip and innuendo. And it may be as subtle as the poetic and rhetorical devices we have examined above. (Interestingly, the more blatant modes of indirection activate the subtler ones by clueing us in to the nature of the game, by setting us on the trail and putting us on the lookout for imbedded clues, intimation, and suggestion.)

Before concluding, we must look at another mode of defamiliarization that is germinating in these three early

novels: typographical experimentation. Often Faulkner will omit quotation marks: "The rector bawled Emmy again" (SP 65); "Cecily's mouth, elastic and mobile as red rubber, shaped Don't" (SP 232). Often he will omit punctuation entirely and even use lower case letters:

> fool fool you have work to do o cursed of god cursed and forgotten shapes cunningly sweated cunning to simplicity shapes out of chaos more satisfactory that bread to the belly form by a madmans dream gat on the body of chaos le garcon vierge of the soul horned by utility o cuckold of derision. (SP 47)

And he experiments with parentheses and italics: in Soldier's Pay he uses parentheses to indicate the unspoken thoughts of a wide range of characters; in Mosquitoes parentheses delineate the narrative voice while italics supercede in the indication of unspoken alter-reality:

> (Gordon, Fairchild and the Semitic man w a l k e d in the dark city. Above them, the sky: a heavy, voluptuous night and huge, hot stars like wilting gardenias. About them, streets: narrow, shallow canyons of shadow rich with decay and laced with delicate ironwork, scarcely seen.)
>
> Spring is in the world somewhere, like a blown keen reed, high and fiery cold--he does not see it; a shape which he will know--he does not see it. The three priests pass on: the walls have hushed their gray and unshod feet. (335)

We also find experiments with eye-dialects and verbal pyrotechnics: "'Clu--hoverrrrrr blarrrr--sums, clo--ver blarrrr--summmzzzz'" (SP 269); "'Wouldn't even git off at de dee-po'" (FID 9); "'Dey wouldn't let you in heaven, wid licker on yo' breaf and no hat, feller'" (FID 134).

All of these defamiliarizing devices function in the service of engaging reader response, of forcing us to read actively, of revitalizing "ideas, thoughts" that too often become "mere sounds to be bandied about until . . . dead" (Mos 186). Devalued signs and inactive readings are anathema to fiction; they lurk menacingly in the very nature of the art itself--literature, to borrow Yeats' phrase, truly pitches its mansion in the place of excrement. Perhaps Dawson Fairchild best expresses Faulkner's distrust of his chosen medium:

> "Well, it is a kind of sterility--Words,". . . "You begin to substitute words for things and deeds, like the withered cuckold husband that took the Decameron to bed with him every night, and pretty soon the thing or the deed becomes just a kind of shadow of a certain sound you make by shaping your mouth a certain way. But you have a confusion, too. I don't claim that words have life in themselves. But words brought into a happy conjunction produce something that lives, just as soil and climate and an acorn in proper conjunction will produce a tree. Words are like acorns, you know. Every one of 'em won't make a tree, but if you just have enough of 'em, you're bound to get a tree sooner or later." (Mos 210)

In "happy conjunction" words can infuse the world with "a kind of singing rhythm" (248), they can form "a sort of cocktail of words" that provides "quite a jolt . . .if your taste is educated to cocktails" (247), they can upset "thrones and political parties and instigat[e] crusades" (130). But habituation subverts such "happy conjunctions" and too often renders language meaningless and ineffectual, as in the case of Horace Benbow, when he wonders "if he had just said the phrase so many times that the juxta-

position of the words no longer had any meaning in his liquor-fuddled brain" (188). And non-engaged, inactive reading renders the artist's creation lifeless and mute, as illustrated by Narcissa's reading to the injured Bayard:

> She opened the book and began to read, swiftly, as though she were crouching behind the screen of words her voice raised between them. . . .He was asleep now, and as she realized this she realized also that she did not know just when she had stopped reading. And she sat with the page open upon her knees, a page whose words left no echoes whatever in her mind, watching his calm face. (232)

The techniques of defamiliarization we see developing in Soldier's Pay, Mosquitoes, and Flags in the Dust are designed to secure and focus reader attention, to revitalize language worn dull and automatic through habituation, to sound words emphatically enough to leave "echoes" in the reader's mind. In these works we see Faulkner groping, experimenting, trying his own "flaming verbal wings." In the novels to come, he will take flight as technique and subject, form and content, are alchemized into a compound as magical and as coherent as the fabula of Yoknapatawpha itself. And while The Sound and the Fury is in many ways an exponential leap from the previous works, so much so that it is tempting to think of it as springing whole from the head of Zeus in 1929, it is actually a part of the continuum, a refinement and an elaboration of techniques of defamiliarization that look backward to the Symbolists and forward to what may well be perfection and

culmination in Absalom,Absalom!

V

THE SOUND AND THE FURY:

Problems in Signification

In his study of Defamiliarization in Language and Literature, R.H. Stacy discusses the famous theater scene from War and Peace:

> Here Tolstoy has Natasha view the actions on the operatic stage through the eyes of (in Greek) an eiron (i.e., one who eironeuetai or "feigns ignorance"). She--or,we should say,the author--sees and considers, but as if through the eyes of a naive and almost primitive onlooker, something which is traditionally viewed not only as a beautiful and elaborate synaesthetic art form but also as a conventionally recognized feature of a cultured and sophisticated society. . . . In brief, this method of Tolstoyan irony involves "never calling complex things by their accepted name, but always disintegrating a complex action or object into its indivisible components. The method strips the world of the labels attached to it by habit and by social convention, and gives it a 'discivilized' appearance, as it might have appeared to Adam on the day of creation." (2)

In 1928 Faulkner took this "method" one step further and gave us a character of true ignorance, one who views conventionally recognizable features of his culture with the eyes of a child. Benjy Compson "perceives" the raw stuff (fabula) of the Compson story but is incapable of assimilating or ordering it into any kind of meaningful coherence. His is truly "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"--nothing, that is, to him. For Faulkner, the story of Caddy Compson was the story of his "heart's darling" (FIU 6), of the sister he

had never had, perhaps even a macabre foreshadowing, as he once said, of the daughter he would later lose ("Introduction to TSAF" 413). For Faulkner, there was significance in telling a story about the loss, if not the impossibility, of significance: "The Sound and the Fury. I wrote it five separate times trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the dream which would continue to anguish me until I did" (LIG 244). The difficulty lay in getting it right, in capturing the complexity of the dream, in finding some way to signify. Towards that end, he begins with someone incapable not only of expressing himself coherently but of even understanding himself, with "someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why" (LIG 245). Consequently, from the outset of Faulkner's "most splendid failure" the burden of interpretation and signification is placed squarely on the reader.

The novel seems to begin with a clear orientation: April Seventh, 1928; but immediately thereafter, the reader finds himself at a loss, bereft of conventional orientors: without introduction of character or scene, we are plunged into the midst of . . .what?

> Through the fence, between the curling f l o w e r spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out,and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they

> stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.
>
> "Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away. (1)

The sentences are flat, almost Hemingwayesque: simple, independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions. As in Hemingway, these sentences imply a reality that is not ordered, not assimilated, not arranged hierarchically by subordinating relationships. Also as in Hemingway, there is a layering effect, and a repetition of key words: fence, delineating and confining; hunting, searching for something lost; hitting, driving something away; caddie. But who is this "narrator" who speaks in flat, almost child-like sentences, who either does not know the name of the game he is watching or has no consideration for the needs and expectations of the reader? Why does he leave us in the dark as to the referents of "they," "he," and "the other"; and why does he not tell us what Luster is hunting? In the next paragraph we get some clues:

> "Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Aint you something, thirty-three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning. Aint you going to help me find that quarter so I can go to the show tonight." (1-2)

Some things at least are clarified. Luster has lost a quarter; the speaker is not a child, but child-like at thirty-three. In Faulkner's pattern of delayed revelation, this is an example of questions and expectations rather promptly--if only partially--answered and fulfilled. With

hindsight we know that Benjy's full story will emerge slowly, bit by unmediated bit, in a rambling interior monologue that will encompass roughly thirteen different time frames and scenes in one hundred and six fragments (see Stewart and Backus). Hindsight also tells us that most of the themes of the novel are found in these first three puzzling paragraphs: The thirty-three-year-old "deflowered" idiot looks through the fence that both restrains him and signifies the boundary between his shrinking world and the possibilities he has lost. "Through the fence," for Benjy, lies not only the pasture sold for Quentin's education and Caddy's wedding, but Caddy herself. Faulkner uses indirection and juxtaposition to convey almost subliminally the significance of this scene: while Benjy simply "looks" (passively, unselfconsciously), Luster's "hunting" intimates that the two acts are in fact quite similarly motivated. Benjy, as we soon become aware, is incapable of analysis, of knowing "why." He is not even aware of his own bellowing, only of the word "caddie" and the men "going away." We know when he bellows because of the verbal reactions of those around him. For Benjy, the world is one of unmediated, unsignified phenomena; however, everyone around him is caught in the struggle to signify, to determine the import and meaning of his mute and ambiguous actions. The relationships of the various characters to Benjy parallel the

relationship of the reader to the novel. We are all trying to understand the sound and fury; Faulkner knows that we understand best when allowed to figure things out for ourselves.

By beginning with Benjy's point of view, Faulkner places the reader in a situation analogous to that of the Compson children the day Damuddy dies. As they eat supper in the kitchen, they hear a sound; filtered as it is through Benjy's consciousness, the sound is neither described nor articulated. It is only presented through the reactions of the listeners: "we heard it again," Benjy tells us, "and I began to cry."

> "What was that." Caddy said. She put her hand on my hand.
> "That was Mother." Quentin said. The spoon came up and I ate, then I cried again.
> "Hush." Caddy said. But I didn't hush and she came and put her arms around me. Dilsey went and closed both the doors and then we couldn't hear it. . . .
> "She was crying." Quentin said.
> "It was somebody singing." Caddy said. Wasn't it, Dilsey." (29)

Quentin and Caddy struggle with interpretations of the sound: the older brother may be more perceptive; or it may be that Caddy wants to deny the reality of sorrow and death, perhaps to protect her brother, or perhaps herself. In any event, the reader is faced with two apparently contradictory significations. Was someone singing? Or crying? Is this a party? Or something else? Our narrator is not explicit. But his crying tells us quite a bit; and

his unfiltering consciousness gives us some clues which we may patch together in order to arrive at a meaningful conclusion: we know that something unusual has prompted the children's early supper (19,22); that Damuddy is so sick that Jason can no longer sleep with her (30-1); that the children have to be quiet and go to bed early this night (30-31). And we have the example of Roskus and his own brand of sign play:

> "Taint no luck on this place." Roskus said.. . . "What you know about it." Dilsey said. "What trance you been in."
>
> "Dont need no trance." Roskus said. "Aint the sign of it laying right there on that bed. Aint the sign of it been here for folks to see fifteen years now.". . .
>
> "They been two, now." Roskus said. "Going to b e one more. I seen the sign, and you is too."
>
> "I heard a squinch owl that night." T.P. said. "Dan wouldn't come and get his supper, neither. Wouldn't come no closer than the barn. Begun howling right after dark. Versh heard him." (33-4)

Roskus and T.P. "read" the ominous signs of death, interpreting the squinch owl, the strange behavior of the dog, and Benjy's retardation as auguries of bad luck and death. Both conversations--one apparently in 1889, the other in 1910--occur in the present-tense of Benjy's mind, and consequently, of his 1928 narrative. For the reader they are a source both of temporal confusion and of narrative revelation: as we proceed through Benjy's section we learn to read the time shifts as indications of Benjy's "timelessness"; we also learn to piece together the various parts of the Compson puzzle. Here Roskus

refers to the deaths of Damuddy and Quentin and predicts a third, Mr. Compson's, which will occur two years later (36). We also see an example of the superstitious reaction to Benjy (idiots are often thought of as somehow touched by the supernatural or more tuned in to animal instincts) and are somewhat prepared for his "smelling" of sickness and death (39-40) and Roskus' assertion that Benjy "knowed they time was coming, like that pointer done" (37). All of these clues have a kind of cumulative subliminal effect in the reader's mind: we become aware of a pattern of juxtaposed deaths long before Frony actually spills the beans about the funeral (38). Based upon this accumulation of data, we are in a position to understand the significance of Mrs. Compson's "sound" as a kind of keening that partakes of both Quentin's "crying" and Caddy's "singing"; we also see Benjy's crying as part of the pattern of intuition.

The three passages just examined are representative of the elaborate system of juxtapositions concerning loss: the gradual erosion of Compson property; the deaths of Damuddy, Quentin, Mr. Compson, Roskus, Nancy; the various "losses" of Caddy; Benjy's castration. The scenes dramatized through Benjy's consciousness are variations on a theme. He is incapable of analyzing and synthesizing the data; that must take place in the reader's consciousness. As we slowly process the various signs of death, we come

to a clearer understanding of the importance of Caddy in Benjy's life and of the void caused by even the threat of change. The significance is all the more poignant and meaningful since it is never tainted, cheapened, or destroyed by direct statement. Far from being melodramatic, Benjy is completely unaware of Caddy's significance. As Faulkner once said,

> Benjy wasn't rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that caused him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy. He no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing. He knew only that something was wrong, which left a vacuum in which he grieved. He tried to fill that vacuum. . . . If Caddy had reappeared he probably would not have known her. (LIG 246)

It is a tribute to Faulkner's masterful use of indirection that we tend to agree with this assessment. We recognize Benjy's innate need for tenderness and love as manifested in his sister's smell of trees, in her pristine presence. Benjy cries not only when Caddy threatens to run away (21), but when her perfume and relationships with men threaten the stability of his relationship with her. Interestingly, these are occasions in which Benjy intuits the significance of natural signs while those around him struggle to interpret his actions:

> Benjy, Caddy said, Benjy. She put her arms around me again, but I went away. "What is it, Benjy." she said. "Is it this hat." She took her hat off and came again, and I went away.

> "Benjy." she said. "What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done."
> "He dont like that prissy dress." Jason said. "You think you're grown up, dont you." (48)

Jason may be wrong about the dress, but he is accurate in general: it is Caddy's maturity, her growing up, that threatens Benjy. That is what he smells in her perfume: "So that was it. And you were trying to tell Caddy and you couldn't tell her. You wanted to, but you couldn't, could you" (51). Nor can Benjy "tell Caddy" when he sees her with Charlie in the swing. He <u>is</u> able to communicate when his crying matches her own sense of guilt at the loss of her virginity: then, she "shrank against the wall," and as Benjy cries, "her eyes ran" (84). But he is only able to "tell" the reader through indirection, through Faulkner's defamiliarization of the story events on the Tolstoyan stage of Benjy's objective mind. We infer the significance of Caddy's loss in the juxtaposition and interpolation of her wedding with Damuddy's funeral, in the associations of Caddy's climbing the tree to peer into the parlor window in 1898 and Benjy's climbing the box to do the same in 1910. And we understand Benjy's motivation in "attacking" the Burgess girl by understanding the accumulation of information about Caddy, the meaning of the fence (<u>He think if he downs to the gate, Miss Caddy come back</u>.[62]), and even Luster's misinformation (his mis-reading) that Benjy is "deef and dumb" (59):

> It was open when I touched it, and I held to it in the twilight. I wasn't crying, and I tried to stop, watching the girls coming along in the twilight. I wasn't crying. . . . I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright, whirling shapes. (63-4)

This is a dramatization of what could have been going on in Myrtle Wilson's mind as she rushed toward what she thought of as her lover's car, as she rushed headlong to her own destruction. Benjy, too, apparently confuses the object of his chase with the object of his desire. If he truly would not have known Caddy had she returned, it is plausible that he could mistake someone else for that which he is missing. And just as Myrtle's action precipitates the ultimate downfall of Fitzgerald's Gatsby, Benjy's leads to his ultimate losses: his manhood and what little freedom he possesses. And here, in Benjy's final tragedy, Faulkner is especially elliptical: "Luster knocked the flowers over with his hand. 'That's what they'll do to you at Jackson when you starts bellering'" (66). The reader must imagine (or know) that "Jackson" is the state asylum (much the way we must understand the show man's reading of Agnes Mabel Becky); we must interpret the

innuendo.[1] We must also read Luster's symbolic act in the context of an array of images connecting jimson or dogfennel with Benjy's sexuality as well as the castration symbolism in the birthday candles and paper dolls "cut into little pieces" (68). If we read these signs competently, we are prepared for the final scene from Benjy's present:

> I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone. . . . Then he went to the window and looked out. He came back and took my arm. Here she come, he said. . . . It came out of Quentin's window and climbed across into the tree. We watched the tree shaking. The shaking went down the tree, then it came out and we watched it go away across the grass. (90)

Again Faulkner works through intimation and juxtaposition: the loss of Benjy's manhood is associated with the loss of Quentin/Caddy, or the loss of love. In this scene he symbolically looks from the void in himself to the unnamed "it" that shakes down the tree and, as with most everything else in Benjy's life, goes away. Benjy then "returns" to the day of Damuddy's death, the day Caddy was in the tree in her muddy drawers, the day Caddy held him until "the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like

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[1]These examples raise the issue of "cultural literacy" (See Hirsch, 28) or relativism: a "literate" American reader in 1929 might understand "Agnes Mabel Becky" as readily as his 1988 counterpart would "Trojan"; certainly any "literate" Mississippian would know how to read the metonymical "Jackson" the way most "literate" Americans today read "Bellview" or "Leavenworth." Suffice it to say, no reading takes place in a vacuum: time and space are critical factors in determining the degree of indirection.

it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep" (92).

Benjy's section is a marvel of modernist--and even postmodernist--experimentation. The disruption of linear time, the abrupt shifts in time signaled by italics, the confusion of time and scene and even characters (two Jasons, two Quentins, Benjy-Benjamin-Maury), the bizarre narrative point-of-view--all of these aspects of modernist defamiliarization serve first to disorient the reader and create a kind of narrative void in the reader's consciousness, then to activate the reader's creative talent in the attempt to fill that void with some significant meaning. It can be frustrating, as Faulkner illustrates through the difficulties and futilities of communication, of "trying to say," the "reducto absurdum of all human experience," as Quentin will tell us. But Faulkner's achievement lies in subverting his own content. By forcing us to interpret the signs and assimilate the pieces of the puzzle, he prolongs our aesthetic experience and engages us to fulfill our half of the aesthetic contract. The "whirling shapes" that recur in Benjy's mind are associated with his sleep; for the reader, they are ambiguities that must be puzzled out until they flow smoothly "each in its ordered place" (401).

2

Following the disjunction of Benjy's narrative, Quentin's seems to promise the respite of lucidity: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (93). The subordinated grammatical relationship, the more refined syntax and vocabulary, the more complex logic, the abstract thought process, all imply the presence of an intelligent and certainly more conventional narrator. Even the leap from 1928 back to 1910 is not so distracting; we have been prepared for such shifts by the radical temporal dislocations of the first section. But we soon learn that our new narrator is as obsessed with time and the changes it works as Benjy was with Caddy and the smell of trees. In fact, we soon come to see Quentin as neurotically obsessive, in some ways a sophisticated Benjy who recapitulates many of the acts and errors of his brother. And if we found Benjy's abrupt temporal shifts disturbing, there will be almost twice the number in this section.

Quentin Compson is truly "a walking shadow," an echo of a disintegrating personality; he seems a character on the cusp of modernism and postmodernism. Just as Jay Gatsby's obsession with time and change led to his passive suicide, Quentin's leads to his deliberate one; just as

Pynchon's Hunter Slothrop will diffuse and break apart like a missile reentering earth's atmosphere, Quentin dissolves before our eyes, a victim of both entropy and the manias that haunt and torment him. And as with Benjy, Faulkner brings Quentin to life through indirection, depicting his consciousness through both fusion and fragmentation, repetition, and juxtaposition.

Faulkner's narrative form is a perfect correlative of Quentin's psyche. The blend of fragmented thought and fused chains of associations and conversations (some real, some imaginary) replicate not only the variegated stresses Quentin suffers but also the patterns of time which so obsesses him. As he says of his watch, "in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear" (94); each consciously heard tick is like the tip of an iceberg. Paradoxically, time is both a subjective and an objective duration, a stream carrying the past always just beneath the thin veneer of the immediate present and a mechanical progression of cold ticks which may be measured and consigned to oblivion: "Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life" (105). But Quentin is unable to stop the clock, unable to "forget it now and then for a moment"; he seems

to be doomed to "spend all [his] breath trying to conquer it" (93).

In fact, in Quentin's obsession with time, he does not even need a functioning clock as a chronometer: after tearing the hands from his watch, he is still tormented by the sound of "little wheels clicking and clicking" (99); he can still hear the bell tower; and most important, Quentin, the walking shadow, is dogged by a variety of shadows throughout his last day, shadows he reads like sundials, having "learned to tell almost to the minute" (94) the time they signify. These shadows may be considered signs of natural or organic time, more accurate than the signifiers of cold mechanical time whose arbitrariness is emphasized by the discrepancies among the watchmaker's clocks, none of which is "right" (104). (For example, Quentin's standing in his shadow [130] signifies mid-day, corroborating the other signs of natural time: "space and time confused Stomach saying noon brain saying eat oclock" [129]. Quentin also reads shadows in terms of Caddy's relationship with Dalton Ames: "her shadow high against his shadow one shadow" [192]; "she touched my shoulder leaning down her shadow the blur of her face leaning down from his high shadow I drew back" [193]. And the reader can read Quentin's shadows in terms of "space and time confused," telling not only the time but also his direction, "my shadow behind me now" [166] signifying

heading west in the afternoon.) But this shadow-play has another dimension as well, one even more essential to Quentin's time-obsessed psyche: the shadows, shades, silhouettes, reflections, and echoes that permeate his section symbolize the absent or alter-"reality" of Caddy and the past that is ever-present in his consciousness, dogging him like a kind of parallel universe typographically indicated by the italics that even appear to the reader as shadows of the primary reality of roman type. In fact, many of Quentin's references to shadows seem almost explicitly to signal the emergence of this Other World:

> The shadow hadn't quite cleared the stoop. I stopped inside the door, watching the shadow move. It moved almost perceptibly, creeping back inside the door, driving the shadow back into the door. Only she was running already when I heard it. In the mirror she was running before I knew what it was. That quick, her train caught up over her arm she ran out of the mirror like a cloud, her veil swirling in long glints her heels brittle and fast clutching her dress onto her shoulder with the other hand, running out of the mirror the smells roses roses the voice that breathed o'er Eden. Then she was across the porch I couldn't hear her heels then in the moonlight like a cloud, the floating shadow of the veil running across the grass, into the bellowing. She ran out of her dress, clutching her bridal, running into the bellowing where T.P. in the dew Whooey Sassprilluh Benjy under the box bellowing. (100)

This passage excellently exemplifies Faulkner's use of defamiliarizing techniques in Quentin's narrative. The juxtaposition of roman and italic "realities," the fusion of minimally-punctuated clauses, the repetition of key words--shadow, running, mirror, bellowing--replicate the con-fusion of "realities" in Quentin's mind and direct the

reader toward the re-creation of a similar con-fusion as the key words themselves fuse thematically: Caddy--who through her loss of virginity, her maturation, and her marriage has become a loss, an absence, a shadow, a reflection--is imaged as running in the same manner as the many watches and clocks that measure the running of time which in turn reflects the changes and subsequent loss of Caddy. All of these images turn back upon themselves in a play of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships as disturbing in Quentin's mind as the associations that prompt Benjy's bellowing. For the reader, this defamiliarizing linguistic play represents both objective and subjective correlatives, epitome and expression of Quentin's consciousness; the cumulative result is something very close to direct reader experience.

Faulkner also uses a play of paradigms and syntagms to develop Quentin's incestuous fantasy (in which Quentin, like the arguing fisherboys, tries to make "of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words" [146]). As he walks along the river he spots a huge trout struggling to hold fast against the currents of change:

> I saw a shadow hanging like a fat arrow stemming into the current. Mayflies skimmed in and out of the shadow of the bridge just above the surface. <u>If it could just be a hell beyond that the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame</u> The arrow increased without motion . . . . then I saw the arrow again,

> nose into the current, wavering delicately to the motion of the water above which the May flies slanted and poised. Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame (144-45)

Quentin equates his personal struggle against change to that of the trout; if only he could commit the act outrageous enough to consign him and his sister to their special, private hell, they would be frozen for eternity, like the figures on Keats' urn, and immutable to the vicissitudes of mortal life. Furthermore, the shadow-fish prefigures the death by water of the shadow-man. Again, through juxtaposition, Faulkner creates a complex paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship:

fish	shadow	fish shadow
Caddy	death	death
shadow	suicide	hell
Quentin	incest	immutability

Or

Quentin=shadow=Caddy=fish=suicide=incest=hell=immutability

(The equation of sex and death is further developed in the long flashback in which Quentin and Caddy discuss their death pact in highly suggestive language [see particularly 189-90].)

The same play occurs in the episode with the Italian girl. While Quentin's futile attempt to return the "little sister" to her home parallels his futile attempt to protect Caddy (a parallel ironically reinforced by Julio's

fight with the would-be abductor), the incident also recapitulates Benjy's assault on the Burgess girl. Like Benjy, Quentin moves along a fence separating him from the girl. "I climbed the wall. And then she watched me jump down, holding the loaf against her dress" (167). And as in the Burgess episode, here, too, is both a language barrier frustrating communication and the protagonist's involuntary laughter that is taken as a sign of insanity. In short, through a series of juxtapositions, the reader comes to see the following configuration of relationships:

Quentin/Little Sister=Quentin/Caddy

Quentin/Julio=Dalton Ames/Quentin

Quentin/Little Sister=Benjy/Burgess girl

By establishing a pattern of interchangeable parts, Faulkner creates a sense of flux along both paradigmatic (vertical) and syntagmatic (horizontal) axes: as the reader participates in the play of language, the narrative becomes polyphonic, each voice articulating and illuminating the character(s) of the principal(s), leading us toward greater understandings of Quentin and Benjy through the impasto effects of juxtaposition and repetition whose impact is decidedly more effective because it is evoked by indirection rather than bluntly stated.

Nowhere is this more efficacious than in the passages which signal the disintegration of Quentin's personality. Focusing upon "twilight," the title of an earlier Compson

story and the working title for The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner weaves another complex web of associations:

> As I descended the light dwindled slowly, yet at the same time without altering its quality, as if I and not the light were changing, decreasing, though even the road ran into trees you could have read a newspaper. . . . when we ran out of the trees I could see the twilight again, that quality of light as if time really had stopped for a while, with the sun hanging just under the horizon . . . the road going on under the twilight, into twilight and the sense of water peaceful and swift beyond. (209-10)

Here Quentin associates his being, his self, with twilight, that transitional stage between day and night, life and death. Twilight is the time when all becomes shadow, when time itself seems to linger in limbo. Everything becomes entangled with the smell of honeysuckle, the ubiquitous southern fragrance Quentin associates with Caddy's deflowering ("damn that honeysuckle" [192]), with twilight, and with water. And all of these associations finally come together in the dissolution of Quentin's self:

> Sometimes I could put myself to sleep saying that over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who. (211)

But these are not the only devices of defamiliarization Faulkner calls upon in Quentin's narrative. He

frequently uses stichomythia-like dialogue patterns which demand careful attention while blurring the distinctions between speakers. Note, for example, this conversation from the flashback mentioned parenthetically above:

> do you love him Caddy
> do I what
> she looked at me then everything emptied out of her eyes and they looked like the eyes in statues blank and unseeing and serene
> put your hand against my throat
> she took my hand and held it flat against her throat
> now say his name
> Dalton Ames
> I felt the surge of blood there it surged in strong accelerated beats (203)[2]

For the most part, this dialogue is easy to follow; Quentin and Caddy simply alternate lines except for Quentin's descriptive narrative. But there is some possibility for confusion here: it seems to be Caddy's idea to put Quentin's hand to her throat--this is her game--yet it seems to be Quentin who demands she "say his name." The source of ambiguity is two-fold: in the fusion of their characters each knows what the other is thinking; and in Faulkner's depiction either could be saying "now say his name" or "Dalton Ames." What is important is that the possible ambiguities of verbal communication are overshadowed by the signification of the natural signs: Caddy's surging pulse speaks more clearly than words.

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[2]Note that Noel Polk's "corrected text" does not even have indentation to help the reader determine who is speaking.

In contrast to this stichomythic dialogue is the fused dialogue we find in Quentin's conversation with his Father, a conversation Faulkner said was purely in Quentin's imagination (FIU 262):

> . . .i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldn't have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into horror and then exorcise it with truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been . . . (219-20)

The fused sentences replicate the psychological overload Quentin is experiencing; they also heighten reader participation, forcing us to read attentively while faced with the same kind of sorting problem that plagues our narrator. Another conspicuous feature is the use of lower case pronouns: essential if the reader is to distinguish between speakers, they are vertiginous without punctuation or verbal "said" tags. Furthermore, Quentin's self-reflexive lower-case "i" clearly indicates the diminution of his character. They remind us that he is rapidly approaching the "peacefullest words. Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum" (216), the state of non-being appropriately expressed in a "dead" language. The reader notes that as the final moment draws near, Quentin seems to pull himself together in a last gasp of lucidity (222), as though with death in sight he has at last found his long-denied peace. And we must also note that our entire expectation that Quentin will

commit suicide is brought about through intimation, suggestion, indirection. This fact will not be confirmed until we have completed the following sections.

3

For the most part, Jason's narrative follows a conventional course appropriate to his conventional, literal-mindedness. His is a cold rational logic, narrow in scope, consequently in technique. Nevertheless, Faulkner does use some devices of defamiliarization to evoke certain aspects of Jason's character. The opening paragraph is a prime example:

> Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her. (223, my emphasis)

The first thing that attracts our attention is Jason's terse misogyny and bigotry; the second is his habitual, colloquial "I says." Jason's awkward, ungrammatical present tense reflects his curious existential uncertainty. Jason believes himself to be, unlike Benjy and Quentin, a creature of the here and now, relatively unconcerned with the past. However, he is in fact a bungling existentialist, a strutting and fretting example of bad faith. For all his scamming and conniving, he is

ultimately the victim of his own selfishness, the con man conned, believing he is caught in a present day struggle with "New York Jews," "a kitchen full of niggers to feed," and a whore of a niece, while in actuality he is as burdened and tormented by the past as his brothers--and as driven by thwarted and frustrated sexuality. Virtually all of Jason's actions and obsessions are dictated by past actions which he feels have cheated him of his rightful due. He is both here and there, present and past, who he thinks he is and not; hence, there is an implicit tension in "I says" between Jason seeing himself in both the first and third persons.

But there is more involved in this deceptively simple stylistic ploy. The laconism and the repetition of "I says" creates a narrative tone reminiscent of hard-boiled detectives of fiction and film, reminding us that Jason is in fact a detective (298), albeit an inept one. Always the tattle-tale, it is appropriate that Jason takes on this role; we should not be surprised that he reports Quentin's behavior to his mother and even shadows his niece on this Good Friday. Like his mother, Jason thinks of himself as a martyr--no doubt something in the Bascomb genes--and thinks nothing of complaining:

> "I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father. I had to work. But of course if you want me to follow her around and see what she does, I can quit the store and get a job where I can work at night. Then I can

> watch her during the day and you can use Ben for the night shift." (224)

It is typical of Jason's self-deception that he does not realize this is exactly what he is doing. It is also both a tribute to his ineptness and a kind of poetic justice that our detective is outwitted and foiled by beggar lice and poison oak (300); far from a Nick Charles or a Sam Spade, Jason the detective is more like a spiteful, mean-spirited Inspector Clouseau.

Another implication of "I says" is Jason's belief in the power of rhetoric; he seems to feel that "saying" can truly make it so, and through "saying" he attempts to create the only reality he can accept. We can see the combination of cold logic and the belief in "saying" in Jason's haggling with the "damn redneck" over a hame string:

> "You'd better take that good one," I says. "How do you fellows ever expect to get ahead, trying to work with cheap equipment?"
> "If this one aint any good," he says, "why have you got it on sale?"
> "I didn't <u>say</u> it wasn't any good," I says, "I <u>said</u> it's not as good as that other one."
> "How do you know it's not," he says. "You ever use airy one of them?"
> "Because they dont <u>ask</u> thirty-five cents for it," I says. "That's how I know it's not as good." (242, my emphasis)

And we have this example of Jason's cruel literal-mindedness: when Caddy returns for Father's funeral, she offers her brother a hundred dollars if she can see Quentin. "'Just a minute,' I says, 'And just like I say.' . . .

'Yes,' she says. 'Just like you say do it. Just so I see her a minute'" (253). When Jason simply drives past Caddy, holding her daughter up to the carriage window, he has no qualms about his defense: "'What have you got to say to me?' I says, 'Didn't I do everything I said? I said see her a minute, didn't I? . . . I did just what I said I would'" (256). Jason's strict adherence to the word is a form of vindication and revenge: he blames Caddy for Herbert Head's broken promise of a job in his bank--"'I believed folks when they said they'd do things. I've learned better since'" (256)--and consequently for the mediocrity of his life in Earl's store. But his vindictiveness is no more justified than his blaming Quentin for his stock losses (282). Jason is simply too narrow-minded and bitter to recognize the responsibility of his own greedy and petty character.

The dominant form of defamiliarization in Jason's section is indirection. As with all of the interior monologues, the reader must create and establish context, accumulate clues, fill in narrative gaps. For example, the significance of Father's funeral is intimated--and the reader forced to infer what's taking place--before the event is explicitly named:

> Mother kept on saying thank God you are not a Compson except in name, because you are all I have left now, you and Maury, and I says well I could spare Uncle Maury myself and then they came and said they were ready to start. Mother stopped crying then. She pulled her veil down . . ..

> "Have you got your band on?" she says. . . .
> "It's so terrible to me," she says, "Having the two of them like this, in less than two years."
> (244-45)

The reader must piece together these indirect funereal references. The reader also must supply the referents for "the two of them," and after determining those to be Quentin and Father, must reconstruct the chronology to determine that Father's funeral must be around 1912.

Faulkner uses the same kind of intimation to clue us in to Caddy's promiscuity and the reason for Quentin's presence in Jefferson. "Father went up there," we are told, "and brought it home . . .. we kept hoping they'd get things straightened out and he'd keep her" (245-46); "Mother says, 'To have my own daughter cast off by her husband. Poor little innocent baby,' she says, looking at Quentin. 'You will never know the suffering you've caused'" (247). (We can see that in good Bascomb fashion, Mother too misdirects blame.) These are some of the puzzle pieces we must work with; more clues come in Jason's conversation with Caddy: "'If you'll get Mother to let me have her back, I'll give you a thousand dollars.' 'You haven't got as thousand dollars,' I says, 'I know you're lying now.' 'Yes I have. I will have. I can get it.' 'And I know how you'll get it,' I says, 'You'll get it the same way you got her'" (260). It is several pages before we know for sure that "Herbert threw her out" (274), and several after that before Jason becomes more explicit:

"I'd at least be sure it was a bastard to begin with, and now even the Lord doesn't know that for certain probably" (287).

Faulkner also uses partial and gradual revelation to develop what will become one of his favorite plot devices: the financial scam (see also The Hamlet and Go Down, Moses). In this case, Jason elaborately schemes to rob his niece while keeping Mother in the dark about his actual business situation. We know something is up when Jason complains about the money order Caddy has sent Quentin instead of the usual check: "And I wouldn't put it past her to try to notify the post-office not to let anyone except her cash it" (262). He then finds "that all the blanks were gone" and quickly hides the letters as Quentin enters his office (263). We begin to understand his plot when Jason goes to the printing shop and then to the opera house searching for blank checks. "At last I found a pad on a Saint Louis bank. And of course she'd pick this one time to look at it close" (269). Some kind of forgery--false saying--is involved here; but we are misdirected as to the referent of "she"; at this point, after Jason's heated argument with Quentin over money, we tend to read "Quentin" as "she." Only when Jason gives the resealed letter to Mother is this clarified:

> She opened it and took the check out and sat holding it in her hand. I went and got the shovel from the corner and gave her the match. . . .

> She took the match, but she didn't strike it. She sat there, looking at the check. Just like I said it would be.
>
> "I hate to do it," she says, "To increase your burden by adding Quentin. . . ." . . ..
>
> "This one is on a different bank," she says. "They have been on an Indianapolis bank." . . ..
>
> "Come on," I says, "Finish it. Get the fun over. . . .I thought you were burning this two hundred dollars a month for fun," I says. . . .
>
> "I could bring myself to accept them," she says, "For my children's sake. I have no pride." . . .
>
> "What would be the good in beginning now, when you've been destroying them for fifteen years?" I says. "If you keep on doing it, you have lost nothing, but if you begin to take them now, you'll have lost fifty thousand dollars." . . .
>
> She struck the match and lit the check and put it in the shovel, and then the envelope, and watched them burn. (272-73)

We later learn that Mother thinks Jason still has an investment in Earl's business and deposits his earnings in her account; the scam is his way of perpetuating that deception while playing the stock market. In the final section of the novel, we will see the seeds of his deceit brought to fruition and see the completion of what at this point is but a fragmented, developing portrait.

The three interior monologues we have examined are inherently defamiliar: first, they present unusual--if not bizarre--points of view; second, they work largely through indirection. Like some other writers steeped in the Southern oral tradition of story-telling (Mark Twain, for example), Faulkner, in this novel, shows an implicit but clear suspicion of conventions of story and plot. He defamiliarizes these conventions in ways anticipating the nouveau roman of Robbe-Grillet or Sarraute. The reader

eavesdrops on mental processes, on conversations real and imagined, and must create context and re-create story largely on the basis of suggestion and innuendo. There is, in a sense, a mimetic impulse here: the characters, after all, know their contexts; it would be inauthentic (or un-"realistic") for them to discuss what they take for granted simply for benefit of exposition. That burden, consequently, is ours; we must create what is not given, infer what is merely hinted, say what is unsaid. Faulkner provides the clues, the pieces of the puzzle, while generally "talking around whatever it was" (244).

4

The fourth section of the novel, Easter Sunday, 1928, is presented from the third person, authorial point of view. Because of this apparent objectivism and the relative familiarity of technique, the reader might be tempted both to privilege this narrative and to relax in a comfortable, conventional "read." However, as we have seen in Faulkner's earlier third person novels, such a lull is merely the calm before the storm; we are not one line into the narrative before realizing Faulkner is once again forcing us out of familiar habits of reading and into a poetic response: "The day dawned bleak and chill" immediately shakes up our conventional notions of grammar

and syntax, and, consequently, our habitual way of ordering reality. We want to read "bleak and chill" as adverbs rather than noun complements; the result is a tension between reading strategies, between the prose we believe we see and the poetry we are forced to recognize. The syntactic irony reinforces (or is reinforced by) the semantic irony of the nearly-oxymoronic "bleak dawning." And remembering the holiday occasion only enriches the feeling of dislocation.

As the passage continues, the irony is developed through a series of wasteland images that invert our usual conceptions of April and Easter in ways reminiscent of Eliot's condemnation:

> The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust, that, when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged needled laterally into her flesh, precipitating not so much a moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil. (330)

Rather than awakening in botanical and spiritual rebirth, this April seems cruel indeed; nature is topsy-turvy, "grey," "dissolving," "disintegrating" into "venomous particles, like dust." The symbolic implications are clear: the decay, destruction, and inversion of the natural order parallels that of the social order; as the world of the Compsons declines, Dilsey "emerges"--the verb is repeatedly associated with her (332, 358, 372)--"emerges" as narrative center, heroine, earth mother, and

repository of what remains of moral and spiritual values in this wasteland.

But even Dilsey herself is portrayed in complex, almost paradoxical terms. She is queenlike yet rustic in her turban and "maroon velvet cape with a border of mangy and anonymous fur above a dress of purple silk, . . . her myriad and sunken face lifted to the weather, and one gaunt hand flac-soled as the belly of a fish" (330). Faulkner's adjectival pairs--"mangy and anonymous," "myriad and sunken"--function almost merismically, seeming to be inclusive in scope by encompassing abstract vagueness and concrete precision. At once inappropriate and strangely apt, they "read" with the finality of epithet. "Flac-soled" is another case in point: the odd, apparently meaningless compound conjures a clear image of loose palm-skin, the flaccid sole not of a foot but an aging hand, pale and convex as a fish belly. This strange metalepsis seems incomprehensible denotatively, yet poetically congruent.

This tension between poetry and prose characterizes the continuing description of Dilsey:

> The gown fell gauntly from her shoulders, across her fallen breasts, then tightened upon her paunch and fell again, ballooning a little above the nether garments which she would remove layer by layer as the spring accomplished and the warm days,in color regal and moribund. (330-31)

Again we confront a dislocating grammar and syntax: what is the object of the transitive "accomplished"? How do we

process the anacoluthic "and the warm days"? And are the "days" "regal and moribund"? Or the gown? These gaps require interpretive choices; we must "re-write" the sentence in ways commensurate with our personal reading strategies. For many of us, the sentence may make its sense rhythmically more so than grammatically; Faulkner seems indeed to be approaching the suggestivity of music.

In fact, Dilsey's section is energized by Faulkner's Symbolist techniques. Narratively, he attempts something like Dilsey's song "without particular tune or words, repetitive, mournful and plaintive," that accompanies the "murmurous minors of the fire" (336)--or perhaps like Luster's trying to coax a tune out of a saw (358). Nowhere is the evocative musicality of language invoked with more force than in the sermon of Reverend Shegog. This "insignificant looking" visitor begins speaking with the voice of "a white man. His voice was level and cold. It sounded too big to have come from him and they listened at first through curiosity, as they would have to a monkey talking" (366). Shegog is,in fact, practicing his own brand of defamiliarization on his "readers" as Faulkner triangulates the effect to his. Faulkner's reader, consequently, is in a double bind, on a narrative "tight rope" (366): watching both Shegog and the congregation watching Shegog; experiencing both the sensations of the congregation and those of an objective bystander; being both character and

reader. We have moved, in effect, from the interior perspectives of the first three sections to a point of view vacillating between interior and exterior as we must read on both micro and macro textual levels.

As Shegog continues his sermon, the audience forgets "his insignificant appearance in the virtuosity with which he ran and posed and swooped upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice"; they are spellbound until, like "an empty vessel," he pauses and gives them moment to sigh as if waking from "a collective dream" (366). "Then a voice said, 'Brethren.'. . .It was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes" (366-67). Shegog is modulating his voice, transposing his message from the rational, denotative, conventional language of white men to the transrational, suggestive, evocative language of music. It is a magical transformation, a move toward wordless communication. "'I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb!'" he says; but the words do not signify semiotically as much as talismanically. It is as though he were but a medium for the music that transcends rational discourse:

> He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was

> not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words. (367)

Then the music modulates once more, "his intonation, his pronunciation," becoming "negroid," the congregation "swaying in their seats as the voice took them into itself." Shegog launches into a litany of religious code words, syntactically and semantically incoherent, yet evocative of the Christian and slave experience:

> "When de long, cold--Oh, I tells you, breddren, when de long, cold--I sees de light en I sees de word, po sinner! Dey passed away in Egypt, de swingin chariots; de generations passed away. Wus a rich man: whar he now, O breddren? Wus a po man: whar he now, O sistuhn? Oh I tells you. ef you aint got de milk en de dew of de old salvation when de long, cold years rolls away!"
>
> "Yes, Jesus!"
>
> "I tells you, breddren, en I tell you, sistuhn, dey'll come a time. Po sinner sayin Let me lay down wid de Lawd, lemme lay down my load. Den whut Jesus gwine say, O breddren? O sistuhn? Is you got de ricklickshun en de Blood of de Lamb? Case I aint gwine load down heaven!" (368-69)

The sermon evokes the ultimate nonverbal response, a "concerted" "Mmmmmmmmmmmm!" from the congregation, "without words, like bubbles rising in water" (369). Even one member's attempt at analysis finds language insufficient--"'He sho a preacher, mon! He didn't look like much at first, but hush!'"--the concluding imperative a colloquial inexpressibility topos. And Dilsey is inspired to her enigmatic yet thematically appropriate refrain: "'I've seed de first en de last'" (371). (One of the last images of Dilsey in this section is of her singing a hymn:

she only knows two lines but repeats them "over and over to the complete tune" [375], emphasizing the importance of the music, of the form over the literal, denotative content.)

It is interesting to note that Reverend Shegog's sermon recapitulates in reverse the narrative strategies of the novel, from the rational "white man's language" of Jason to the irrational language of Quentin to the meaningless yet meaning-full moan of Benjy. The sermon is an eloquent example of transcendent, nonverbal communication in a world of verbal impotence--an impotence reinforced through subliminal-like repetition and innuendo in the fourth section's portrait of Jason. Trying to get the sheriff to chase Quentin, Jason's "sense of injury and impotence feed[s] upon its own sound . . .. He repeated his story, harshly recapitulant, seeming to get an actual pleasure out of his outrage and impotence" (378-79).And as Jason pursues his niece in solitary frustration, he thinks about Lorraine: "He imagined himself in bed with her, only he was just lying beside her, pleading with her to help him, then he thought of the money again, and that he had been outwitted by a woman, a girl" (383-84). Jason's suggested physical impotence parallels his inability to impose his will upon Quentin; it is his genetic trait comparable to his brother Quentin's inability to protect and preserve his idealistic image of Caddy, and Benjy's

frustrated "trying to say." The four sections of the novel culminate as a cubistic vision of verbal inadequacy and loss; Dilsey and Shegog suggest the possibilities of transcendant signification, while the Compson (conventional) world concludes with Benjy's testament to a purely arbitrary, unmotivated semiotic order.

5

The novel's Appendix, added for the 1946 Portable Faulkner, comments ipso facto, like Eliot's "Notes On The Waste Land," on the necessity and importance of interpretation in modernist works. This is truly a world demanding explication, a fictional universe that requires creative and re-creative ordering. But if the Appendix superficially seems a kind of reader's guide to The Sound and the Fury, we should be wary; it is in fact a fifth perspective on the novel, one benefiting (or suffering) from fifteen years of growth and hindsight, yet characterized by the same difficulties that inform the original text. Faulkner called it "the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it" (LIG 245): it was his attempt to provide some sense of closure to his favorite work, the novel he wrote initially with no thought of publication.

The reader looking to the Appendix as a key to the first four sections is certainly surprised--if not dismayed--to discover Ikkemotubbe. What can this "dispossessed American king" have to do with the stories just read? We are, consequently, forced at the outset to review what has gone before, to remember (or to realize) that they have been stories of loss and dispossession, stories of people bound inextricably with the past. This exercise in itself places us much in the characters' positions--for Faulkner's reader, like his fictional people, the past is never dead, much less past; as Fitzgerald's Carraway observed, we are constantly borne back ceaselessly into it. In this Appendix, Faulkner draws upon this theme that had figured so prominently in his work up to 1945: in order to understand and come to terms with the present, one must understand and come to terms with the past. This theme underlies many of his long, periodic sentences, in which we must essentially recapitulate history to arrive at the concluding point; it is an implicit subject of most of his life's work; and it will reach a kind of apotheosis in Requiem for a Nun (1951) in which to understand the prisoner behind the locked door, we must first trace the history of the lock itself which is inextricably bound to the history of Jefferson. So we look to genealogy for genetic clues to illuminate the dark lives of the Compsons

(though some of these figures are related to the Compsons by heritage rather than blood).

In Ikkemotubbe we find what in Faulkner is tantamount to original sin: the presumption of ownership and transference of what no man can own, the land. The chief is dispossessed by Jason Lycurgus Compson, himself "the grandson of a Scottish refugee who had lost his own birthright by casting his lot with a king who himself had been dispossessed." And Faulkner tells us how "de l'homme" had been homophonically transposed into "Doom," a translation both epitomizing and prefiguring the decline of man (403-04).

In the "Great White Father" Jackson we find a concern with "the principle that honor must be defended whether it was or not because defended it was whether or not" (404); in Charles Stuart Compson we discover a man who "talked himself countryless, his expulsion due not to the treason but to his having been so vocal and vociferant in the conduct of it, burning each bridge vocally behind him before he had even reached the place to build the next one" (406); in Jason Lycurgus II we see the failure of Shiloh "who put the first mortgage on the still intact square mile to a New England carpetbagger" and who "spent the next forty years selling fragments of it off to keep up the mortgage on the remainder" (409); we see how Jason III (father) "sold the last of the property, except that

fragment containing the house and the kitchengarden and the collapsing stables and one servant's cabin . . .to a golfclub for the ready money with which his daughter Candace could have her fine wedding in April and his son Quentin could finish one year at Harvard and commit suicide in the following June of 1910"; and we learn how Jason IV "committed his idiot brother, Benjamin, to the State Asylum in Jackson and sold the house to a countryman" (Flem Snopes) who turned it into a boarding house and later into "row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individuallyowned demiurban bungalows" (411). Such is this litany of dissipation.

When we reach the glosses on the Compson children, we learn how these family traits come home to roost:

> Quentin III. Who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead . . .. Who loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires. But who loved death above all . . . loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death. . . until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint and so flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning.
> (411-12)

This passage essentially verifies the story we have pieced together from the original novel; now, however, with what we know of Compson genealogy, we understand Quentin as someone struggling to be the arbiter of his own fate, yet

doomed by blood to fulfill his legacy of failure. While Faulkner may be a Symbolist in technique, he is certainly a Naturalist in psychology.

Caddy's gloss provides us with our first explicit--though so sketchy to be more suggestive than definitive--account of her tragic history: her "doom"; her pre-marital pregnancy with another man's child; her divorces; her escapades in Hollywood, Mexico, and Paris.But Faulkner shies away from a full presentation of his heroine. Before she can actually materialize on center stage, she disappears from direct view, and we see her once more through the eyes of another. In a sentence that runs almost three pages, Faulkner traces the librarian's mission to "save" the "ageless, beautiful, cold serene and damned" woman photographed with "a German staffgeneral." It seems that even across the distance of years and miles, Caddy is still capable of energizing the life of another, of bringing a vitality into the "mousesized mousecolored spinster" stuck in the routine of hiding Tom Jones and Forever Amber from curious high school students. Before the long sentence runs its course, it once again recapitulates the Compson history of decline and loss, then is followed immediately by the librarian's whisper: "'It's Caddy!'" (413-16). The juxtaposition clearly implies that the lost sister, more so than a Harvard education, was "the best chance in life" for Quentin, if not for the

entire Compson family. When the librarian later confronts the aging Dilsey in Memphis, the woman who had "seed de first en de last" claims not to recognize the woman in the photograph: "'My eyes aint good anymore,' she said. 'I cant see it'" (419). At that point the librarian realizes "that was it she didn't want to see it know whether it was Caddy or not because she knows Caddy doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything anymore worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose" (420). The Compson blood having poisoned her all it could, Caddy can only be saved by not being saved; the best she can do is distance herself from the miasma.

Caddy's fate at home is played out by her daughter, Quentin. Though herself "doomed" (424), Quentin takes charge of her life the best she can. Like her mother before her, under the oppressive hand of men, there are few things in life Quentin can control; like her mother, she can take charge of her virginity and its loss; and she can take what little rightfully belongs to her and flee. Here in the Appendix, Faulkner fills out the story of her theft and flight:

> Who at seventeen, on the one thousand eight hundred ninetyfifth anniversary [Faulkner leaves the math to us] of the day before the resurrection of Our Lord, swung herself by a rainpipe from the window of the room in which her uncle had locked her at noon, to the locked window of his own locked and empty bedroom and broke a pane and entered the window and with the uncle's firepoker burst open the locked bureau drawer and took the money (424-25)

But at this point Faulkner once more shifts his attention from the narrative center; in what is ostensibly a gloss on Quentin, he launches into a two-page parenthetical account of Jason's rage and impotence. Even out of the picture, Quentin can wreak a type of vengeance on her misogynistic uncle, as though one trait inherited from her mother was the ability to be everpresent in absence.

As Quentin vanishes, Faulkner brings down the curtain on the Compson family: "And that was all" (427). He closes with brief notes on TP, Frony, and Luster, then the enigmatic final words:

> DILSEY
> They endured. (427)

The very brevity is curious for Faulkner, its terseness reminiscent of aphorism, proverb, epitaph. The simple declaration seems frustrating at first, unsatisfying--does Dilsey endure? or do "they endure Dilsey"? But when we consider the context of all that has gone before, we realize that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man may truly be king: in a world decomposing before <u>our</u> eyes, endurance is perhaps no small feat. As Faulkner once said, "in that whole family there was Dilsey that held the whole thing together and would continue to hold the whole thing together for no reward, that the will of man to prevail will even take the nether channel of the black man, black race, before it will relinquish, succumb, be defeated" (<u>FIU</u> 5). Thus the burden of survival falls upon the

shoulders of those most accustomed to bearing burdens, as though strength gathered through adversity were not without significance. Still, we may wonder if all this sound and fury has not come down to but a whimper. Despite his nostalgia for traditional virtues, for "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed--love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice" (Essays 120), Faulkner presents a bleak world of decay, incommunicability, and meaninglessness, a world with very little room for optimism. Yet the novel as a whole provides hope: while the fabula it portrays may be nihilistic, if we as readers fulfill our part of the narrative contract and reconstruct that fabula, communication and meaning-making become possible. All of this sound and fury may indeed signify "Nothing"; but that in itself may be significant.[3]

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[3] Interestingly, Noel Polk's "Corrected Text" does not include the Appendix, thus recreating for the contemporary reader the experience of the 1929-1945 text. This experience centers around the present Compson tragedy, the decline of the last of the family, rather than the fall of the House of Compson; it focuses more upon the micro than the macro, and consequently, leaves even more questions unanswered, even more gaps to be filled by the reader. Mutatis mutandis, my conclusions to Part Five remain valid--even more so, for the "Corrected" or "reverted" experience culminates with the arbitrary order of Benjy and the comparable struggle of the reader--signification is still dependent upon referents, concepts, signifieds supplied extra-textually; we still must make significant the apparent lack of significance.

VI

AS I LAY DYING:

STRUGGLING WITH THE NIHILISM OF THE WORD

During six weeks of 1929, while listening to the nearby hum of a power plant dynamo, Faulkner wrote a self-proclaimed tour de force, a relatively lean novel articulating, among other things, his artistic concerns with language and the communication of meaning. As I Lay Dying is a book about tension: the tension between comedy and tragedy, sanity and insanity, life and death; and the tension between word and act, signifier and signified, the devalued sign and the possible reconstitution of meaning. One way of reading the novel is as an attempt to reconcile the vertical axis of word, stasis, and meaningless existence with the horizontal axis of deed, motion, and some kind of significant life. It is an attempt to strike "a balance," in Cash's words, to see if the elusive worlds of language and action can truly be "made . . . on the bevel" (73).

These tensions are both implicit and explicit in the antithetical characterizations of Anse and Addie Bundren, a married couple as estranged as word and deed. Anse, the cuckolded husband, described as a "scarecrow" (65), one who "did not know that he was dead" (159), is the person-

ification of stasis, laziness, and the empty use of words in place of deeds. He even admits as much, though in a somewhat round about way:

> I told Addie it want any luck living on a road when it come by here, and she said, for the world like a woman, "Get up and move, then." But I told her it want no luck in it, because the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man. . . Because if He'd a aimed for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else, wouldn't He a put him longways on his belly, like a snake? It stands to reason He would. (31-2)

In addition to specious logic--God may make man and trees, but certainly man makes roads--Anse is guilty of rationalizing his own laziness. True, it is his "word," his promise to Addie that she will be buried in Jefferson, that precipitates the action of the novel; but he is perfectly willing to stand back and watch others perform the actions necessary to fulfill that "word." Anse often seems so ineffectual that he is virtually non-existent; his "mumbling" mouth (109) is toothless, and one goal of the novel seems to be to put teeth into his words. It is ironic that ultimately he gets those teeth and ultimately his word is honored, ironic because it is through little effort or sacrifice of his own.

It is Anse's counterpart who speaks to his ineffectuality, his characterological nullity, while adumbrating the essential meaninglessness of arbitrary signs:

> Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think Anse, couldn't remember Anse. . . And when I would think Cash and Darl that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them. (159)

Thus Addie Bundren, caught for most of the novel in the "twilight" between life and death, speaks from beyond death but not the grave--she is still in a twilight between death and final rest. For Addie, words are much like her husband, Anse: unmotivated and meaningless; they are "gaps," mere "shape[s] to fill a lack" (158). Addie

> think[s] how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. (160)

Addie understands the arbitrariness of words, the way love may have a sense of "loveness" for English speakers but mean nothing to the non-English, the way we confuse the emotion for the word and vice versa. But Addie's deconstruction carried to the extreme yields "the shape of a ," pure linguistic nihilism: if Faulkner truly believed this, he could never have written a word. In fact, Faulkner does have a good modernist/post-modernist

suspicion of language while at the same time believing--as he must--in the possibility of meaningful communication. Such communication is available through indirection, through intimation, even through silence itself: wordless communication may be the ultimate goal, the only true communication possible; but it must ironically come about through a written context. We should be reminded of the words of Dawson Fairchild in Mosquitoes,words speaking of the "sterility" of words:

> "You begin to substitute words for things and deeds, like the withered cuckold husband that took the Decameron to bed with him every night, and pretty soon the thing or the deed becomes just a kind of shadow of a certain sound you make by shaping your mouth a certain way. But you have a confusion, too. I don't claim that words have life in themselves. But words brought into a happy conjunction produce something that lives, just as soil and climate and an acorn in proper conjunction will produce a tree. Words are like acorns, you know. Every one of 'em won't make a tree, but if you just have enough of 'em, you're bound to get a tree sooner or later." (210)

As I Lay Dying, Faulkner's tour de force, is an exploration of the possibility of such a "happy conjunction." It is the attempt to "straddle" the vertical line of words and the horizontal one of action, the attempt to produce a tree. Faulkner knows this can only be accomplished through the interaction of text and reader, and his techniques of defamiliarization are designed to encourage active interaction.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes a reader of AILD is the fragmentation of point of view. We grope and

flounder through the opening sections, looking desperately for a privileged center. For this reason, it is fruitful to examine closely a few of the beginning chapters.

We begin with Darl's account, an account which adumbrates both the theme and the method of the novel. "Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file" (3). The very first sentence brings us into the world of linearity, of motion. It also presents a potential grammatical ambiguity: Darl's use of "come" anticipates the incorrect grammar of his spoken language; it would be his natural, idiomatic "past" tense. But we soon see, as Darl leads us through his organic worlds of "cotton" and "straw" and things of wood, that he is using the correct present tense; and when we read that a broken roof "leans in empty and shimmering dilapidation in the sunlight" (3), we begin to suspect that our narrator has been granted a kind of poetic language beyond the realistic capabilities of his character. We also receive the first of many delayed revelations:

> When I reach the top he has quit sawing. Standing in a litter of chips, he is fitting two of the boards together. Between the shadow spaces they are yellow as gold, like soft gold, bearing on their flanks in smooth undulations the marks of the adze blade: a good carpenter, Cash is. He holds the two planks on the trestle, fitted along the edges in a quarter of the finished box. He kneels and squints along the edge of them, then he lowers them and takes up the adze. A good carpenter. Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort. I go on to the house, followed by the
>
> Chuck. Chuck. Chuck.

of the adze. (4)

We know from a previous sentence that Cash is sawing, but we have no idea what he is making until almost the end of this paragraph (though the title does give us a clue). We may be struck by the preponderance of sibilants, by the Latinate undulations, by the anastrophe "a good carpenter, Cash is." We definitely must wonder how and why a "better box to lie in," an apparent coffin, could give "confidence and comfort." And we note the typographical breaks in the last "sentence." Though it may be stretching to say that the anastrophe, the reversal of conventional word order, anticipates the reversal of Darl's fortunes, his turn from sanity to apparent insanity, it is certainly not stretching to read the sibilants as imitative of the sound of the saw and the typographical breaks as replications of the syncopation of the adze. Both are conventional poetic techniques, but they are unexpected techniques for the novel reader. We know at this point that we are being asked to read fiction in ways generally reserved for poetry. We do not know at this point that a linear narrative will result from a succession of vertical narrative blocks, much in the way a smooth line is achieved by the broken "chucks" of an adze.

The next "vertical block" is Cora's, and we find ourselves in the past tense world of her unmarketable cakes (she "could not even cook," Addie will later tell

us). Cora's section does advance the story line: we learn that Addie is dying--"her eyes are like two candles when you watch them gutter down into the sockets of iron candle-sticks"--while Cash's saw "sounds like snoring" outside (7-8); and we see Darl and get another perspective on--therefore a better understanding of--his opening chapter. But much of Cora's first section is, as Joseph Reed accurately notes, "a red herring" (92): we expect the cakes to figure more prominently than they do in the final tale.

Then suddenly we are back with Darl and the almost Shandian question and answer segment: "'Where's Jewel?' pa says" (9); and before we get the answer--"'Down to the barn,' I say" (10)--Darl has taken us back through his childhood, to his drinking water from a cedar bucket, to his "feeling [him]self without touching [him]self, feeling the cool silence blowing upon [his] parts"; he has brought us back to the present with a description of his pa's "badly splayed" feet and what at this point seem non sequiturs about Vernon having been to town and his wife having once taught school; and he intimates his clairvoyance by predicting "rain before morning. Maybe before dark." Though not presented in one sentence, as we often find it, Faulkner's characteristic concern with the ever-presence of the past is clearly evident. "The past is never dead. It's not even past," Gavin Stevens will tell

us (RFN 80). We cannot possibly understand who and what a person is without understanding who and what he was, from where and whom he springs--and why. In Darl's past we see what may well be the sensual origins of his characteristic interest in wooden things and in silence. We also find the prefiguration of the novel's sexual themes as well as a journey to town by a man married to a former school teacher. And there is Darl's almost off-handed remark about the rain. It is certainly not unusual for people close to the land to have clear ideas about changing weather--they have learned to read the natural "signs"; but in Darl's case this simple homespun forecast points toward the strange telepathic powers he will later exhibit. On the first reading we will undoubtedly miss this clue; nevertheless, Faulkner has emphasized it by giving us a pattern of past-present-future that juxtaposes a prescient remark with Darl's answer, "Down to the barn." He is a seer of sorts, one who knows certain things.

Darl's second section also gives us an imagistic rendering of the vertical/horizontal theme that will be explicitly articulated later by Anse and Addie. We see Jewel and his horse,

> two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun.
> When Jewel can almost touch him, the horse stands on his hind legs and slashes down at Jewel. Then Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings; among them, beneath the upreared chest, he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake. For an instant before the jerk comes onto his arms he sees his whole body earth-free, horizon-

> tal, whipping snake-limber, until he finds the horse's nostrils and touches earth again. Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs . . . .
>
> They stand in rigid terrific hiatus . . . . Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse. For another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. They descend the hill in a series of spine-jolting jumps, Jewel high, leech-like on the withers, to the fence where the horse bunches to a scuttering halt again. (11)

The tension is implicit in the first line quoted: "two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun" presents one of Faulkner's favorite images--arrested motion--and alludes to one of his favorite poems, Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Keats' figures are forever caught in a moment of blissful agony, that oxymoronic state of being never separated yet never fulfilled. Faulkner's are in a state of living death, a tableau vivant in which the urge for living players to move can become torturous (for both players and audience). Once again the reader is being asked to read poetically--and to ponder the inversion, "tableau savage": not the French tableau sauvage, but a strange English hybrid. (We may remember that savage is etymologically related to silvaticus, "of the woods.") In any case, we are being asked to understand a paradoxical relationship between motion and stasis.

This relationship is developed as the passage continues: the horse--that Anse says is made "longways" like a snake, "to be always a-moving"-- is described by Darl in

vertical terms, "stand[ing] on his hind legs," like a man. Jewel, on the other hand, "moves with the flashing limberness of a snake. . . . his whole body earth-free, horizontal, whipping snake-limber." This melding of the vertical and horizontal themes is reinforced by Faulkner's use of "terrific" in association with "rigid," "motionless," and "hiatus": we are reminded of Addie's "how terribly doing goes along the earth" (my emphasis). Also, the recurring whip image, a "stooping swirl," illustrates a motion that ripples like a sine curve across both the vertical and horizontal axes.

The reader furthermore encounters the somewhat unusual "spraddled," a word that seems almost a portmanteau of spread and Addie Bundren's "straddle." Not long before AILD Faulkner had written another oxymoronic tale of death-in-life, "A Rose for Emily" in which we see another "tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip" (Collected Stories 123). Grierson seems to straddle generations, his whip a symbol of the dominance that survives even his death. Jewel's horse, on the other hand, seems to straddle the axes of motion and stasis, promising a denial of Addie Bundren's words through a concomitant straddling of the parallel axes of word and deed. If so, this "pussel-gutted bastard" would be a "sweet son

of a bitch" (12) indeed.

Jewel's only narrative segment begins with an ambiguous, non-referential "It's," introducing the reader to an interpretive problem that will become exacerbated in the Dewey Dell and Vardaman sections. "It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box" (13). By the end of the sentence we know the referent of "he," but by the end of the paragraph we only have more hints regarding "it": "It's like when he was a little boy and she says if she had some fertilizer she would try to raise some flowers and he taken the bread pan and brought it back from the barn full of dung" (13). The graphic reminder of mortality, the dung in place of the staff of life in the coffin-like bread pan, is one more example of what Jewel sees as Cash's insensitivity. He is angry, frustrated, and even envious--we learn that he fantasizes about taking his dying mother to a high hill and rolling rocks down upon the "buzzards" who sit "waiting, fanning themselves." He would keep them at bay "until she was quiet," thereby protecting her from "that goddamn adze" ticking off the final moments of her life: "One lick less. One lick less" (14). But the full import of "it" is not given in this, Jewel's only, narrative. The "referent" requires the unravelling of the entire story. It lies somewhere in the fact that Jewel acts more than he speaks, and it lies in

the reasons for his actions. At this point we may call "it" anger, frustration, or jealousy, but those individual "acorns" are inadequate. Our understanding of that deceptively innocuous indefinite pronoun entails an understanding of everything Jewel says, everything others say about him, and especially, everything he does.

When we next come to Darl's third chapter, we take some comfort in a familiar voice. We are beginning to regard him as our principal narrator and grant him a certain credibility. We get a sense of the tension between worldly concerns--they have the chance to earn three dollars though we aren't told how--and love and respect for a dying human being. We are told that Anse gave his "word" to bury his wife in Jefferson. And we learn more about Jewel:

> "It's laying there, watching Cash whittle on that damn. . . . . ." Jewel says. He says it harshly, savagely, but he does not say the word. Like a little boy in the dark to flail his courage and suddenly aghast into silence by his own noise. (17)

Again we see Jewel's aversion to the word; but in the process we actually see more of Darl himself; we remember his earlier memories of childhood and darkness and silence. And at the end of this chapter we are given further evidence of the insubstantiality of words, of "voices" that "sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head" (18). More and more as the novel unfolds, silence will be seen as teleological, as an

inevitable goal--like death--if not a meliorative and desirable one. Silence is like a Melvillian whiteness; it is absence and presence, lack of communication yet also the total fulfillment of communication; it is the sound of the fully grown, unfalling tree.

The most astounding example of absent presence is Darl's account of Addie's death. Acting as a third person narrator, a present observer, Darl is actually away with Jewel, earning those three dollars. It is a testament to the credibility he has earned, to the power we grant his imagination or even his clairvoyance, that we tend to accept this narrative as truth. Faulkner is once again reminding us of the distinction between truth and fact--Darl's account of his mother's death is true, Faulkner might say, whether it happened or not. This is a message that will be at the heart of Absalom,Absalom!.

As Addie dies at "twilight," the italicized passages show us Darl and Jewel laboring with the wagon, "tilted at a steep angle into the ditch above the broken wheel" (45). The repetition of "yellow" reminds us that "the light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightning" (35-6), thus adding to the mythic, cosmic, Biblical background that adds resonance and irony to the pending journey. The idea of "twilight," of a blending of dualities, is enforced by the imagery: "about Jewel's ankles a runnel of yellow neither water nor

earth swirls, curving with the yellow road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of dark green neither of earth nor sky" (45). As he imagines (or sees?) Anse "stand[ing] over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. . . . mouthing the snuff against his gums," saying "'Now I can get them teeth,'" Darl announces Addies death: "Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead" (48). It is almost as if saying she is dead makes it so, as if Darl has to say it before the deed and word can come together and hence be true. It is interesting that there is no punctuation at the end of this chapter, no period after "Addie Bundren is dead"; instead, we are left with a gap, a loss, a silence. But this is certainly not an end; on the contrary, the action of the novel is only beginning, precipitated out of the open-endedness following Addie's death. The effect of the italics is to render the phenomenological status of the fiction topsy-turvy: we tend to read the familiar roman type-face as "more real," somehow more credible; and we tend to read the italicized as distant, more imaginative, hence "less real." As a result, we too are placed in a kind of twilight between fiction and reality, between word and deed; we too experience a kind of reversal and seem to be almost "straddling" two seemingly irreconcilable states.

In his next chapter, Darl further articulates the

twilight state:

> In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are <u>was</u>, it is not. Yet the wagon <u>is</u>, because when the wagon is <u>was</u>, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel <u>is</u>, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am <u>is</u>. (72)

This extremely dense passage may strike the reader as evidence of Darl's madness--it is certainly reminiscent of Quentin Compson's interior monologue just prior to his suicide. However, careful reading reveals a complex Cartesian <u>cogito</u>, an existential discourse on being that encompasses many of the novel's themes. Darl is caught between consciousness and sleep, between meaningful existence and a loss of identity. His existential problem is essentially Addie's: in her soliloquy she feels "planted," remembering her father's words that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (155). She needs to assert her identity and does so by punishing her school children--"Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who

have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever" (155)--and by "taking" Anse and then even anticipating revenge from beyond the grave by exacting his promise to bury her in Jefferson. Meaning for Addie requires action, even if it is spiteful or malicious; anything is preferable to empty words. Hence Jewel, who acts rather than speaks, _is_ in part because he does not know any better. His is a kind of blissful ignorance compared to the painful self-awareness and self-doubt of the contemplative Darl.

On the linguistic level, this passage seems decidedly pre-Derridean: character, like the sign, both differs and defers; it takes its meaning from what it _is_ and what it _is not_, from what it _was_ and what it _will be_. It is both the possibility of meaning and meaning displaced. The ramifications for the reading of the entire novel are quite interesting. There is play along the paradigmatic axis: we find "traces" of every other narrator in Darl's segments--and vice versa. Syntagmatically, there is play in the relationships between the narrative blocks themselves, in the ways they may parallel, overlap, leap forward. Meaning at any point is as ephemeral as the "shape" formed by the wind and rain; yet even if that shape be a gap, a " ," as it is for Addie Bundren, that "shape to fill a lack" may still have contours and "echo[es]" (161), still retain traces and evidence of

possible meaning. Hence, for Darl the ordeal of contemplation becomes as "real" as that of action, word as viable as deed, the fact that he undergoes a crisis of consciousness proof both of his existence and against its complete loss.

The effort to bring together seeming incongruities is very much like the current Darl describes in the river-crossing chapter:

> It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again. (127)

The uniting of word and act, of signifier and signified, seems no more paradoxical than "lazy alertness," no less plausible than the way the current upsets the normal vertical/horizontal balance of the landscape:

> Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead. Above the ceaseless surface they stand--trees, cane, vines--rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful water. (127)

Not only are the vertical trees--those meaningful products of disseminated "acorns"--"leaning this way and that," but the horizontal road is displaced, "shaped vaguely high in the air by the position of the lopped and felled trees, as if the road too had been soaked free of earth and floated

upward, to leave in its spectral tracing a monument to a still more profound desolation than this above which we now sit, talking quietly of old security and old trivial things" (129). Darl seems truly to be describing a waste land, but it is a waste land that does contain the potential for its own rejuvenation. When the wagon--which, we remember, is meant to be "a-moving"--enters the river, Faulkner appears to be attempting to blend if not fuse vertical and horizontal elements:

> I felt the current take us and I knew we were on the ford by that reason, since it was only by means of that slipping contact that we could tell that we were in motion at all. What had once been a flat surface was now a succession of troughs and hillocks lifting and falling about us, shoving at us, teasing at us with light lazy touches in the vain instants of solidity underfoot. Cash looked back at me, and then I knew that we were gone. But I did not realise the reason for the rope until I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ. Get out and let the current take you down to the bend, Cash said, You can make it all right. No, I said, I'd get just as wet that way as this (133-34)

The inversions of the strict vertical/horizontal patterns of imagery culminate in the tree/Christ figure. Besides the ironical implications for the journey itself--is it a violation of the will of God? is it inexorable even in the face of God? etc.--the Christ image is one of multiple paradoxes. Christ was both man and God, presence and absence, word and flesh; and as such violated physical laws of gravity and buoyancy. It would seem that all is possible in the realm of imagination, a realm as open-

ended as Darl's unstopped sentence, a realm in which one truly can "ravel out into time" (193).

And Darl, in many ways, seems to do just that--to "ravel out in time." To the extent that we privilege his narrative, to the extent that his voice generally seems more credible and his actions more reasonable than those of the others, his reversal at the end is particularly surprising. His only statutory crime, that of setting fire to Gillespie's barn, is certainly understandable. While we recognize arson as grounds for incarceration, we nevertheless view this instance as perhaps the most rational act of the novel. What is baffling is Darl's apparent lapse from sanity--not so much his claim to hear Addie's voice from within the coffin; that can be explained as a kind of imaginative projection, a dramatization of what he feels in his heart. No, what surprises us--even though, as noted above, we have been somewhat prepared for it--is the loss of identity (signaled by the lapse into third person) of what has been the strongest and most reliable of the narrative voices--and the way the loss of Darl supercedes the burial of Addie as the dominant subject of the novel. Does his mad laughter indicate a recognition of some cosmic absurdity? In part it certainly does: he is at least partially laughing at the human folly that will go through "hell and high water" for a bag of bananas--and at whatever "prime maniacal risibility" would allow it. But

this does not fully explain his manic "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes" (236), and in order to come to a somewhat better understanding of Darl's end, we must understand other facets of this "cubistic bug" (201) of a novel.

Some of the most bizarre narration comes from Dewey Dell and Vardaman, whose sections are characterized by youthful innocence, ignorance, and gullibility. As a result, their narratives tend to be particularly indirect and difficult. For example, in her first chapter Dewey Dell presents this passage, one relying heavily upon an ever-shifting, indefinite "it":

> We picked on down the row, the woods getting closer and closer and the secret shade, picking on into the secret shade with my sack and Lafe's sack. Because I said will I or wont I when the sack was half full because I said if the sack is full when we get to the woods it wont be me. I said if it dont mean for me to do it the sack will not be full and I will turn up the next row but if the sack is full, I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it. And we picked on toward the secret shade and our eyes would drown together touching on his hands and my hands and I didn't say anything. I said "What are you doing?" and he said "I am picking into your sack." And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it.
>
> And so it was because I could not help it. It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. (24-5, my emphasis)

The indirection of this passage results from the substitution of the indefinite pronoun for a series of key words: the one responsible; fate; sexual intercourse; giving in

to temptation; the general condition; give in/ have sex; giving in; the sack; giving in/having sex; general condition/having sex; giving in/having sex. But we are not given the first antecedent of "it." Instead, we must navigate the maze of pronouns and sort out the various meanings. This, obviously, is not actually as difficult as I may be implying--it is, after all, a fairly accurate rendition of the vernacular. My list may not be definitive, but the fact that it is a reasonable approximation of most other readings indicates something about our ability to "know without words." Not only are we accustomed to social euphemism and aware of verbal conventions to the extent of being able to "read between the lines," but we have been taught that "real truth" lies just there, in what is implied and intimated rather than stated directly. This is a lesson of our culture, but a lesson vigorously reiterated by William Faulkner. The fact that one of the emptiest of words can contain such a plenitude of possible meaning--and communicate some of that meaning reasonably well--is a rather cogent argument against Addie Bundren's linguistic nihilism.

The same antecedent problem occurs frequently in Vardaman's sections ("it," 49-51; "them," 180; "they," 194, 199), but what strikes the reader as particularly strange in his narrative is the paradigmatic play of substitutes. First Vardaman commits the <u>post hoc</u> fallacy

of associating Peabody and his horses with the cause of Addie's death, thereby substituting them for the unknown forces beyond both his comprehension and his vengeful reach (49-50). He then substitutes his fish, which, dead, is "not-fish" (49), for his dead mother: "My mother is a fish" (74), reads the novels shortest chapter. When the casket falls into the surging river, Vardaman "hollers" for "the best grabbler," to "catch her darl catch her darl because in the water she could go faster than a man" (136). The use of lower case for "darl" and "vardaman" illustrates the way names can lose their significance, the way words can become simply empty sounds through repetition. They are examples of devalued signs. However, Faulkner's particular repetition of "darl" and "vardaman" tends to have a remedial effect. It reminds the reader of the tenuousness of verbal signs and in that "re-minding" lies the potential for revaluation: by forcing us to read actively and awarely, Faulkner is tapping our recreative powers and urging us to fulfill our commitment in the aesthetic contract.

But Faulkner hardly stops here; if Darl seems to "ravel out into time," Vardaman's narrative seems to ravel out into silence. While his mother still retains some association with the fish (182), she also becomes simply a gap, an "is-not" that no longer even sustains a word: "I had to keep on running the buzzard away from "

(181). And soon after the fire, soon after Darl lies on the casket crying (207), he too ravels out into silence in his younger brother's mind: "Darl he went to Jackson is my brother Darl is my brother " (232); "Darl " (233); "Darl went crazy " (233); "Darl " (234).

But if Darl joins Addie as a gap in the story, he does so after supplanting her as the story's subject, and he leaves us with a kind of cosmic affirmative which overrides her brand of cosmic negativity. (The Hawthornian echoes in Addie's story remind us that she too says "NO! in thunder.") For one thing, Darl illustrates the power of the narrator to take over the narration: As I Lay Dying ultimately becomes at least as much his story as Addie's. But that is just one of the many ironies at play here. Addie's revenge is exacted, Anse keeps his word, and the journey yields its results: not Addie's burial--that merits a scant subordinate clause (220)--but a visit to the pharmacy, a bag of bananas, a new set of teeth, a "graphophone," and even a new Mrs. Bundren.

Interestingly, it is Cash who narrates the conclusion of the novel--we should remember that Faulkner frequently spoke of himself qua writer as a "carpenter" (LIG 61)--and when he discusses the incarceration of his brother, we can see his characteristic concerns with balance (73, 86, 151):

> But I aint so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there

> was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. (221)
>
> This world is not his world; this life his life. (242)

But most of Cash's last chapter deals with the new "graphophone"--the malapropism aptly unites writing and sound--and with the new teeth that make Anse look "kind of hangdog and proud too" and enable the novel to end with a kind of circularity. "'Meet Mrs Bundren,' [Anse] says" (242). Thus we conclude with an affirmation of the verbal, "says," but a verbal now armed with a bite. In a sense it does seem as though the word has been made flesh, as though Cash's desire for a "bevel" has somehow been achieved.

But As I Lay Dying finally yields no such soothing resolution. We are left struggling with paradox, wondering whether to laugh or cry. The tension of cross purposes does get Addie buried in her chosen plot, but at such a price. And the disparate vertical units of composition do yield a linear narrative of a linear journey, much in the fashion of falling dominoes, or more appropriately, a cubist painting. Structurally, the novel is something like a rural Mississippi "Nude Descending a Staircase." But the final triumph of Faulkner's tour de force may lie in the triumph of indirection and defamiliarization--technical "bevelling" devices--over the distance separating word and

deed. When Faulkner has Doc Peabody speak of "the love that passeth understanding" (44), he is reminding us of T. S. Eliot's translation of shantih, the final word of The Waste Land. In that tour de force, the reader is also asked to undergo a journey, to read actively, to ask the proper questions; and, if the interaction between reader and text is complete, we should know the translation without the annotation. And so with As I Lay Dying: if this aesthetic contract is fulfilled, there may indeed be wordless communication, but paradoxically brought about by the power and the context of the word.

VII

ABSALOM,ABSALOM!: A READER-RESPONSE PARADIGM?

Absalom, Absalom! was a "very difficult" novel for William Faulkner to write. He struggled for three years with "inchoate fragments that wouldn't coalesce"(FIU 76) and even wrote two other works, Pylon and The Unvanquished, before finally submitting Absalom to his publisher in 1936. I say "submitting" quite advisedly, for Absalom, Absalom! is not a novel that can readily be called "finished"--indeed, the fact that many readers find the book as difficult to read as it apparently was to write stems from its incompleteness and concomitant indeterminacy: it is a novel designed to place great demands upon the reader, not the least of which is the "finishing" of it in our own fashion and according to our own needs.

That Faulkner was well aware of what he was doing is indicated by this query and response from a 1958 session at the University of Virginia:

> Q. Mr. Faulkner, in Absalom, Absalom! does any one of the people who talks about Sutpen have the right view, or is it more or less a case of thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird with none of them right?
>
> A. That's it exactly. I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact. So these are true as far

> as Miss Rosa and as Quentin saw it. Quentin's father saw what he believed was truth, that was all he saw. But the old man was himself a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see all at once. It would have taken perhaps a wiser or more tolerant or more sensitive or more thoughtful person to see him as he was. It was, as you say, thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when a reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird which I would like to think is the truth.
>
> (FIU 273-4, my emphasis)

It is a complicated process, but therein lies the novel's richness and, I believe, its point. It is essentially a paradigm of reader response: we are given examples of various "readings," various struggles with "inchoate fragments," and as we follow the characters' attempts to make sense of the story, we too must struggle to make the pieces coalesce in some meaningful way. We, like Quentin and Shreve, must involve ourselves in the recreative process of meaning-making, for that is the only way of possibly "overpassing" the major obstacle to learning about the South--"You would have to be born there" (AA 451). As we shall see, the most effective telling about the South will be the indirect story, the "shadow of the branch"; the appropriate reader response creates the tree. In order to facilitate that response, Faulkner digs deep into his bag of defamiliarizing tricks. Rather than simply giving us a textual edifice to come to terms with, he demands that we witness the very construction of that edifice and come to terms with that as well.

In that process, we must deal with the fact that there are no facts--or very few--and every perceived fact must bear serious scrutiny. In the originally published (or "uncorrected" text), even the appended chronology and genealogy contain "errors" that willy-nilly compel us to reevaluate the substance of the narrative. We are, in effect, handed a bagful of bits and pieces and required to assemble the puzzle.

Absalom,Absalom! begins in the tomblike atmosphere of "what Miss Rosa Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that--a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers" (3). Miss Rosa, in her "eternal black," is a static figure, imprisoned forty-three years, as we come to learn, in a kind of stunted childhood by the inhumanity of Thomas Sutpen. The room is her cell/tomb, sealed and darkened "because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler"(3); that same someone "had also told her that the cost of electricity was not in the actual time the light burned but in the retroactive overcoming of primary inertia when the switch was snapped" (108). It is just such an "overcoming of primary inertia" that prompts Quentin's "summons, out of another world almost" (7). Rosa's only hope of breaking out of her "impotent and static rage" is through the process of discourse: "It's

because she wants it told, [Quentin] thought" (7); and Rosa herself is quite explicit: "So maybe you will enter the literary profession . . . and maybe someday you will remember this and write about it" (6). Through the telling and retelling, through the process of interaction between speaker/author and listener/reader, Rosa may find ways of coming to terms with her life. She may also find a way of finally dealing with Thomas Sutpen, of controlling him for a change, and of exacting a kind of narrative revenge upon the man whose death preempted any worldly retribution.

But the tomblike atmosphere is not only symbolically appropriate to Rosa's story--it has significance for reader-response as well. In the Coldfield "office," Quentin is denied not only an external perspective but most external sensations. He is subjected to a kind of sensory deprivation, granted merely the "grim haggard amazed voice" as the focus of his attention--and the "wistaria" which permeates the novel almost talismanically, a Proustian nexus between listener and voice, present and past. (The only other externalities, the "quiet September sun" and the occasional "dry vivid dusty sound" of sparrows, contribute to the thematic atmosphere while hardly intruding upon the domain of the voice.) And the reader is right there with him: we too are deprived of all external sen-sory data, our concentration guided by and focused almost hypnotically upon the narrative voice that

holds us prisoner until the long, often periodic sentences reach their full stop. Only then are we allowed to come up for air, and we do so having learned implicitly and indirectly of the power of rhetoric and narrative--to an extent, the medium is indeed the message here; for the most part all we have is the everpresent, omnipotent narrative voice(s) and our continuous reaction and response. All else is eliminated.

Rosa, "the county's poetess laureate" (8), talks "until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked" (4). The "ghost" appears "out of the soundless Nothing," created by the narrative "as if it were the voice which he haunted" (4), and the effect upon Quentin is essentially the effect of any "text" upon a reader: as he receives the percepts from Rosa's text, Quentin must translate them into concepts which will become a part of his imaginative reconstruction or recreation of the work. As he does so we see the following representation of that process:

> the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage, like this: It seems that this demon--his name was Sutpen--(Colonel Sutpen)--Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation--(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)--tore violently. And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which--(Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)--without

> gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only--(Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something. And died)--and died. Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says--(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (And by Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin Compson. (5-6)

The italics indicate the shift from Rosa's narrative to Quentin's recreation; the dashes and parentheses note the dialogue in the listener's mind, the interaction between his response and the actual or remembered text itself. This seems to be a reductive representation of reader-response, but it also seems to be an honest attempt to illustrate that abstract mental process. As the novel unfolds, this simplistic model will give way to more complex permutations.

Much of the interaction between speaker/author and listener/reader fits into what Roman Ingarden calls "special acts of consciousness," or active readings in which literary objects "attain the character of an independent reality" (40, see also 14 above). This is particularly evident in the penultimate chapter, but even in the early pages of the novel we find this example, in one of the narrator's relatively rare appearances: "as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence" (AA 11).

Thus Quentin assimilates Rosa's tale into his own

active reading; but one of the added difficulties of the novel is that Rosa's account itself is a kind of "reading," an imaginative construct born out of "the overheard talk of adults" (22) and personal experience. And it is consequently colored and distorted by her own obsessions: Rosa's "trauma," caused ostensibly (so Shreve speculates) by Thomas Sutpen's suggestion "that they breed together for a test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry" (222), imposes a Gothic, demonic cast upon her perspective. "Out of quiet thunderclap [Sutpen] would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous . . . , faint sulphur-reek still in his hair clothes and beard" (4); and he satanically issues his fiat: "Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light" (5). Thus Miss Rosa invokes "the ogre-shape" "enclosed by its effluvium of hell" (11), tells of her "dead sister Ellen: this Niobe without tears who had conceived to the demon in a kind of nightmare" (11-12), and tells of the town's suspicions that Sutpen was some sort of highwayman (or "riverboatman") extraordinaire.

Since Rosa is the only one of the narrators to have actually known Sutpen, we might expect her story to be the most factual and accurate. Yet her version is both fraught with speculation (she was not even alive to witness the "abruption" above) and admittedly incomplete: "apparently half of what he actually did [between arriving in town and

marrying Ellen] nobody at all knew about" (17). But a detailed knowledge of Sutpen's activities is not necessary for Rosa's tale to be true; her version is true in her own terms, true as a revelation of her character, true as a response to her particular needs. For Rosa, the "truth" is that Sutpen's demonic nature explains all of his actions and answers all of the questions of the novel (see Vickery 85):

> I saw Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse; I saw Ellen die with only me, a child, to turn to and ask to protect her remaining child; I saw Henry repudiate his home and birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown; I saw that man return--the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims--who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him. (17-18)

It may be, as John T. Matthews argues, that Rosa agrees to marry this demon because she is seeking "to fill a void" (128), trying to compensate for a life of self-doubt and emotional deprivation. But I believe the ramifications of her decision are farther-reaching and in the larger terms of the novel, tell us something about the South. Referring to herself momentarily in the third person, Rosa explicitly links Sutpen with the region itself, with those who

> had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born (and the man who had done that, villain dyed though he be, would have possessed in her eyes, even if only from association with them, the stature and shape of a hero too) . . .. Oh he was brave. I have never gain-

> said that. But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it--men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose? (19)

Her explanation reveals a South in love with abstractions, in love with ideas of love, courage, and honor, a South caught in a chivalric dream-world perhaps born out of an excess of Sir Walter Scott (see Cash 67). Such abstractions are the very stuff of Southern mythography; they allow the past to be re-created in forms of wish-fulfillment and vindication; they enable a culture to avoid dealing with the reality of its past. As Rosa says, "there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth, from which the dreamer, waking, says not 'Did I but dream?' but rather says, indicts high heaven's very self with : 'Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?'"(178). Through indirection, Faulkner seems to be laying bare personal and cultural dreams and pointing the reader's response toward a truth that is truer still. Indeed, the novel as a whole works against such conventions associated with the magnolia myth, parodying and deconstructing them.

Such truth will be revealed through the interaction of the text and a competent reader; it is in a sense transrational, as Faulkner indicates in this remark about the difference between narrative and real time:

> It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows

> must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity--horror or pleasure or amazement--depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. (22-23)

Absalom, Absalom! may be read as an attempt to illustrate formally and structurally the abstract process of reader-response on the one hand, and a kind of cultural psycho-analysis of the South on the other, both with their "logic-and reason-flouting" qualities. As Iser points out,

> the constitution of meaning not only implies the creation of a totality emerging from interacting textual perspectives . . . but also, through formulating this totality, it enables us to formulate ourselves and thus discover an inner world of which we had hitherto not been conscious. (Act 158)

This becomes even more apparent as we move into Mr. Compson's sections.

2

Mr.Compson's narrative discloses yet another aspect of the Southern psyche: he articulates the feelings of a rational white world caught in its untenable social system by chance and fatality. Whereas Miss Rosa's tale is based in a kind of demonization, Mr. Compson's is rooted in a determinism that frees him from responsibility for both his and his ancestors' actions. As Donald Kartiganer has pointed out, "It is no wonder then that the characters in Mr. Compson's narrative should have at times the stark

lineaments of Greek tragedy and epic, the heroes of which are frequently involved in allegiances and contexts--the capricious machinations of the gods--which free them from what we consider moral issues of right and wrong" (78). Kartiganer argues, accurately I believe, that Sutpen's story is "easy for Mr. Compson" (81) because the inevitability of fate absolves him "for his own inactive and indecisive life" (78).

Mr. Compson's Sutpen is "the biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county" (AA 86), accepted finally by the community because of his wealth, but "unaware that his flowering was a forced blooming," unaware that "while he was still playing the scene . . ., behind him fate, destiny, retribution, irony--the stage manager . . .--was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next one" (87-88). One of these "synthetic and spurious shadows" is Charles Bon who, like Sutpen, appears "almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time" (90). To Mr. Compson, both Bon and Sutpen are mythical figures doomed to a pattern of self-creation and self-destruction. As he speculates about Bon's engagement to Judith and Sutpen's "discovery" of the octoroon mistress (the New Orleans trip "sheer chance, just a little more of the illogical machinations of a fatality" [125]), Compson portrays the not-so-young man as

"the detached . . . scientist watching the muscles of an anesthetized frog" (115), possessing "that fatalistic and impenetrable imperturbability with which he watched [the Sutpens] while he waited for them to do whatever it would be that they would do" (115). Again it is "fatalism" (133) that causes Bon to love Henry "the better of the two," and it is "the fatality and the fatality's victims" who "both think, hope, that the War would settle the matter" (148).

But Mr. Compson's narrative is much more than simply an illustration of another Southern fatalism, the kind of neurosis that could defend slavery as an order commanded either by God or Comtean social determinism (Cash 87). For it is in his sections that the novel really opens out into the realm of unsubstantiated conjecture; and it is in his sections that we become more acutely aware of the importance of the telling and the listening, and particularly of the importance of Quentin's emerging role as listen-er and re-teller (and re-listener).

When Mr. Compson tells Quentin of Sutpen's "affront" to the town, he is speculating that the town <u>thought</u> Sutpen had implicated them in "whatever the felony which produced the mahogany and crystal" (50); when he speculates that Sutpen named all of his children, Henry, Judith, Clytie, and "the one before Clytie" (73), he indicates that he has learned from his father what we will later learn: that Sutpen had had another wife and another

child. But Mr. Compson gives no indication that he suspects Charles Bon to be that child. He does, as suggested above, see parallels between the two, and he is certainly as fascinated with Bon as Miss Rosa had been with Sutpen.

Regarding the crucial question--why did Henry Sutpen shoot Charles Bon?--Mr. Compson seizes upon the "photograph of the other woman and the child" (110) which Judith found on Bon's dead body. (Miss Rosa had still thought the metal case contained Judith's picture--in the dynamic process of narrative even a photograph is not fixed.) Bigamy becomes the ostensible reason for the Christmas argument (reported by the servants) in which "Henry had formally abjured his father and renounced his birthright" (96). But even Mr. Compson is aware that such a "morganatic ceremony--a situation which was as much a part of a wealthy New Orleansian's social and fashionable equipment as his dancing slippers-- . . . just does not ex-plain" (123-24). He realizes that of the "few old mouth-to-mouth tales . . . something is missing"; he compares the pieces of the story to elements of a "chemical formula":

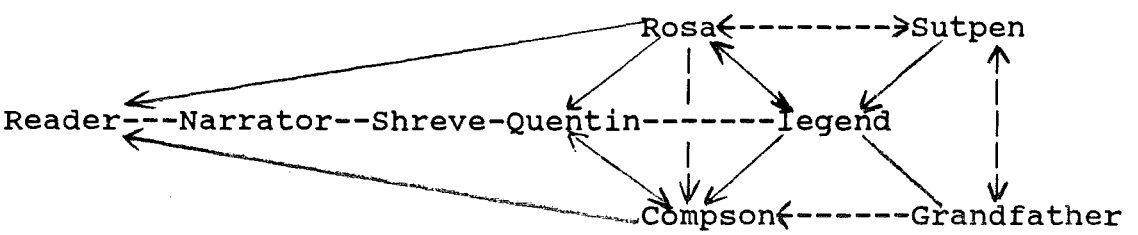
> "you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs." (124-25)

In this passage Mr. Compson is adumbrating the reconstruc-

tive problem at the heart of the novel, the problem facing both the internal narrators and the internal and external readers who, like Faulkner, must deal with "inchoate fragments" that resist coalescence. There are inevitably gaps in the narrative which must be "overpassed" imaginatively. But far from being stress points of structural weakness, such gaps are more precisely "portals" strengthened and reinforced by a kind of bonding with the readers' creative capacities. As we have noted above, reader-response critics such as Wolfgang Iser argue that "the indeterminate sections or gaps of literary texts are in no way to be regarded as a defect; on the contrary, they are a basic element for the aesthetic response. . . . indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation" ("Indeterminacy" 12, 14; see above, Chapter Two).

Furthermore, Mr. Compson's chemical metaphor perfectly describes Absalom, Absalom!'s structural design. Up to this point in the novel Faulkner has given us two distinct versions of the Sutpen story; we have been implicitly asked to interact in dyadic opposition with Miss Rosa's "demonizing," to interpret, to analyze, to fill in the gaps--and to do likewise with Mr. Compson's deterministic account. Such a dyadic relationship is typical of all reading, and, despite our awareness of Derridean deconstruction, usually presents no insurmountable problems. However, Faulkner has complicated the process on a variety

of levels: obviously our relation with Rosa is not simply dyadic--much of her tale triangulates into hearsay, local legend, fabrication, projection; and our relation with Mr. Compson is similarly triadic--we must interpret his interpretations of stories told (hence interpreted). To complicate matters further, we must evaluate Mr. Compson's version in the reverberations of Rosa's; and to complicate things further still, all of these interpretations and reinterpretations are subject to filtration through Quentin's and/or Shreve's consciousness and punctuated by intrusions from the external limited narrator. What we have finally is a series of triangulations, a structure looking very much like Mr. Compson's "chemical formula":



Each pairing represents an example of interaction between speaker and listener or author and reader, incoming arrows indicating reader reception, outgoing arrows an imaginative construct built upon informational input. The web of triangulations illustrates the overdetermined (in a Freudian sense) nature of narrative influence and the vertiginous array of perspectives, speculations, opinions, and "facts" that defamiliarizes the subject matter of Absalom,

Absalom!, essentially rendering the epistomological and ontological ground of the novel problematic. As Faulkner said, "it takes two to make a book," and here we see that it takes two cubed again and again to make this one.

In effect, Absalom, Absalom! presents both a model of and a stimulus for what Iser calls "the wandering viewpoint" (Act 108 ff.): as we read, new information necessitates the reevaluation of old, and that transformation of memory alters our expectations of information to come: "throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories" (Act 111; see also 10-11 above). It is also helpful to see this "dialect of protension and retention" in terms of the play of differance along the syntagmatic axis: new narratives contain traces, similarities, and differences of preceeding ones; as we apperceive and reevaluate, that protean entity called our "reading" gradually takes shape. But let's backtrack for a moment to see just how this works in practice.

3

Mr. Compson's first section, Chapter Two, takes place in a twilight full of the ever-present wistaria. It is a "day of listening too--the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly about that which he already knew since he

had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833" (34). Consequently, almost half of this chapter is told by the narrator: his voice summarizes what has been in the "air" of Quentin's experience and what Mr. Compson presumably tells him that evening on the gallery. We learn what little the town knew of Thomas Sutpen--"they had to depend on inquiry to find out what they could about him" (37): he appeared in Jefferson as though "created out of thin air" (35), acquired one hundred square miles of virgin land, and disappeared to return with a French architect and a wagonload of "wild negroes" who, to the townsfolk, seem to communicate in "some dark and fatal tongue of their own" (41); we see the house rise out of the wilderness twelve miles from town; and we see Sutpen's pursuit of a respectable wife. At this point Mr. Compson takes over the narrative, and tells us of the turmoil surrounding Sutpen's marriage to Ellen Coldfield, of the town's boycott of the ceremony predominantly because they could never forgive Sutpen "for not having any past" (61). What we get in this chapter is exposition, but exposition of what the town knew, what knowledge of Sutpen was available through local tradition and lore; the form is appropriate: we have a traditional narrative voice superceded by a straightforward first person narrative.

In Chapter Three the traditional form is broken and

the reader is presented with a new form, one fitting the new melding of narrative and reader. First, we note that quotation marks disappear and are not replaced by any typographical markers. Roman type signals the spoken voice with brief italicized inserts indicating the speaker. This is another of Faulkner's implicit messages, one emphasizing the narrative voice--voice, once again is everything, not simply something that pops into the narrative from time to time: voice <u>is</u> narrative and vice versa. Again we have the long sentence patterns which hold reader attention until the voice is ready to relinquish its hold upon us. We have the choice only of hanging on until the period or of giving up entirely. And we should note that the long sentences in this section <u>seem</u> much more difficult than they actually are. In fact, the length comes from series of qualifications and explanations, as in this example:

> [Sutpen] probably did not even look at [Rosa] twice as compared with, weighed against his own family and children--the small slight child whose feet, even when she would be grown, would never quite reach the floor even from her own chairs, the ones which she would inherit nor the ones--the objects--which she would accumulate as complement to and expression of individual character, as people do, as against Ellen who, though small-boned also, was what is known as fullbodied (and who would have been, if her life had not declined into a time when even men found little enough to eat and the end of her days had been without trouble, fullbodied indeed. Not fat: just rounded and complete, the hair white, the eyes still even young, even a faint bloom yet on what would be dewlaps and not cheeks any longer, the small plump ringed unscarified hands folded in tranquil anticipation of the food, on the damask before the Haviland beneath the candelabra which he had fetched to town years and years ago in wagons, to the astonished and

> affronted outrage of his fellow citizens), and against Judith already taller than Ellen, and Henry though not as tall for sixteen as Judith was for fourteen, yet giving promise of someday standing eye to eye with his father;--this creature, this face which hardly ever spoke during the meal, with eyes like (as you put it) pieces of coal pressed into soft dough and prim hair of that peculiar mouselike shade of hair on which the sun does not often shine,against Judith's and Henry's out-of-doors faces: Judith with her mother's hair and her father's eyes and Henry with his hair halfway between his father's red and Ellen's black and eyes of a bright dark hazel;--this small body with its air of curious and paradoxical awkwardness like a costume borrowed at the last moment and of necessity for a masquerade which she did not want to attend: that aura of a creature cloistered now by deliberate choice and still in the throes of enforced apprenticeship to, rather than voluntary or even acquiescent participation in, breathing--this bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the also-dead--the face, the smallest face in company, watching him across the table with still and curious and profound intensity as though she actually had some intimation gained from that rapport with the fluid cradle of events (time) which she had acquired or cultivated by listening beyond closed doors not to what she heard there but by becoming supine and receptive, incapable of either discrimination or opinion or incredulity, to the prefever's temperature of disaster which makes soothsayers and sometimes makes them right, of the future catastrophe in which the ogre-face of her childhood would apparently vanish so completely that she would agree to marry the late owner of it.
>
> (77-79)

This is certainly a mouthful; but the narrative is quite easy to follow: essentially we have a series of adjective clauses and prepositional phrases, a series of qualifiers within qualifiers, literal parentheses within figurative ones. The only real difficulty comes near the beginning: the distance between the appositive ("the small child... chairs") and its referent ("her"/[Rosa]); and the awkward

elision of "if" in the second of the pair of subordinate clauses ("if her life...eat and the end...trouble") which forces the reader to read back from "the end" to find the appropriate context. Otherwise, this example, like many in Absalom,Absalom!, is right-branching; it develops logically and linearly and, consequently, does not present serious problems if the reader will simply hang in there until closure.

My point is quite simple: due to the almost vertiginous nature of the subject matter, of the kaleidoscopic array of speculation and imaginative construct, the reader is constantly searching for solid epistomological and ontological ground--we are never quite sure what is real and what is not; consequently, the kinds of defamiliarization we have examined in some of the earlier novels could be overwhelming here. Note how often in this novel Faulkner will parenthetically identify the referents of pronouns, how often sentences are right-branching and, though lengthy to exasperation, generally straightforward and easy to follow. It is as if in some sections of Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner saw the need for relief and did not want syntactic difficulties to interfere with the overwhelming flow of narrative. As a result, the prose rages onward, unfolding, revealing information bit by bit, continually qualifying, modifying, and building upon itself, while the reader holds on, caught up in its current. It is

another testament to Faulkner's paradoxical faith in the sheer power of language to carry and convey meaning.

In Chapter Four Faulkner backs away from the merged narrative and returns to a more traditional form. As if reiterating and analyzing the lesson taught by example in the previous chapter, the external author now has his internal author (Mr. Compson) explicitly direct the readers (Quentin and the external reader) to the imaginative play: "I can imagine [Henry] and Sutpen in the library that Christmas eve, the father and the brother, percussion and repercussion like a thunderclap and its echo"; "this man whom Henry first saw riding perhaps through the grove at the University on one of the two horses which he kept there or perhaps crossing the campus on foot in the slightly Frenchified cloak and hat which he wore, or perhaps (I like to think this) presented formally to the man . . ."; "You can not even imagine him and Judith alone together. Try to do it and the nearest you can come is a projection of them while the two actual people were doubtless separate and elsewhere--two shades pacing, serene and untroubled by flesh . . ."; "I can imagine them as they rode . . ."; "And I can imagine how Bon told Henry . . ..I can imagine Henry in New Orleans" (111, 117, 120, 133, my emphasis), etc. Mr. Compson qua narrator and Quentin qua reader seem to recapitulate "the percussion and repercussion," the "thunderclap and its echo," as the father

imagines Ellen and Judith creating Bon from out of nothing: "the shadowy character. Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phan-tom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all" (128). The irony, of course, is that Bon "as a man" does hardly seem to exist at all, and as fictional characters indeed even Mr. Compson and Quentin are but shadows.

But perhaps the most interesting part of Mr. Compson's narrative is what we may call his "How To" lesson in indirection; he presents to Quentin an explicit example of Faulkner's own aesthetic of defamiliarization, indirection, and the gradual revelation of meaning:

> "it would be the ceremony, a ceremony entered into, to be sure, with a negro, yet still a ceremony; this is what Bon doubtless thought. So I can imagine him, the way he did it: the way he took the innocent and negative plate of Henry's provincial soul and intellect and exposed it by slow degrees to this esoteric milieu, building gradually toward the picture which he desired it to retain, accept. . . . watching the picture resolve and become fixed and then telling Henry, 'But that's not it. That's just the base, the foundation'. . . . a dialogue without words, speech, which would fix and then remove without obliterating one line of the picture, this background, leaving the background, the plate prepared innocent again. . . . waiting for the next picture which the mentor, the corruptor, intended for it: that next picture, following the fixation and acceptance of which the mentor would say again, perhaps with words now, . . . 'But even this is not it': and Henry, 'You mean, it is still higher than this, still above this?' Because he (Bon) would be talking now, lazily, almost cryptically, stroking onto the plate himself now the picture which he wanted there; I can imagine how he did it--. . .the exposures brief, so brief as to be cryptic, almost staccato, the plate unaware of what the complete picture would show, scarce-seen yet ineradi-

> cable:--a trap, a riding horse standing before a closed and curious monastic doorway . . . and Bon mentioning the owner's name casually--this, corruption subtly anew by putting into Henry's mind the notion of one man of the world speaking to another, that Henry knew that Bon believed that Henry would know even from a disjointed word what Bon was talking about . . ." (136-38)

Thus Compson imagines how Bon would communicate his point through intimation and suggestion, and how Henry would respond almost subliminally,

> "Without his knowing what he saw it was as though to Henry the blank and scaling barrier in dissolving produced and revealed not comprehension to the mind, the intellect which weighs and discards, but striking instead straight and true to some primary blind and mindless foundation of all young male living dream and hope . . .. this seen by Henry quickly, exposed quickly and then removed . . ..that brief, before Henry had had time to know what he had seen" (138-39)

It is this process of indirection that lends special resonance to Faulkner's use of "trap": reading forward we see a buggy by a door; reading backward we see the legerdemain that is narrative artifice. Writer and reader are truly "seducer and seduced" (148), and Mr. Compson's lesson serves to reveal the kind of funhouse reciprocating mirrors of narrative that cause this novel to be so confusing, taxing, and richly rewarding. We come to understand that his narrative is a highly subjective, highly imaginative recreation which, while "true" in a subjective sense, "true" on its own terms, is actually but a fragment, an incomplete and largely fictitious account. Even Bon's letter to Judith emphasizes the point: it is "without date or salutation or signature" (160): even this

written text, this physical artifact that should be factual, is incomplete, perhaps apocryphal to an extent. Yet as shaky as it is, the letter/text does "make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of oblivion to which we are all doomed" (159-60). Again and again Faulkner would repeat these words almost verbatim in explaining the artist's desire for immortality (LIG 103, 227, 253). And as incomplete as it is, the letter and his father's narrative creation work to motivate Quentin toward an active reading: the narrator interrupts Mr. Compson with a long parenthetical account of his son's response--"(It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see [Henry and Charles], facing one another at the gate."--and describes the confrontation leading to "the voices not even raised: Dont you pass the shadow of this post, this branch, Charles; and I am going to pass it, Henry)" (164-65).

4

When we resume Rosa's story in Chapter Five, we find ourselves thrust immediately into a rambling, italicized narrative: "So they will have told you" the section begins; and Rosa frequently punctuates her story with variations of those words as if to remind Quentin that much of what he has heard in his nineteen years of breathing

"the same air" has been the product of someone else's reconstruction. Much of "their" narrative may be true--at least Rosa does not explicitly reject it--but some we are allowed to see for the fiction that it is: "(oh yes, they will tell you) found a beau and was insulted, something heard and not forgiven, not so much for the saying of it but for having thought it about her so that when she heard it she realized like a thunderclap that it must have been in his mind for a day, a week, even a month maybe" (213-214). Not only does Rosa say she has forgiven Sutpen, but ear-lier she adamantly gave him "this credit: he had never once thought about what he asked me to do until the moment he asked it because I know that he would not have waited two months or even two days to ask it" (207). But even as she underscores the imaginative play of the townspeople, Rosa indulges in fictions of her own, a projection of her own insecurity: "They will have told you how I came back home. Oh yes, I know: 'Rosa Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn't keep him'" (210).

The overall effect is, once again, to deny both Quentin and the reader any vantage point outside of the converging and kaleidoscoping currents of narrative fictions. We, like Quentin, are totally deprived of any external stimuli--indeed, the only glimpse we get of any kind of world beyond the voice is when the voice itself draws explicit attention to the wistaria that "distills

and penetrates this room as though (light-unimpeded) by secret and attritive progress from mote to mote of obscurity's myriad components." But the wistaria is not a phenomenological reality as much as an integral part of the narrative, "the substance of remembering" (178) that serves to connect 1910 and the "summer of wistaria" (178). The response is, once again, an active reading; the chapter ends not with Rosa's conclusion but with Quentin's:

> But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass--the door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women, the negress and the white girl in her underthings (made of flour sacking when there had been flour, of window curtains when not) pausing, looking at the door, the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace spread carefully on the bed and then caught swiftly up by the white girl and held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, with his shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair, his gaunt worn unshaven face, his patched and faded gray tunic, the pistol still hanging against his flank . . . (215)

In his activated imagination Quentin "sees" all of these details and even "hears" the conversation that would occur:

> Now you cant marry him.
> Why cant I marry him?
> Because he's dead.
> Dead?
> Yes. I killed him. (215)

We are, in effect, witnessing the writing of fiction, the continuation of the section of Quentin's "novel" left unfinished on his father's porch.

Finally, as if to say to the reader, "if you don't have the point by now . . .," Faulkner concludes his novel

with an explicit illustration of imaginative interplay, the "happy marriage of speaking and hearing . . . where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false" (395).

5

The Harvard section begins with the letter from Mr. Compson announcing Rosa Coldfield's death. This letter is in fact a "text" with which the two students interact--it rests on the dormroom table for the remainder of the narrative, and although often "lying at such an angle that [Quentin] could not possibly have read it" (272), it is everpresent, like Sutpen, even in its apparent absence. The interaction is so complete that we forget about the "text" until Quentin is able to "finish it" (469) near the novel's end; at that point we are reminded that he has been looking at it all along.

The letter and its announcement trigger two very different responses: Quentin is carried back to that which he "couldn't pass" (216), the encounter between Henry and Judith following Bon's death; and Shreve is once again engaged in his ongoing inquiry: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (218). Shreve is interested because of his sense (albeit perhaps an ironic

one) of cultural deficiency:

> Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. (450)

Shreve has apparently heard a good deal of the Sutpen story but does not fully understand. His "telling" is an attempt to crystallize loose and jumbled "facts" garnered from his roommate since September.

Shreve reiterates Rosa's history, her hatred for her father (Mr. Compson's speculation) who "nailed himself up in the attic to keep from being drafted into the Rebel army and starved to death" (221), and her "mortal affront" (222) at the hands of the demon, Sutpen. Shreve also summarizes Sutpen's design and self-destruction. His account, though generally accurate (punctuated by Quentin's laconic confirmations) and often characterized by images borrowed from both Rosa's and Mr. Compson's fictions ("demon," "Agamemnon to her Cassandra," 222; "the Creditor's hand," 229) nevertheless reveals either an incomprehension of social and cultural particulars (a "misreading" or even an incompetent one?) or the desire to satirize in order to perhaps distance himself and/or Quentin from the text (a deliberate reading against the text?): the Canadian repeatedly refers to "Aunt Rosa" and is repeatedly

corrected--"Miss Rosa, I tell you" (221); he is confused (?) about "crystal tapestries and Wedgewood chairs" (223) and "Pickett's charge at Manasses" (451); and he misses the point about Penelope's colt and Milly's baby--"Well, Milly," Quentin's Sut-pen says, "too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (357)--thinking that Milly had had a son.

But there are times when the act of narration transcends cultural differences, when Shreve sounds "just exactly like Father if Father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back" (227), when Shreve gets right "the Florentine mirrors and Paris drapes" (381) and "the dirty haviland and the crumpled damask" (403). At such times both students merge so completely with the narrative line that there is virtually no difference between the two:

> both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps never existed at all anywhere. (378-79)

These are times of heightened imaginative play. Shreve speculates (but "it might have been either of them and was in a sense both" [378]) that the Christmas argument arose when Sutpen told Henry that Charles was his brother, and further speculates that Bon may or may not have known this "fact." Shreve-Quentin literally creates the money-hungry lawyer who orchestrates Eulalia's revenge by finding Sut-

pen in Mississippi, finding Henry at the University, and arranging for Charles to enroll and meet him there (366 ff.). And Quentin and Shreve imagine that Bon recognizes his features in Henry's face--"My brow my skull my jaw my hands" (392)--and ultimately wants only to be sim-ilarly "recognized" by his father. They invent the visit to Charles' mother which convinces Henry that Charles is indeed his brother. And they imaginatively merge with the characters at various points: "So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses . . . that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry" (417), and "first, two of them, then four; now two again" (431) off in the war.

As David Minter notes, Quentin and Shreve are involved in "a game of creation--a game at once synthetic, in its piecing together of disparate interpretations, and inventive, in its supplying of scenes and filling of gaps, and imaginative, in its constructing of a whole" ("Interpretive Design" 201). And for Shreve it is indeed a form of "play" (AA 349). But for Quentin it is much more than that; he is engaged in a kind of logo- or narrative-therapy, trying to come to terms with his complex heritage. And his role in this narrative-therapy requires that he tell as well as listen; for it is in the telling, the talking out, the shriving, that Quentin will have a chance of making sense of his culture and perhaps exorcise his

own demons. Note how anxious he is about having "to hear it all again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall never listen to anything else but this again forever"; and note how he insists "I am telling" (345). It is the creation and the re-creation, the "happy marriage of speaking and hearing" that will perhaps reconcile the paradoxes that torment Quentin and perhaps allow him (and Shreve) to "overpass" and try to understand a South which he sees as "paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" (324-25).

Absalom, Absalom!, after all, focuses upon the events leading up to , comprising, and resulting from the Civil War, the figurative fratricidal conflicts quite literalized. It is therefore logical that the students' imaginations would turn eventually to the white man's denial of the humanity of his black brother; hence, the speculation that Charles Bon was part black is appropriate in their version. What is confusing and enigmatic is how Quentin supposedly comes by this "fact."

Quentin has told Shreve that Sutpen "told Grandfather, dropped this into the telling as you might flick the joker out of a pack of cards . . . that the old man's wife had been a Spaniard" (315), and that Sutpen later discovered

> misrepresentation of such a crass nature as to have not only voided and frustrated without his knowing it the central motivation of his entire design, but would have made an ironic delusion of all that he had suffered and endured in the past and all that he could ever accomplish in the future toward that design. (328)

So Sutpen repudiated his first wife, put her "aside like eleventh and twelfth century kings did" (300). (Perhaps the same "kings" the narrator tells us Henry cites as precedence for incest. In any event, there is an ambiguity here: is Quentin drawing an analogy, comparing Sutpen's act to those of kings existing either in Quentin's readings of history or in Quentin's imagination? Or, is he indirectly quoting what Sutpen supposedly told Grandfather, in which case the kings are imaginative constructs of Sutpen himself, responses to something read or heard read in the "school 'where,' he told Grandfather, 'I learned little save that most of the deeds, good and bad both, incurring opprobrium or plaudits or reward either, within the scope of man's abilities, had already been performed and were to be learned about only from books"? [300-01]). But the reason for that repudiation, the substance of Sutpen's "discovery," is unexplored until what is perhaps the height of the students' imaginative play, the "cinematic" presentation (Brooks 317) of the Carolina war scenes. In their "screenplay" Quentin and Shreve have Sutpen summon Henry to his tent for the critical revelation: "<u>--He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father</u>

told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro" (AA 443). Such an imaginative leap is understandable given the professed purpose of the narrative--it cuts to the heart of "telling" about the South, for it confronts the inhumanity that was both the source and the legacy of the "peculiar institution" and attempts to deal with what may be the quintessential Southern nightmare, finding "a nigger in the woodpile" (87). We can justify such a leap in terms of social, cultural, and historical context, and in terms of the boys' individual needs. But Faulkner does not let us off so easily; he draws our attention again and again to Quentin's visit to Sutpen's Hundred with Miss Rosa, titillating us with indirection and innuendo, the promise of "truth" told and secrets revealed.

Both Quentin and Shreve speak of "that night" (227, 332, 342) and allude to "information" (332) gained "out there" (342). But the nature of that information is never disclosed, nor is the manner by which it is supposedly communicated. As if to answer all of our questions, Faulkner uses Quentin's recollection and reconstruction of that night as the novel's climax (or anti-climax). It is a climax, however, that raises more questions than it resolves.

In the decaying old mansion Quentin is confronted by

Clytie, and he thinks, "'Yes. She is the one who owns the terror'" (460). As Shreve says, apparently repeating what Quentin has told him, "you saw that Clytie's trouble wasn't anger nor even distrust; it was terror, fear. And she didn't tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too . . . she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror" (437-38). This "terror" is "about whatever it was that was up stairs" (438); it is about Henry Sutpen, the one person who actually knows the answers to all of the questions of the novel; it is about that very knowledge itself. We should be reminded of one of Faulkner's favorite authors, Joseph Conrad, for Quentin is indeed peeping "over the edge" into a heart of darkness, playing Marlow to Clytie's Kurtz. He resists, "saying 'No. No,'" but finally must enter the dark upstairs room and face "the horror":

> And you are-----?
> Henry Sutpen.
> And you have been here-----?
> Four years.
> And you came home-----?
> To die. Yes.
> To die?
> Yes. To die.
> And you have been here-----?
> Four years.
> And you are-----?
> Henry Sutpen. (464-65)

The substance of this "conversation" is not as interesting as the form: it is a dialogue, a collaboration between one speaker who initiates the discourse and another

who listens and responds, thereby completing it. It is a microcosm of the novel itself, complete with gaps, question marks, and reader-response. Note also that this dialogue is almost perfectly self-reflexive, opening out in near-mirror images much like the abstract design of a Rorshach test (the italics even add to this effect). It is as if Faulkner were asking the reader to look into this "ink splotch" and respond interpretively, which, indeed, he is.

Ultimately, the burden of meaning-making is placed squarely on the reader's shoulders. We must decide the matter of knowledge and how we know what we know. How can one in fact know about the South without having been born there when such knowledge is problematic at best for those who were? The "answer" has to do with even broader questions about the process of reading: how can one translate typographical scratches called words into meaningful signs which are in turn translated into an imaginative world populated by characters we conceive as flesh and blood individuals and grant both phenomenological and ontological reality? How can we witness the acts of legerdemain and still suspend disbelief? One response is that, of course, we often do not. Indeed, part of the dizzying effect of Faulkner's defamiliarizing of the stuff of this novel springs from the fact that characters like Charles Bon, his mother, the New Orleans lawyer, even Sutpen himself, seem to oscillate in and out of the plane of

reality. Just when we have visualized and realized them, the rug is jerked from beneath us and we are forced to acknowledge that even in the terms of the novel they may not exist at all. Saying such a thing, obviously, implies that we do believe Quentin and Shreve exist, and saying that is to admit that we have fallen for the trick: we have been willing accomplices in the magic performed by our own imaginations and the author's expert manipulation. As a consequence, we are forced to reexamine our notions of reality, of what constitutes "fact," "truth," and "knowledge."

The message of Absalom, Absalom! seems to be that knowledge comes only partial and fragmented, and even then is purchased at a high price of commitment and imaginative involvement. The novel reminds us that knowing is derived from the Latin gnarus, itself a derivation of narrative; if we enter fully into the discourse and properly participate imaginatively, we may achieve something like the meeting of minds between Quentin and Shreve, not complete empathy--such is precluded by the subjective semiotics of reading and listening--but some meaningful understanding nonetheless. (This does not discount a kind of objective correlative effect: it would not be understatement to say that the reader at the end of the narrative experiences an ambivalence or confusion similar to that expressed by Quentin.) In fact, the semiotic sign play, the necessity

of translation and meaning-making which insures the autonomy of our read-ings, paradoxically is our closest empathic bond with Quentin. His problem is indeed ours: we must sift through the pieces, choose, discard, interpret, assimilate, trans-late semiotically, and create. We must make meaning out of "the rag-tag and bob-ends," somehow make the "fragments coalesce," and complete the text. It is by submitting ourselves fully to the narrative that we find the opportunities for creation and knowing, and it is Faulkner's use of defamiliarization that makes that submission both possible and compulsory. It is through such active read-ing, he seems to say, that we may be able to understand not only ourselves but others, and along the way possibly arrive at some meaningful "truth."

VIII

THE EXPANDING SHADOW

Thus far we have examined the development of Faulkner's use of defamiliarization, from his early career as a quasi-Symbolist poet and translator/adaptor through what many consider his finest three novels. For a variety of reasons, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom,Absalom! fit well as a coherent trilogy: they represent the maturation of Faulkner's techniques; they illustrate his distrust of and struggles with the signification of meaning through the written word; and they exemplify his more or less successful transcendence of those difficulties through the defamiliarization of language, structure, and content, and the reliance upon the re-creative imagination of the reader. In this "trilogy" we find Faulkner's characteristic use of cubistic fragmentation, of Symbolist indirection, of reader disorientation, of the deconstruction of fabula, of the dependence upon the reader to re-construct, reorient, interpret, infer, detect, and pull all of the "inchoate fragments" together. But we could certainly not stop here. The techniques illustrated in these works are the stuff of Faulkner's fictional oeuvre: by learning, not to read, but how we read this trilogy, we become aware of the re-creative skills we

bring to bear upon any Faulkner work; for every Faulkner novel achieves its meaning as a function of some if not all of the techniques of defamiliarization discussed in this study.

While our "trilogy" marks perhaps the end of Faulkner's strict cubist phase, fragmentations of fabula and points of view characterize many of his later novels: they were structural strategies that fit well with his propensity to write in short stories or segments, and with his penchant for forging novels from previously published stories. The Unvanquished, The Hamlet, and Go Down, Moses are prime examples of collected stories functioning (more or less successfully) as coherent novels; the first two are often called Faulkner's more accessible works because their relative clarity of language, unification of characters and story lines, and overall adherence to convention make them more readable for the uninitiated Faulkner reader. But Go Down, Moses, the novel generally considered his last major work, presents many of the difficulties seen in our trilogy, forcing the reader to seek out unifying principles and provide narrative coherence.

The very first words of Go Down, Moses are the names of the protagonist: "Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike'," yet we are immediately told that

> this was not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin, McCaslin

> Edmonds, grandson of Isaac's father's sister and so descended by the distaff, yet notwithstanding the inheritor, and in his time the bequestor, of that which some had thought then and some still thought should have been Isaac's, since his was the name in which the title to the land had first been granted from the Indian patent and which some of the descendents of his father's slaves still bore in the land. (3)

We recognize Faulkner's historicism: his characteristic mode of introducing the present in the context of the past. But there is more involved here; in this chapter, appropriately entitled "Was," we find that not only must a character, in this case Ike, be understood in terms of his personal and cultural legacy, but that legacy, inheritance, and complex genealogical issues seem to be the very subject of the story about to unfold. Indeed, the story itself is something handed down from one generation to the next.

As we proceed through this opening chapter, we encounter a series of codified rituals, motifs, and patterns of behavior that comprise Ike's history, his <u>was</u>: the social contracts between blacks and whites; the social contracts between gentlemen and ladies (as well as the rules of pretension to those very titles); the formalized games of hunting, racing, and card playing--all intricately interwoven in the fabric of property rights and inheritance. While we may certainly read "Was" as a self-contained, coherent story, our reading of the novel as a unified, coherent whole will depend upon our ability to play

an elaborate game of our own, the game of intertextuality. We must spot these formal structures and be able to recognize them as they reappear in various guises throughout the rest of the novel: in the black/white relations of Lucas and Zack, Roth and Henry, and Rider and the deputy, for example; and in the male/female relations of Lucas and Molly, Zack and Molly, Rider and Mannie, Roth and his octoroon mistress--we can see already that both racial and sexual issues quickly become hopelessly entangled. And indeed, they can do nothing else, being, in essence, the legacy of old L.Q.C. McCaslin's original sin of incest with his half-black slave/daughter. But only by understanding this complex _was_ can we hope to fathom Ike's _is_, his repudiation of his legacy, and the irony of his ultimate rejection of Roth's mistress and de facto reenactment the very sin of L.Q.C. that he spent his life trying to expiate. In short, to read _Go Down, Moses_ is to participate microcosmically in the intertextual game we are always being asked to play in reading Faulkner: to piece together the similarities and differences, the facts, fantasies, and speculations that are the _fabula_ of Yoknapatawpha; and to construct an aggregate _sujet_ that will have an internal logic, coherence, meaning, and truth for ourselves.

On a subtler level, Faulkner uses fragmentation and juxtaposition as structural principles in many other nov-

els as well: the interpolated stories of the lovers and the convict in The Wild Palms; the intertwining plots of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas in Light in August; the narrative and dramatic segments in Requiem for a Nun. And there are the character-oriented chapters (or "Books") in The Town and The Mansion, two works that themselves complete the Snopes Trilogy begun by The Hamlet, and in so doing virtually complete the Yoknapatawpha saga itself.

And there is always the language: the way it disorients the reader, places us in that twilight state so prevalent among his characters, forces new and unexpected modes of reading upon us. First our expectations are shattered, our very conceptions of how we are supposed to read deconstructed. Consequently, we are forced to question our relation to literature, the relation of literature to life, and even our conception of ourselves. The Faulkner reader must shed his conventional, habitual, automatic reading self so that a new reading self may emerge in its place.

While Faulkner is seldom discussed in the context of existentialism, the implications are too apparent to ignore. Defamiliarization exists in the first place because of the perceived need to rejuvenate a fallen language, and in the Heideggerian sense, fallen language is associated with the fall of Being from a realm of authentic meaning into everydayness and inauthenticity. In effect, the re-

valuation of the sign becomes the revaluation of Being, defamiliarization becomes a kind of existential ordeal therapy. If this all sounds a bit too extrapolative, it should not; for Faulkner's own thoughts clearly raise the existential issue at the heart of a "new pattern" in art:

> I think what is primarily responsible for . . . alteration in the sound, the style, the shape of work, is disaster. I think I said before that it's hard believing, but disaster seems good for people. . . . if they are too successful too long, something dies, it dries up, and then they have to collapse with their own weight . . .; but disaster is good for man. . . . if it does nothing else it reminds him who he is, what he is. (LIG 108)

So perhaps it is not inappropriate to close on a metaphysical note: for if defamiliarization is effective, it will put (post)modern man back in touch with the authentic language that articulates his true Being; and through the transcendence of such language, he may indeed realize once again those "eternal verities" Faulkner was so fond of invoking, "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed" (ESPL 120).

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