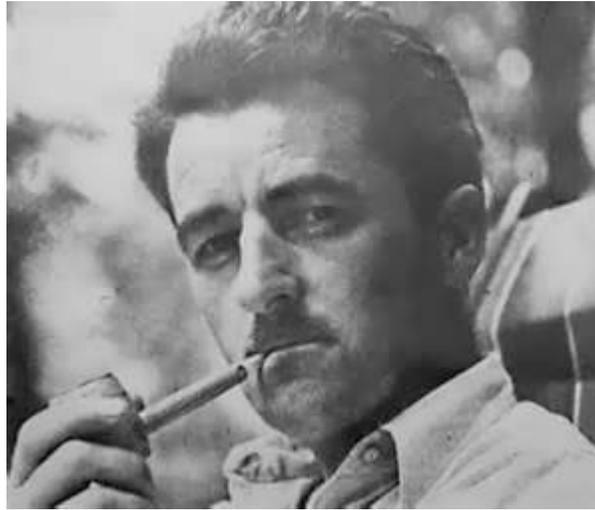


ANALYSIS BY SECTION

The Sound and the Fury (1929)



William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

TITLE

The title refers to a phrase from *Macbeth* by Shakespeare: Life is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” After this positioning itself at the highest level of literary sophistication, the novel opens from the perspective of an idiot, establishing irony as a dominant tone and challenging the literary sophistication of the reader. *The Sound and the Fury* focuses primarily on the sound and fury of the Compson family, who represent the decadent aristocratic order of the Old South. The nihilism expressed in *Macbeth* is the mood of alcoholic Mr. Compson and applies to his family and to the first three sections of the novel, but not to his loyal black servant Dilsey, who transcends nihilism in the last section. The title is not a quotation and does not include the phrase “signifying nothing” because the novel is not entirely a tale told by an idiot. The whole is told by Faulkner and of course it signifies a great deal.

STRUCTURE

The four-part structure of *The Sound and the Fury* generates a synergy of implications: (1) The first three sections, interior monologues of the three Compson brothers, correspond to human development from child to adolescent to adult; (2) however, in the secular modern world there is ironic degeneration; (3) the “growth” from child to adult entails a dissociation from Nature, spirituality and God; (4) the inability of the three brothers to get along is psychological allegory dramatizing the conflict and lack of integration in the modern psyche; (5) ironically, all the Compsons are idiots in one way or another except Caddy, who runs away; (6) though her consciousness is not rendered, Caddy is the central figure in the novel and represents something different to each brother; (7) the egocentric subjectivity of the first three sections is transcended in the last section by objective narration; (8) Dilsey finally gets the attention she deserves as a Christ-evoking figure who transcends the sound and fury; (9) Dilsey responding to the Easter sermon of Reverend Shegog is the climax of the novel that redeems it from nihilism; (10) the first two sections in stream of consciousness are supreme examples of Expressionism, apparently chaotic but actually carefully designed; (11) the structure of the novel as a whole transcends the apparently meaningless chaos with order that is archetypal and Neoclassical, like an old plantation mansion; (12) Faulkner’s synthesis of Expressionism

and Neoclassicism in this novel, the aesthetic balance, the unity, the spiritual themes, and the evocation of spirit in Shegog's sermon, are evidence of his own transcendent consciousness.

BENJY

April Seventh 1928

The title prepares us for a tale told by an idiot, not for a vivid flow of sensations and the perceptions of a small child. Faulkner has an uncanny ability to evoke a vivid illusion of real life in the tradition of Realism, with a freshness, spontaneity, depth, and poetic language that enlarges and elevates his vision in this novel beyond Realism to the dimensions of myth—a Modernist achievement comparable to those of Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce.

The date of the section, April Seventh, 1928, will not mean anything to the reader any more than to Benjy until it is recognized as the day before Easter, giving emphasis to the Easter sermon in the last section as the climax of the novel. The idiot is looking through a fence between “curling flower spaces.” His perspective is close to the ground like a child crawling around in the weeds. They may be weeds, since he does not differentiate between flowers and weeds. Benjy is not conditioned by society. Life is not meaningless to him, signifying nothing, he is more free to enjoy his sensations in the natural world than an adult. He loves the pasture, fire, sleep, and his sister Caddy. Ironically, this tale as told by the idiot is full of sound and fury that is meaningless to his parents and others, but not to him nor to his sister Caddy, who loves him—and that means everything to him.

By the end of the first paragraph we may infer from the images of hitting and flag and “putting the flag back” that we are watching men play golf on the other side of the fence. We must interpret what is going on literally along with the idiot, and like him we do not yet know what it means. Identifying with this perspective through imagination, seeing like a child again through empathy, we are in a sense reborn. After the golfer calls out for his caddie, Luster indicates that we are not identifying with a child but with someone “thirty-three years old”—adding pathos to irony: “Hush up that moaning.”

Luster is hunting for lost golf balls while the golfers “went away across the pasture.” This introduces the major theme--recurrent as in a symphony--of loss. The black boy finds the balls of white men while all of the male Compsons lose their “balls” in one sense or another. All the characters in the novel have lost something. We will learn that the Compson pasture was sold to pay for Quentin to go to Harvard. The pasture is an image of traditional agrarian life being lost to urban culture epitomized by the trivial game of golf. Benjy is a pastoral figure, the child in us all, separated from his pasture (the heart) by a fence, just as he has been separated from his Caddy (Nature). The childlike phrase “hitting little” indicates that they are not very good golfers. Nor is the boy Luster a very good caretaker, though it is hard to blame him, having to cater to a big idiot all day. He projects his own interest in making money onto others, as if Benjy cared. He thinks Benjy is moaning because at the time there are no more golfers coming, rather than because there is no more Caddy coming in response to his emotional needs. Caddy is used like a golf caddie by Benjy and by the other Compsons who make idiotic demands of her.

That Benjy is 33 years old is mentioned twice on the first page of the novel and repeated thereafter, emphasizing that he is the same age as Christ when crucified. He is a Christ-evoking figure for his innocence, purity, simplicity, transcendence of time, castration (crucifixion), and redemptive example. Other characters are defined by their measure of charity in response to Benjy, who has the qualities of a child that Christ said are required to enter “the Kingdom of Heaven.” As Roskus says, “He know more than folks thinks.” Benjy *knows* more through instinct, intuition and experience than the ordinary thinking of normal people, as when he smells death. At the same time, however, he *is* an idiot. He is differentiated from Christ by his birthday soon after April Fools Day. In his negative aspect he is a metaphor of the Compson family idiocy, selfishness, rigidity, impotence, and inability to change. All four sections of the novel feature a Christ-evoking figure: Benjy, Quentin who idiotically sacrifices his life for family honor, Jason the anti-Christ, and Dilsey the true Christian.

It means nothing to Benjy that his shadow is higher on the fence than Luster's, just as race and status mean nothing to him, in contrast to his brothers Quentin and Jason. The shadow motif in the novel derives from Shakespeare's line "Life's but a walking shadow," preceding "It is a tale told by an idiot." In depth psychology the "shadow" is the unconscious repressed dark side of the Self. Benjy is too innocent to have a shadow in that sense. He is the repressed child within us all, hence his shadow on the fence suggests the dissociation of the acculturation process that separates us from Nature, whereas in the next section Quentin makes a deadly symbol of his shadow and kills himself to escape it.

When he ducks through the broken fence Benjy snags on a nail, a regular occurrence according to Luster. Getting snagged triggers a memory in *italics* of Caddy freeing him from a snag in early childhood. This memory is identifiable by references to cold, to Christmas, and to the boy Versh, the black caretaker of Benjy from 1898 to 1900. The chronological beginning of the novel is 1898, when Damuddy dies. The only other significant memories from this earliest period are Benjy's name change and Uncle Maury's affair with the neighbor woman Mrs. Patterson. Most of Benjy's memories are from 1905 to 1912, identifiable by references to T. P., his black caretaker during that period, and are about Caddy growing up: using perfume, necking with her boyfriend in the swing, losing her virginity and getting married. He remembers having to stop sleeping with Caddy, waiting at the gate for her to come home, getting blamed for molesting when he tried to ask the Burgess girl about Caddy, and being castrated. Able to smell death, he also remembers when Quentin committed suicide, when his father dies, and going to the cemetery. Going to the cemetery becomes a motif imaging the death of the Compsons and the Old South.

One of the comic ironies is Mrs. Compson's sense of superiority as a Bascomb, in that she proves herself inferior in every way, especially to her black servant Dilsey who runs her household. And her brother Uncle Maury Bascomb is an adulterer, alcoholic, and parasitic mooch repeatedly noticed putting away a liquor bottle. Mrs. Compson dithers and whines and pities herself: "Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things." She generates most of the humor in the novel, as when she tells Caddy that someday she will have to take care of Benjy, as if she were not already doing so: "Someday I'll be gone, and you'll have to think for him." Mrs. Compson gives little evidence of thinking at all. When her husband dies in 1912, she goes to pieces like the old social order her carriage represents: "This thing going to fall to pieces under you all some day," Dilsey says. "Look at them wheels." The family carriage has a "new wheel" after Mr. Compson dies, like the family wagon of the Bundrens after Addie dies in *As I Lay Dying*.

On the way to the cemetery Mrs. Compson repeats "I'm afraid to" and expresses a family death wish: "Perhaps it'll be the best thing, for all of us." Dilsey chides her for giving up. Mrs. Compson in her carriage is afraid of going forward and afraid of turning around, distracted by Benjy howling for a flower. "I just know something will happen.... Stop, Benjamin," she whines. She never gives Benjy love nor even a flower. She is ashamed of him and as a result she has no parental authority, cannot influence him and surrenders her maternal role to Caddy and Dilsey. Comparable to Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily," but without her murderous inclination, Caroline Compson is all that is left of the genteel southern tradition, a pathetic vestige of refinement, completely dependent on her servant Dilsey. Her weakness, dependency, and fear are voiced in little syllables: "'You, T. P.,' Mother said." Her repetitions of "T. P." are pitiful chirps. Finally she orders T. P. to turn her around, then she changes her mind, afraid of a revolution: "You'll turn us over.... I'm afraid for you to try to turn around."

Jason is introduced as a young man already consumed by business. To his mother on her way to the cemetery he is impatient, irritable, sarcastic, cold, and cruel. His loss of humanity is evident when he calls Benjy "that damn loony." He is preoccupied with appearances and is described repeatedly with his hands in his pockets, as if as Luster says, "He holding his money all the time." When Versh says "'Jason going to be rich man.... He holding his money all the time,' Jason cried." In the end, ironically, he loses it all--his soul and all his money too. Jason embodies the prevailing adult values in the modern world, the antithesis of Benjy yet an idiot himself.

Going into the barn with Luster reminds Benjy of the cold Christmas day in early childhood when he and Caddy carried a letter from Uncle Maury around the barn to the neighbor woman Mrs. Patterson with whom he is having an affair. Maury is a bad neighbor coldly indifferent to the probable consequences to

Mrs. Patterson. He considers himself socially superior while behaving like a barn animal, even calling his seduction letter a Christmas present. He is also a bad uncle for using the children to facilitate his sordid affair, involving them in betrayal, dishonesty, and sneaking around—setting an example for Caddy. Loss of faith and breaking faith—like loss of balls—is a major theme in the novel.

The moment that Mrs. Patterson opens Uncle Maury's seduction letter is juxtaposed to a memory of Mr. Patterson—a kind man who has given candy to Benjy—intercepting a subsequent letter after his wife has begun the affair, to her great distress: "She was trying to climb the fence.... 'You idiot, Mrs. Patterson said, 'I told him never to send you alone again'." And what kind of idiot would use a bellowing idiot for a messenger in full view of the husband? The consciousness of Benjy jump-cutting back and forth in time allows Faulkner to juxtapose cause and effect, past and present. Compressing time in abrupt juxtapositions generates contrasts, insights and ironies.

Luster and Benjy are looking for lost golfballs in the branch—the creek—when another golfer yells "Caddie," provoking Benjy to moan for his loss of Caddy. In response to the question of a laundress washing clothes, Luster repeats Benjy's age and she says, "You mean, he been three years old thirty years." Luster whips Benjy when he howls too much, reversing the power relationship between the old white slave master and the slave. Benjy gets into the creek and is reminded of playing there with Caddy when she got her dress wet, the chronological beginning of the novel in 1898, on the day Damuddy dies.

When Caddy gets her dress wet Versh says her mother is going to whip her for that and she declares her intention to take off her dress to dry. Quentin at age 9 is already a little moralist: "I bet you better not." Prefiguring her later promiscuity, Caddy defies her mother and Quentin and asks Versh to unbutton her dress. "Don't you do it, Versh," Quentin says. Like the other blacks, Versh has nothing to lose by Caddy's behavior, and there is a humorous leer in his reply to Quentin: "Taint none of my dress." When she strips to her bodice and drawers Quentin slaps her—and she falls down into the water. It is important to notice that Quentin causes Caddy to fall and get muddy by overreacting. After she and Quentin get into a splash fight their dialogue encapsulates the plot of the novel (synecdoche):

Feeling defeated, Quentin says "We'll both get whipped now," as though foreseeing their tragic ends. Caddy says recklessly "I don't care.... I'll run away," which she does. "I'll run away and never come back." That makes Benjy cry. Caddy tells him to hush and he does because she cares for him—but then she goes away. The tableau of the small children is completed by the loner Jason playing by himself. When Benjy sees that Caddy is muddy on her behind, that she has changed, he begins to cry again, until she comes to him and smells like trees. Then he accepts the mud, whereas her muddy drawers later become a symbol of corruption to Quentin, which is idiotic.

Italics contrast this past episode of Caddy hushing Benjy to Luster unable to hush him in the present because he lacks the understanding and love that Caddy gave him: "Folks don't like to look at a loony," he says. Italics usually indicate a time shift, but not always. Consistent use of this device would become mechanical and contrary to the spontaneous and irrational nature of Benjy's consciousness. Inconsistency requires greater attention to cues, motifs, parallels, and other details. Faulkner wanted originally to print this section in different colored inks to indicate time shifts and levels of consciousness, but that was rejected by his publisher as too expensive.

Called to the house where Damuddy is dying, the children anticipate that Jason will tell on them. Quentin appeals to his brother's sense of gratitude, only to find that Jason has none: "Jason won't tell.... You remember that bow and arrow I made you, Jason." "It's broke now," Jason says. Called ironically "the last sane Compson," from childhood he is always isolated, selfish, threatening, and trying to get others in trouble. Jason is the little tattletale who runs ahead of the others but, prefiguring his ultimate defeat, "He had his hands in his pockets and he fell down."

Benjy sees Roscus milking the cow in the barn, reminding him of when he saw the cows "jumping out of the barn." He relives when he and T. P. got drunk on champagne—T. P. thought it was "Sassprilluh"—the day of Caddy's wedding. They stagger around and holler and scare the cows jumping out of the barn—"Whooley." The little moralist Quentin kicks T. P into the pig trough. Benjy gets dizzy and disoriented and

things come into his visual field and go away and “I couldn’t stop.” Since by nature he is in a sense high all the time, Benjy does not need to get drunk and does not seem to enjoy it. T. P. has all the fun. “T. P. was falling *down* the hill and Quentin dragged him *up* the hill”--symbolizing the conflict between Nature (down) and “morality” (up). Quentin thumps T. P. against the wall. This is the only fight in the novel that Quentin seems to win, but T. P. just laughs at him and goes on having fun, a parallel to Quentin’s failure to deter Caddy. In defeat, Quentin goes off by himself down to the creek and throws rocks into the shadows, continuing the motifs of water and shadows. The scene ends with Benjy in a manger like the Christ child: “Open the crib, Versh.” There is no room for Benjy in the heart of his mother nor of any other Compson except Caddy, as indicated when it became obvious to his mother that he is an idiot and changed his name from Maury to Benjamin so as not to embarrass her brother Uncle Maury--a worse idiot.

The children eat supper in the kitchen to keep them away from the death scene of Damuddy, except for the sensitive Quentin, who does not understand the sounds he is hearing elsewhere in the house: “How can they have a party when Damuddy’s sick.” He cannot swallow it, whereas Jason eats hungrily as usual. Caddy says the younger children have to mind her, but Jason says “I’m not going to mind you.” Hereafter minding Caddy becomes a motif, as all three brothers mind Caddy very much in the sense of feeling adversely affected by her natural behavior growing up.

When Quentin is called “she” we are confused. The contradiction is disorienting until we figure out that the female Quentin is the daughter of Caddy whom she named after her brother. The contrast between the two Quentins is continuously ironic, since the daughter is more rebellious than Caddy ever was and the brother might have been a positive loving influence on the little girl if he had not killed himself. The daughter is proof of the futility and tragedy of Quentin’s idiotic suicide. He made everything worse. As it is, the primary influence on the little girl is Jason. Also, appearing here without explanation, the confusion of identities aptly suggests that Quentin the brother never grew up. In contrast, Dilsey does all she can for the daughter: “I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more.” And in contrast to the whites, the black characters are depicted as more responsible, strong, natural, religious, free, and happy. They sing and have fun and go to church and stay together as a family. They endure.

Caddy mentions “when Nancy fell in the ditch and Roskus shot her and the buzzards came and undressed her.” This is Nancy the horse. The Nancy in the story “That Evening Sun,” written soon after this novel, is a black woman about to be murdered and thrown into the ditch, because the Compsons do not protect her. In the short story Faulkner created the ambiguity of which Nancy’s bones are in the ditch in order to suggest that the Compsons care no more about the black woman who does their washing than they would about a horse. Another time marker appears when the family dogs change—from Dan back in the period of T. P. to Blue in the present with Luster.

Jason tells on Caddy and Quentin but his father does nothing about it and Jason gains nothing by it. He never does. Mr. Compson is a negligent parent and does nothing much about anything. The minding Caddy motif recurs as he tells the children to mind Dilsey then allows Caddy to persuade him to “Let them mind me, Father.” Though he indulges her, it is a pretense, as true authority is retained by Dilsey. The Compson family would have been much better off if the children had minded Dilsey, as they would if they had minded Christ. Quentin is the oldest child, but Caddy is already playing the role of mother to Benjy abdicated by Mrs. Compson, and it is natural for her to want her father to give her the authority to parent the other two boys, who fight with her. All three of her brothers impose their own rigid order upon her to satisfy their own needs: (1) Benjy a physical order; (2) Quentin a moral order; and (3) Jason a social order. Caddy is natural. Allegorically she is Nature. The brothers, unable to adapt to her, howl in protest when she does not adapt to them, which she cannot and should not do.

Benjy smells death and cries. Mr. and Mrs. Compson are grieving over the death of Damuddy and T. P. takes Benjy out of the way into the pasture (not yet sold for a golf course) where he can bellow: “You got the whole night and a twenty acre pasture to beller in.” The other children become aware that Damuddy has died and even Jason cries with his hands in his pockets. “A snake crawled out from under the house.” Caddy says she is not afraid of snakes, then in italics she is getting married to a snake (Benjy and T. P. are drinking “Sassprilluh”) because she got pregnant by a boyfriend.

When “*They getting ready to start*” Caddy’s wedding, a passage in italics changes to standard type although the time period has not changed. The scene in both passages is the same, Benjy and T. P. getting drunk. Then a time change *does* occur without any typographical change. One time elides into another: “T. P. says to Benjy of the wedding, “Git on the box and see is they started.” Caddy says “They haven’t started because the band hasn’t come yet.” Frony says “They ain’t going to have no band.” This statement applies to the death of Damuddy in 1898, when a band would be inappropriate, not to the wedding in 1910. Caddy replies to Frony, ““You don’t know anything’... She went to the tree. ‘Push me up, Versh’.” Benjy’s memory of standing on a box to look in at the wedding is paralleled to Caddy in the tree to look in at the death scene. The memory of the wedding (T. P.) elides into the memory of Damuddy’s death (Versh), indicating that for Benjy the wedding is a death, for he is losing Caddy. Furthermore the wedding also precipitates the death of Quentin. Elision is a device for conveying the fusion of events and feelings in the consciousness of Benjy while also unifying themes of the novel.

Faulkner said the novel grew out of this evocative image: “He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers.” Caddy is not to blame for getting muddy and she climbs above the boys out of sight: “Then we couldn’t see her.” For the rest of their lives the brothers project their needs and grievances onto Caddy and do not see her as having a life of her own and the right to live it. ““What you seeing.’ Frony whispered. *I saw them. Then I saw Caddy, with flowers in her hair, and a long veil like shining wind. Caddy. Caddy... I clawed my hands against the wall Caddy.*” In the mind of Quentin, Caddy’s muddy drawers become a symbol of corruption and dishonor. To Jason they are another excuse to be a tattletale. To Benjy the muddy drawers fuse his memory of death with his memory of seeing Caddy getting married, through (1) the parallel of climbing up on something to see in the window; and (2) through the pun of Damuddy. The children call their grandmother Damuddy and when Benjy looks up at Caddy in the tree witnessing Damuddy’s death, he sees da muddy drawers.

The tragedy of Caddy is that her love for Benjy and her family destroys her. She cannot satisfy all their demands. She is even willing to commit incest if that will help Quentin, but she cannot remain a child for him. Pregnant and abandoned, she is only getting married for the pretense of respectability to satisfy her mother. Then here is Benjy interrupting her wedding with his anguished bellowing protest—hyperbole for the whole family. “Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry.” This elides into an earlier memory of Caddy no longer smelling like trees when at fourteen she used perfume for the first time. She washed it off for his sake and has Benjy give the perfume away to Dilsey. But she cannot wash away her pregnancy. Caddy is to a degree Christ-evoking because of her loving nature, her sacrificing herself for others, and her “crucifixion” as a scapegoat.

Caddy loves Benjy enough to do anything for him: “Tell Caddy. She’ll do it.” She tries to protect her pathetic mother from his howling only to have her mother accuse her of teasing him. Benjy’s ability to enjoy a transcendent experience beyond the capacity of Jason and most adults is ironic, as when Caddy shows him the box of jewelry: “Caddy got the box and sat it on the floor and opened it. It was full of stars. When I was still, they were still. When I moved, they glinted and sparkled. I hushed.” Caddy saves him repeatedly from anguish and is the source of his transcendence. “It was full of stars” would be a metaphor to the boxed-in consciousness of Quentin, whereas Benjy’s identification of jewels in a box with stars in the sky is an expansion of consciousness. Caddy helps Benjy feel identified with stars, in harmony with Nature and able to control his environment—“Caddy smelled like trees.” In contrast, the negative aspects of Nature are embodied in Jason, a “dirty little beast.”

The sordid affair of Uncle Maury is set in contrast to Caddy’s loyalty and love. Mr. Patterson gave Maury a beating: “Uncle Maury was sick. His eye was sick, and his mouth.” Mr. Compson amuses himself by ridiculing his brother-in-law as a parasite, a loser, a blowhard and a cowardly scoundrel. Yet his feeling of superiority is ironic, for he himself is a cynical racist dependent on his black servants and a destructive influence on his children, drinking himself to death. When his mockery of her brother makes his wife cry, Mr. Compson intensifies his sarcasm: “I admire Maury. He is invaluable to my own sense of racial superiority. I wouldn’t swap Maury for a matched team.”

Benjy’s memory of losing Caddy to the extent of having to sleep alone at age 13 elides into the memory of Caddy in the tree when Damuddy dies. Caddy tells Dilsey “Quentin’s mad because he had to mind me

tonight.” Though just a little girl she contends with Dilsey for authority, dramatizing the tension between Nature and moral discipline as children mature. Minding Caddy in the idiotic way the brothers do rather than minding Dilsey is their tragedy. When he sees Caddy in the swing necking with her boyfriend, Benjy howls and again she pacifies him by washing her mouth with soap, so that she smells like trees again. This memory triggers a later memory of seeing Caddy’s daughter Quentin necking in the same swing with her boyfriend. The juxtaposition of parallel situations measures the moral degeneration of the family from past to present, as the daughter is brazen to be necking in broad daylight, and rather than react to Benjy’s protest with love or even sympathy she calls him an “old crazy loon” and threatens to have him whipped. Her boyfriend is mean enough to nearly burn Benjy with a flaming match for fun.

Benjy continues to wait at the gate for Caddy to come home from school, though Versh tells him “Miss Caddy done gone long ways away. Done got married and left you.” When other girls come past the gate with their book satchels Benjy tries to ask them about Caddy but he frightens them by running along beside them “moaning and slobbering through the fence.” By implication, one day Jason leaves the gate unlatched so that Benjy gets out and is accused of molesting one of the schoolgirls, though he is only trying to communicate. That Jason is responsible is indicated by his eagerness to get rid of Benjy by having him sent away to the state mental asylum: “I reckon you’ll send him to Jackson, now.” Benjy’s memory of trying to speak to the girl elides into his memory of its consequence—his castration. He was innocent, yet seen as a threat. Ironically, Benjy is the one who gets molested. His forced impotence corresponds to the acculturation process that dissociates the modern man from Nature, rendering him unconscious as by a mask of anesthesia: “I tried to get it off of my face.”

Luster offers to sell the golfball he found to a white golfer, but the man pockets the ball and refuses to pay Luster for it. The white man emasculates the black boy, making the incident a metaphor of race relations: “That white man hard to get along with.” Luster said. ‘You see him take my ball.’” The golfers are carrying bags that evoke the carpetbags of scoundrels from the North who preyed on vulnerable white southerners and blacks after the Civil War. The golf course that has displaced Benjy’s pasture corresponds to the pastoral southern values displaced by artificial urban values in the new social order.

Dilsey reprimands Luster for teasing Benjy. She buys Benjy a birthday cake with her own money because Jason is so ungenerous he would disapprove of her baking one. When she goes out of the kitchen, Luster teases Benjy some more. It is understandable and sometimes even humorous that a black boy his age burdened all day with the care of a big white idiot would find ways to amuse himself in compensation. Luster’s teasing is harmless compared to Jason’s abuse. Benjy is sitting in front of the stove looking into the fire he loves when Luster stands out of sight behind him manipulating the long wire connected to the firedoor, closing and opening the stove to make Benjy bellow, then hush. Dilsey catches him at it and shakes him. She hushes Benjy by giving him one of Caddy’s slippers to hold and Luster takes him into the library to look into the fire there.

Benjy touches a blank space on the wall where a mirror used to hang, as the once expansive Compson plantation is sold off piece by piece. He recalls a fire in his mother’s room when he was a child: “There was another fire in the mirror.” As he turns away from Caddy to his cold mother Benjy feels a sense of loss when “The fire went out of the mirror.” The mirror is Benjy’s narcissistic frame of reference, a metaphor of his rigid self-centered world view. Warm like Caddy’s love, the fire disappears when he turns to his mother. In past and present, Mrs. Compson is always sick and whining in self-pity, Jason always has his hands in his pockets, and Benjy is howling or hushing. “I could see the fire in the mirror too. Caddy lifted me again.” Caddy is always lifting Benjy. One of the most poignant moments in the novel is little Caddy in the maternal role when the idiocy of her family imaged in Benjy grows almost too heavy a burden for her to lift anymore: “Caddy stooped and lifted me. We staggered.”

Mrs. Compson holds his face to hers and makes ineffectual demands, causing both of them to cry. Caddy stands behind her and holds up a cushion he likes “above Mother’s head.” Everything is over Mrs. Compson’s head. “‘Hush, Mother.’ Caddy said. ‘You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I’ll go get Dilsey.’” After all the frequent hushing of Benjy, this hushing of Mother parallels her idiocy to his. As a child Jason cuts up Benjy’s dolls and as an adult he cuts up Caddy’s daughter, who also is paralleled

to Benjy: "Quentin looked at the fire. The fire was in her eyes and on her mouth. Her mouth was red." Quentin is looking for warmth like Benjy and gets hot for a boyfriend wearing a red tie.

One day like many a teenager Caddy tries to sneak into the house without being stopped by her parents. "We could hear Caddy walking fast." Her parents watch her pass the doorway. "She didn't look. She walked fast." Benjy senses that she has changed: "I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. She put her hands out but I pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran." She no longer smells like trees. She has lost her virginity to her boyfriend and might have been undetected if Benjy had not smelled the change and seen it in her eyes and come bellowing and pawing at her, an example of the idiotic overreactions of her family to her natural development.

The ironic subordination and dependency of Mrs. Compson, the lady of the mansion, is evident when she tells Luster to "go and ask Dilsey if she objects to my having a hot water bottle.... Tell her that if she does, I'll try to get along without it." Mrs. Compson is cold and Dilsey provides all the warmth in the household after Caddy is gone. The motif of lost balls culminates when Benjy gets undressed for bed and seeing himself in the bedroom mirror, he begins to cry. "Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone." Then he and Luster see the daughter Quentin climbing down a tree outside the window. We do not learn until later that Quentin is running away from home with her boyfriend, having stolen the money her mother sent for her support that Jason stole from her. Benjy sees what he has lost because of Jason before Jason sees that he too has been emasculated--by a girl.

Benjy loves sleep and his section ends with his nostalgic reliving of bedtime back when he was little, back when his family was together, before his mother rejected him for being an idiot, before his name got changed, before he had to sleep alone, and before he lost Caddy. Ironically, his inability to differentiate times in linear sequence makes it possible for him to transcend the present by reliving the past. The thematic climax of his section is the conversation about muddy drawers when Dilsey puts the children to bed. She puts little Jason in the same bed with Quentin, the two brothers who want to punish their sister for an accident caused by Quentin, who turns his face to the wall. "Just look at your drawers," Dilsey said. "You better be glad your ma aint seen you." Mrs. Compson would overreact like Quentin, whereas Dilsey herself is only concerned about Caddy's need of a bath. "I already told on her." Jason said. "I bound you would." Dilsey said. "And see what you got by it." Caddy said. "Tattletale." "What did I get by it." Jason said." Mean self-interest, petty sound and fury, never gets Jason anything.

Faulkner rubs in the symbolism when Dilsey "wadded the drawers and scrubbed Caddy behind with them. 'It done soaked clean through onto you'." To Dilsey it is merely dirt, but Quentin projects guilt and turns the muddy drawers into a moral symbol, as if abstract dirt had soaked through *into* Caddy. Mrs. Compson is sickened more than usual by the dying of Damuddy, "So we still have to mind me," Caddy says. And to this Dilsey says "Yes." Damuddy is the genteel tradition of chaste southern womanhood that is not yet dead in 1898, and even by 1909 when Caddy loses her virginity the Compsons still have to "mind" Caddy's failure to live up to the standard of purity being imposed upon her by her pathetic mother. "'Mother's sick.' Caddy said. 'She and Damuddy are both sick'."

Benjy's bliss is going to bed embraced by Caddy, but there is also "something I could smell." He smells death without understanding loss. He does not know that his family is losing Damuddy or that he has lost his Caddy forever. At the end of the first section, the idiot is falling sleep with Caddy—secure in his heaven—transcending time and loss, whereas at the beginning of the next section, the Harvard student is waking up obsessed by time and unable to adapt to his loss of Caddy—suicidal in his own hell.

QUENTIN

June Second 1910

Quentin's first thought upon awakening is of time. Time is inescapable reality. His first sight is a shadow, a dominant psychological motif leading to his death. The first shadow is an effect of dawning light—enlightenment. Sunrise is a natural measure of time. But "then I was in time again, hearing the watch." The awakened mind of Quentin moves reflexively from natural time to artificial clock time. The

watch is a traditional literary symbol of civilization—rational, mechanical, linear, calculating, impersonal, standardizing, reductive, spiritless, incessantly moving, captivating, and inexorable. “And so as soon as I knew I couldn’t see it, I began to wonder what time it was.”

As a captive of clock time, Quentin is dissociated from Nature, from the natural order and the soul, evoked here by the unmentioned sunlight and by the shadow. Fixated on the shadow, Quentin does not see the light. Quentin is particularized in detail as a southern white boy at Harvard obsessed with his sister, but he also embodies conflicts typical in the 20th century: (1) between faith in God and atheism; (2) between idealism and nihilism; (3) between reason and instinct; (4) between dignity and suffering; and (5) between life and suicide. Quentin’s section dramatizes the modern Existential crisis at length, while Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” dramatizes it succinctly.

The watch has been handed down from Grandfather Compson to Quentin. Grandfather had a strong character, helped build the community and represented the best of the Old South, whereas Mr. Compson is a nihilistic cynic who embodies the decadence of the old aristocratic order. The traditional southern ideals of his Grandfather that Quentin was raised to revere are now being scorned as meaningless by his father, who passes the watch on to Quentin “not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it.” Ironically, to the contrary, Quentin spends all his last day and even sacrifices his life trying to conquer time.

In Mr. Compson the pastoralism of the Old South, considered more wholesome than life in the urban North, has devolved into alcoholic indolence. Moreover, he sells off Benjy’s pasture to send his son to college up North, to become further alienated from the natural world. What he values about Harvard is the boat races, evidence that among his children he is most like Jason—“watching pennies has healed more scars than Jesus” he tells Quentin. Mr. Compson is another self-absorbed idiot like Benjy. His subversive influence on Quentin is evident throughout, especially near the end. Quentin has internalized the perspective of his father to such an extent that he knows what his father would say and in addition to his memories he conducts imaginary dialogues with his father that lead directly to his suicide.

In self-pity Quentin compares himself to “the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister.” Saint Francis lived a pastoral life among animals whereas Quentin is alienated from Nature, in particular as represented by Caddy growing up. Yet Quentin sees himself as more saintly and suffering more than St. Francis because of Caddy, who has become his Little Sister Death. Absurdly, he even feels superior in martyrdom to Christ, because He had no sister. His father said “Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels.” That is, belief in Christ—religion in general—got worn away by mechanistic rationalism since the industrial revolution, epitomized in the watch as a “symptom of mind-function.”

Shifts back and forth in time become more frequent in Quentin’s section than in Benjy’s, for he has a more developed brain and active mind. Though they recur more often in fragments, the number of memories are fewer, and almost all are about Caddy—evidence of his complete obsession. In addition to the memories of Damuddy’s death and Benjy’s name change, Quentin remembers playing with Caddy and the neighbor girl Natalie, Caddy kissing a boy, Caddy losing her virginity, receiving Caddy’s wedding announcement, meeting her husband Herbert Head, the eve of her wedding, and the wedding.

The first italicized passage in this section is a memory of his most decisive impetus to suicide, Caddy getting married to Herbert Head, framed by a mirror as a metaphor of self-centered vision, as in Benjy’s section. Roses become a motif of the wedding, honeysuckle a motif of Caddy’s developing sexuality. The agonizing memory of the wedding is linked to his prior effort to possess Caddy himself and hold on to her forever even if in Hell, by claiming falsely to his father that “It was I it was not Dalton Ames... I have committed incest, Father I said.” Incest is associated with aristocratic inbreeding and in Quentin’s case expresses a perversely possessive love. He makes his sister the incarnation of family honor, as if the family still had any. Thinking himself a saint, he is incapable of actually committing incest. He can only declare it as if words made it real, a fantasy of rejecting sainthood by committing incest in the abstract and living in hell ever after with Caddy, as if God would believe his lie.

Quentin's roommate Shreve contrasts with him in being a Northerner detached from the problems of the decadent South—a cool Canadian. Also in contrast Shreve is normal and upbeat with “his glasses glinting rosily.” Shreve looks at his watch and warns they will be late to class. Living by clock time contributes to Quentin's obsession and intensifies the pressures of convention. He thinks of Spoade, the classmate who called Shreve “my husband,” casting Quentin as a wife (with no balls). “Did you ever have a sister” is Quentin's weak excuse for self-pity. Spoade also contrasts with Quentin in being a causal nonconformist adaptable enough to also be “like anybody else.” The sparrow that comes out of the sunlight and perches on his window ledge is also adaptable, able to look at him from each eye independently before settling on one perspective, whereas Quentin is only able to stare from one eye.

The time of his last day is measured by tolling in the campus bell tower, reminding him of Jesus and Saint Francis and going to a private little hell with Caddy, as if reserving a room from Satan: “Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us.” He recalls confronting Dalton Ames, who is brave and honorable enough to hand Quentin a pistol to shoot him with if honor demands it. But Quentin does not shoot him—he faints. Then he invents the excuse that if he had killed Ames they would all go to Hell together.

Quentin “lost his balls” when he confronted Dalton Ames on the bridge and fainted. This memory elides into thoughts of weighting his body with flat-iron and drowning himself: “And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind.” Influenced by his father he now feels that religious faith in rising from death into an afterlife is irrational and absurd: “Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come floating up.” His hatred is so great he fantasizes being the mother of Dalton Ames—again in a female role—and aborting him. He laughs about “refraining” from the birth and “watching him die before he lived.” Ironically, Ames is a better man than Quentin.

In his anguish, Quentin breaks his watch and twists the hands off, cutting his thumb on the broken glass. All his efforts to conquer time prove just as futile and he only hurts himself. He feels like his father now and debunks the watch to himself as representing just another myth like Jesus walking on water and Washington not telling lies. Feeling that faith in an afterlife is irrational, Quentin is himself irrational to kill himself. Even his preparations are irrational. His fastidious concern for appearances is absurd. He intends to drown himself in just a few hours, yet he treats his little cut with iodine—twice—bathes, shaves, and puts on a new suit and his broken watch. Has he never seen the condition of a drowned corpse?

His dissociation from reality is evident when he refers to his shadow as “The” shadow—something apart from himself. He tries to drive the shadow “back into the door,” to repress it. In psychology the “shadow” is composed of repressed negative aspects of the self, in Quentin's case weakness, failures, guilt, and his suicidal compulsion. In italics he relives Caddy's rushing in her bridal gown “out of the mirror” to console Benjy drunk and bellowing, while Quentin is left with “the floating shadow of the veil.” Quentin sees the wedding as a sham, a conventional pretense, but he can do no more to stop it than Benjy, and his response is just as idiotic—buy a new suit and jump in the river.

Shreve returns from class, sees Quentin in a new suit and asks “Is it a wedding or a wake?” It is both, inasmuch as Caddy's wedding precipitates Quentin's suicide. He mails a suicide letter to his father, then looks for Deacon, the black man on campus who caters to the prejudices of white students from the South. Quentin's racial condescension is expressed when he gives a cigar to one bootblack and a nickel to another, after they “caught me, one on either side, shrill and raucous, like blackbirds.” He reminds himself “to think of them as coloured people not niggers” and realizes that “a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among.” Yet when he is on a train going home for Christmas, through the window he sees a black man sitting on a mule and projects stereotypical characteristics onto the man: childlike, incompetent, and irresponsible, yet tolerant and loyal.

Trying to “lose time,” he takes off the broken watch and puts it in his pocket, then passing a jewelry store window “I looked away in time.” He avoids looking at a street clock, but “then I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket.” He goes back into the jewelry store to leave his watch for repair, as if he is not going to kill himself after all, but then he decides to keep it in his pocket. In the store window the watches on display all show different times “and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance

that mine had, without any hands at all.” This sense of absurdity is a characteristic of Existentialism. The contradictory watches appear to confirm the moral relativism of his father and is the *objective correlative* of his nausea at feeling that life is meaningless. He compares the hands of a clock to the wings of a “gull tilting into the wind.” Gulls become a motif because Quentin is gulling himself. He buys flat-irons to weight his body down while thinking about learning more in his next year at Harvard.

The italicized “*Moving sitting still*” introduces the episode of Quentin and Caddy playing with the neighbor girl Natalie. The image suggests awakening sexuality, it elides into a memory of Caddy coming home after losing her virginity and getting pawed by bellowing Benjy, then Quentin’s memory slips back to Caddy threatening to run away as far back in childhood as when she got her drawers muddy and Damuddy died. Quentin smells water, associated in his mind with Caddy getting her drawers muddy, with cleansing and with his coming death. He sees “a gull motionless in midair,” as if stopping time. At the end of the next paragraph are “three gulls hovering above the stern like toys on invisible wires.” Quentin has a childish desire to stop time by controlling realities like toys, as he tried to manipulate Caddy, who gave up her relationship with Dalton Ames for Quentin’s sake.

His divided self—idealist/nihilist—makes him ambivalent about suicide, as dramatized in his efforts to escape his own shadow. “The shadow of the bridge, the tiers of railing, my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it...” The bridge recalls the bridge of honor he could not cross when he confronted Dalton Ames and fainted. His shadow on the water is “at least fifty feet” long, a measure of his exaggeration in overreacting to Caddy’s natural development and to his father’s nihilism. The shadow is exaggerated because of where Quentin is standing. He is unable to move on in life. He fantasizes about drowning his shadow, comparing the shadow of the packaged flat-irons to shoes lying on the water, trying to separate himself from his own intention to drown himself, unable to accept responsibility for anything. As if he expects to float above death like a hovering gull. “What a sinful waste Dilsey would say.” Dilsey is the only one in the novel who earns the right to moral authority.

Quentin watches Gerald Bland come out of a boathouse with another man and a rowing scull, dressed in pretentious imitation of an Oxford student, inappropriately in flannels, a jacket and a stiff straw hat. His sense of superiority to his bland classmate cheers him up enough for sarcasm: “God is not only a gentleman and a sport; he is a Kentuckian too.” Gerald and his mother consider themselves Kentucky aristocrats on a grand scale, “like a couple of planets.” Yet Quentin associates with the Blands because they appeal to his own pretensions to be sustaining the honor of the old aristocratic order.

Thinking more of Caddy in the past than of the present, he recalls when she kissed a boy, then leaps ahead to meeting Herbert Head, the man she felt obliged to marry. Head is all head, insincere like a salesman: “Face full of white teeth but not smiling.” Head gives Caddy a new car and promises Jason a job in his bank. A banker with the name Head emphasizes that he is similar to Jason, but a successful Northern version who got expelled from his prep school and cheated at Harvard. Even before the novel was published in 1929, the year of the crash into the Great Depression, bankers were hated by many people. The President of the United States at the time was Herbert Hoover, who got blamed for the Depression. With the same first name and same initials, Herbert Head evokes the prevailing values in the country, especially in the North. “Heads. Increasing himself head by head.” Head’s marriage to Caddy is comparable to the marriage of Flem Snopes to Eula Varner in *The Hamlet* (1940), in that both men are unworthy mercenaries who possess and despoil Nature. Quentin loathes Herbert and refuses even to open the wedding announcement for three days. To him the wedding arranged by his mother is disgustingly obscene, as connoted by the fact that Herbert is from French Lick.

The fragments of memories rapidly alternate, evoking his confusion, emotional turmoil, neurotic fixations, and inability to escape his obsessions. His memories often include the bellowing of Benjy, sound and fury analogous to his own expressions of self-pity. It is not necessary to understand all the fragments or to attach them to specific past events. The memories are emotive and the narrative is like atonal postmodern music, a dirge for himself, the saintly hero doomed by muddy underpants. The unity is not in melody or continuous linearity, but in recurrent obsessions, symbols, motifs, and total structure. Most of all, the fragments involve the reader in Quentin’s psychological disintegration and the forces that motivate

his suicide. After he relives meeting Herbert Head, he tramples on his shadow and obsesses about Caddy losing her virginity to Dalton Ames.

He finds Deacon, a black man who has adapted successfully to white society, unlike himself. Catering to white students from the South, playing dumb and calling them “marster,” Deacon meets trains, carries luggage, calls himself a nigger and wears a “sort of Uncle Tom’s cabin outfit, patches and all.” Deacon played servile “until he had you completely subjugated...though his manner gradually moved northward as his raiment improved, until at last...he had bled you.” Deacon has respect for southerners but is too clever to live among them. He had been “guide and mentor and friend to unnumbered crops of innocent and lonely freshmen.” Unlike the southern white boys he has helped, Deacon is free of racial prejudice: “I draw no petty social lines. A man to me is a man, wherever I find him.” Quentin gives Deacon a letter to Shreve, asking him to give Deacon his old suit.

Quentin remembers his mother rejecting him much as she rejected Benjy. “Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread,” she says. Ironically, the only one of her children she cares for is the anti-Christ: “You take the others I’ll take Jason.” She threatens to run away before Caddy actually does. Her husband suggests that she take Caddy up to French Lick and Mrs. Compson decides to find her a husband there, “then all the talk will die away.” However, it never dies away in Quentin’s head. His mother rejected him in her heart simply for being a Compson, for “that streak of Compson selfishness and pride.” She epitomizes the faults she attributes to others and gives him a martyr complex long before Caddy lost her virginity--“*if I only had a mother.*” Oblivious to her atrocious parenting, she sees her only sin as virtuous, “putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me.” She even sees herself as Christlike: “I must pay for your sins as well.” Just as ironic, she sees Jason as her only “salvation.” Faulkner does not need to intrude with moral judgment, Mrs. Compson and Jason are always wrong and Dilsey is always right. The moral simplicity of the novel compensates for its technical complexity.

Compulsively, trying to avoid looking at clocks, Quentin keeps wondering what time it is. By noon he feels like a “gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity.” His resistance to change is frustrated, he is being dragged through time toward death, hoping for eternity, but unable to silence the voice of his father in his head ridiculing the afterlife as only for whoever can play a harp.

His distaste for the Blands and their preoccupation with looks and appearances elides into the wedding of Caddy for appearances. He fantasizes shooting Herbert Head, just as he had fantasized killing Dalton Ames. Yet Quentin himself is preoccupied with how he looks even on the way to drown himself. In contrast, Caddy is more concerned for the welfare of others than about her own wedding, asking Quentin, “Are you going to look after Benjy and Father”? Quentin retorts, “The less you say about Benjy and Father the better when have you ever considered them Caddy”? Well, most of the time, like now. When does Quentin ever consider their welfare—or Caddy’s for that matter? If he truly loved Caddy he would respond with reassurance to her repeated entreaties that he look after Benjy and their father. Instead he pays no attention and vents his anger by accusing *her* of being selfish!

Beginning with his fantasy of shooting him, Quentin relives his conversation with Herbert Head on the eve of the wedding. He tries to shoot him down by exposing him as a cheater at Harvard, but Herbert is amoral and brushes that off, then he tries to ingratiate himself, a snob focused on appearance: “I like you Quentin I like your appearance you don’t look like these other hicks.” He offers to help Quentin as well as Jason, but Quentin declines bitterly. “I’m sorry about that business,” says Herbert. “I never had a mother like yours to teach me the finer points.” When they argue Herbert calls Quentin aptly a “half-baked Galahad,” centuries out of date. Quentin does not faint this time, but Caddy interrupts them and gets Quentin to promise that he will not let the family send Benjy to the asylum in Jackson, but he breaks his promise when he kills himself.

Quentin keeps calling Herbert a “blackguard,” the villain of his romantic melodrama. Caddy explains to him, “I’ve got to marry somebody. *Then they told me the bone would have to be broken again.*” Quentin’s experience when he broke his leg and it had to be reset is the objective correlative for his emotional pain when (1) Caddy lost her virginity; and (2) Caddy gets married to Herbert Head. “*Got to marry somebody*”

she says, and he asks about her lovers: “*Have there been very many Caddy*”? She answers “*I don’t know too many will you look after Benjy and Father*”? Quentin infers that she does not know who the father is, and that Herbert does not know Caddy is pregnant by another man—more dishonor.

Quentin comes to another bridge, an image of crossing over the shadow on the water and getting beyond it, which he is never able to do. “Where the shadow of the bridge fell I could see down for a long way, but not as far as the bottom.” The bottom of it all: “*If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead.*” Quentin is a virgin making his inexperience of Nature an absolute standard of female virtue like a chastity belt. “Women are never virgins,” his father declares. “Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It’s nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That’s just words and he said So is virginity.” Mr. Compson has the same unromantic casual view of sex as Will Varner (and probably Faulkner too) in *The Hamlet*, who did not even take off his hat.

The conflict between faith and disbelief is explicit: “*it is because there is nothing else I believe there is something else but there may not be.*” Momentarily he is hopeful: “And maybe when He says Rise the eyes will come floating up too, out of the deep quiet and the sleep, to look on glory.” But then he swings back to thinking like his father that faith is absurd: “And after awhile the flat irons would come floating up.” On a bridge between two worlds of belief, Quentin looks down at a shadow resisting the current. This shadow is a trout hanging “motionless among the wavering shadows.” Just as he is unable to emulate the sparrow or the hovering gulls, Quentin is unable to emulate the trout and maintain his balance against the current of postmodern nihilism and personal despair. He is incapable of transcendence because he is alienated from Nature, personified in Caddy. Ironically, he is a victim of his own Head. Three boys with fishing poles come onto the bridge and talk about how nobody can catch this trout, a legendary survivor, “making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words.” This describes Quentin as well, as when claiming to his father that he had committed incest with Caddy. If this section is compared to “The Waste Land” (1922) by T. S. Eliot, it is significant that Quentin never fishes and chooses death by water.

In a bakery the “half-baked Galahad” encounters a little girl: “Hello, sister.” He makes her analogous to Caddy. The lady behind the counter represents the mercantile culture of the North—“Land of the kike home of the wop”—as contrasted to the pastoralism of the South. She approaches Quentin “like a cash box in a store. She looked like a librarian. Something among dusty shelves of ordered certitudes long divorced from reality.” Quentin again projects himself, repeating that the lady is neat, as if that is a fault in her. His section of the novel ends with his own obsessive neatness divorced from reality. The prejudice of the lady toward the little Italian girl in the North parallels the prejudices of southerners—including Quentin himself—against “niggers,” “kikes,” and “wops” for example. North and South, people are prejudiced by human nature. There is a lot of his parents and his brother Jason in Quentin.

Walking with the little girl, Quentin recalls the odor of honeysuckle, the motif of Caddy’s developing sexuality. In trying to locate where the little girl lives he comes to a house with a pink garment hanging from an upper window, an image repeated later in the novel in the daughter Quentin’s room after she has run away. This little girl does not live here. His prolonged search for her house evokes the feeling that perhaps she has no real home, like Caddy—and like her daughter Quentin. Finally he abandons the little girl and runs away, “my shadow behind me now.” On the contrary, he cannot run away. He recalls when he slapped Caddy for kissing a boy. He returns to the dirty little girl and resumes trying to find her house, with thoughts of playing with Natalie, also a “dirty little girl,” as is Caddy after he pushes her down. Quentin pushed Natalie down in order to play with her: “*We were dancing sitting down.*” Then he gropes her: “*You keep your nasty old hands off of me.*” He berates Natalie for not doing what he berates Caddy for doing: “Get wet I hope you catch pneumonia go on home Cowface.”

Puritanical and hypocritical, Quentin was so disgusted by his own sexuality he jumped into the hog wallow and covered himself with mud, an image juxtaposed in the present to the sound of the boys swimming. “Hear them swimming, sister? I wouldn’t mind doing that myself.” After wallowing in the mud like a hog, he told Caddy what he was doing with Natalie and smeared mud on her. In the present he takes the little girl to watch the naked boys swimming. “Poor sister,” he says, followed by the memory of

embracing his sister Caddy, both of them covered in mud: "We lay in the grass panting...the smell of honeysuckle upon her face and throat."

Now the little girl looks at him, the "half-baked Galahad," with a "half-baked" loaf of bread clutched to her breast. When her brother Julio sees them, he overreacts as Quentin does to anyone "stealing" *his* sister: "I killa heem.... Git on home," Julio shouted at her. 'I beat hell outa you'." Her father calls him "You durn furriner." Arrested on suspicion of *molesting* the little girl after all his efforts to protect and help her, Quentin bursts into laughter at the absurdity. To him this is evidence that his father is right about life and that all moral effort is futile. Yet in the parallel the irony turns around: Quentin *does* abuse Caddy by pushing, slapping, fighting and condemning her until finally he arrests himself by dying.

His disgust with sex is expressed in the obscene image of "*the beast with two backs*" eliding into "*the swine...coupled within how many Caddy...I don't know too many there was something terrible in me terrible in me.*" His shadow represents the something terrible in himself he is trying to escape, including his inclination to suicide. His urging Caddy to commit incest and run away together ends with his pathetic "did you love them Caddy did you love them When they touched me I died". By yielding to her family and sacrificing herself in marriage to Head, Caddy commits spiritual suicide before Quentin commits literal suicide and Mr. Compson commits alcoholic suicide.

The painful memory of Caddy confessing to many lovers leads back into the one of her coming into the house after losing her virginity, where the bellowing of Benjy expresses his own idiotic overreaction. Caddy cleanses herself down in the creek where she got her drawers muddy and Quentin smells her honeysuckle sexuality. The prose is drenched in honeysuckle, "getting stronger and stronger and the smell of water." When he tells her to get out of the water, "do you want to catch cold," she answers yes. Quentin wants her to hate Dalton Ames and swears to kill him. She says "yes I hate him I would die for him I've already died for him." So she assents to Quentin's suicide pact, sacrificing herself again because she loves him. "I wish you were dead," he says. Their dialogue as he holds the knife to her throat sounds like they are about to have sex: "push it are you going to / do you want me to / yes push it / touch your hand to it". But he cannot do this anymore than he could commit incest.

Again he relives his confrontation with Ames on the bridge. The name Ames points to the question of his aims with Caddy. Ames asks if Caddy needs him for anything. "I want to know if she's all right have they been bothering her up there". Quentin sounds as trite as a sheriff in a western: "Ill give you until sundown to get out of town." He threatens to kill Ames, but he begins shaking. Ames implies that Quentin is an idiot: "listen buddy whats your name Benjys the natural isnt he you are..listen no good taking it so hard its not your fault kid it would have been some other fellow". But then Ames loses our sympathy when he says "theyre all bitches," identifying us with Quentin when "I hit him with my open hand." Not a punch, a bitch slap. Ames grabs his wrists and does not even hit back after Quentin hits him again. He even offers Quentin his pistol to kill him with. Quentin faints. Ames even gives the kid an excuse for passing out, then offers to loan him his horse to get home on. "I knew that he hadnt hit me that he had lied about that for her sake too and that I had just passed out like a girl!"—more dishonor. When we learn that Caddy has broken off with Ames for Quentin's sake, in retrospect this makes Ames' genuine concern for her more admirable, mitigates his sexist remark made in bitterness, and gives a tragic depth to Caddy's sacrifice. Ironically, Ames is more honorable than Quentin.

The memory of failing miserably to fight Ames elides into the present consequences of trying to fight Gerald Bland: "He boxed you all over the place." Yet Quentin is most concerned with his appearance, prompting his roommate Shreve to exclaim, "Oh, forget your damn clothes." The suicidal Quentin provoked a fight with Bland knowing that he was an experienced boxer, without understanding why—that he had made Bland a surrogate for Ames when Bland started demeaning women, recalling Ames' bitter remark that all women are bitches. Quentin overreacts again and projects his feeling that Ames is a blackguard onto Bland. His easygoing classmate admonishes the half-baked Galahad with sarcasm: "'Oh,' Spode said, 'the champion of dames. Bud, you excite not only admiration, but horror.' He looked at me, cold and quizzical. 'Good God,' he said."

In his despair Quentin lies in a “grey half light where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form from antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed”. Life is meaningless, just as his father believes. Quentin sees the last light upon the tideflats “like pieces of broken mirror.” His view of the world is shattered. His memory of Benjy sitting in front of a mirror parallels his own self-centered outlook except that Benjy’s mirror is not shattered, just missing sometimes when he is not reliving the past with Caddy.

On a trolley he is able to cross a bridge “between silence and nothingness,” as if from womb to death. Yet he uses gasoline to clean the blood off his vest, as if it matters. It matters very much to Quentin. In his last conflicted thoughts he resists nihilism in a dialogue between himself and his father. His father reduces human life to nothing more than enduring evil for awhile. Quentin responds that in that case suicide is courageous. One of his motives for suicide is that he thinks it will redeem him from cowardice and prove his courage to his father. “Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died.” His father taught him to reject Christianity.

Mr. Compson reacts to his son’s suicidal inclination by minimizing “the act itself” and retreating from involvement: “every man is the arbiter of his own virtues.” He does not take Quentin seriously and does not see “any cause for alarm.” He rationalizes his son’s claim to have committed incest: “you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth.” Quentin explains that he wanted to isolate Caddy and himself from “the loud world...and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been...if I could tell you we did it would have been so”—like the boys with fishing poles on the bridge making of unreality “an incontrovertible fact.” His father tries to disillusion his son: “you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh...you will not even be dead.” This refers to Christ on the symmetrical cross and the resurrection. Mr. Compson belittles his son for feeling like a martyr and for believing in an afterlife: “you seem to regard it merely as an experience that will whiten your hair overnight so to speak without altering your appearance at all.”

Rather than offer him compassion, Mr. Compson lectures his son as to why he will not kill himself—“you won’t do it under these conditions it will be a gamble.” He is so egocentric he projects his own outlook onto his son, his own criteria for his own gradual suicide by alcohol: “he does it only when he has realized that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important...no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps.” Quentin tells his father he will not do “that.” He will kill himself not from despair, but to affirm honor and to redeem the family from Caddy. He will do it to prove his father wrong, that there is something worth dying for—before he loses his faith completely and becomes like his father, believing in nothing.

Quentin’s resistance to change intensifies through repetition of the incredulous “temporary.” Arrested in adolescence at age 21, he is unstable and desperately hanging on to permanent meaning, like Benjy. Despite his resistance he is being persuaded by his father’s cynical nihilism, which is a spiritual form of suicide annihilating his former idealistic self with nothing to replace his soul. Paradoxically, he kills himself to save himself from himself. He is pathetic yet also heroic in a way for resisting his father’s nihilism. Yet his literal suicide is a waste, as Dilsey says. While redeeming himself in his own head, he renders meaningless his year at Harvard and the sale of Benjy’s pasture to send him there. He cares most about appearances, yet rather than bravely redeeming the family honor, he gives the appearance of being a cowardly failure. Ironically, his father had appealed to his sense of honor: “for you to go to Harvard had been your mother’s dream since you were born and no Compson has ever disappointed a lady.” His disappointed mother feels he was “inconsiderate” to kill himself.

Quentin rationalizes his suicide in the line “it will be better for me for all of us.” Juxtaposed, his father’s detachment is chilling: “every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another man’s wellbeing.” Yet he is prescribing for his son’s well being with his pronouncements about the only valid criteria for suicide. The besotted Mr. Compson is so heartless he does not care whether his son

kills himself or not, just as in the story “That Evening Sun” he does not care whether his black laundress Nancy is murdered or not. They may be her bones the children see in the ditch.

In the last paragraph Quentin enacts a ritual of preparing for death. “The last note sounded.” The last note sounded in the preceding paragraph was his father’s declaration that everything is temporary: “there is nothing else in the world.” By juxtaposition with the campus bell tower chimes, Mr. Compson’s inhumane nihilism is identified with clock time, the consciousness Quentin is desperate to escape. He puts on his vest, cleansed of the blood stain, just as he intends to cleanse his family of Caddy’s stains upon its honor. “The gasoline was faint now, barely noticeable, and in the mirror the stain didn’t show.” The mirror is again his narrow, rigid, self-centered world view and the cleansing agent is on the surface like his notion of how to redeem himself and his family. The stain is still there, but it doesn’t show. As always he is more concerned with appearance than reality, like his mother when she married off Caddy.

His final acts are as absurd as his father thinks all life to be, as idiotic as Benjy. On his way to kill himself Quentin brushes his teeth, squeezes the brush “as dry as I could” and puts it away in his bag in a gesture of closure. He forgets his hat and goes back for it or students might “think I was a Harvard Square student making like he was a senior.” Horrors. He even brushes his hat. His last acts conform to petty undergraduate decorum, implying that his suicide likewise conforms to an arbitrary standard of behavior relative to a time and place that will soon be irrelevant.

We are left to imagine Quentin jumping into the river in a new suit with a *clean* vest and brushed teeth, leaving only his freshman beanie floating on the water. He arrests himself in development as a freshman. He could never cross his psychological *bridge* and he finally escapes *time* by jumping off into the *mirror* of the *water*, into his own reflection—into his *shadow*. That he makes everything worse rather than better is implied by juxtaposition with Jason opening the next section bitching at Caddy’s daughter, the girl Quentin, abandoned to Jason’s abuse. In the end, he betrayed Caddy.

JASON

April Sixth 1928

Jason begins by denying the possibility of change, which he resists as fiercely as his brothers do. His irrationality is ironic in that he thinks of himself as more rational than everyone else. Supposedly “the last sane Compson,” he proves to be just as loony in his way as Benjy. He is undercut by irony and satirized throughout the novel. In mythology Jason is a hero in quest of the Golden Fleece, whereas Jason Compson is a fool for gold and fleeces his own niece. His chasing after her for the money he stole from her is a mock “quest.” This contrast between the past and the decadent present is a technique common to Modernists beginning primarily with Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922). Jason represents the spiritual degeneration of humanity since antiquity and in particular the decadence of the South, a Compson who sold out to the prevailing values of the North and devolved into a Snopes. His irreverence, dishonesty, selfishness, amorality, cruelty, and destructive influence make him a Satan as opposed to Dilsey.

Jason’s attitude toward women is evident from the start: “‘Once a bitch always a bitch,’ what I say.” His own character and business failures and Dilsey’s efficiency make his misogyny ridiculous: “Yet they try to make men believe that they’re capable of conducting a business.” He thinks Caddy’s daughter Quentin should “be down there in that kitchen.” His girlfriend Lorraine is a prostitute. “I’d like to see the good, church-going woman that’s half as square as Lorraine, whore or no whore.” Jason condemns his sister Caddy for sexual misconduct but “I’ve got every respect for a good honest whore.” By respect he means that “I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I’m going to give her. That’s the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you cant think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw.”

Jason does not even respect his mother, who thinks he is her only good child. She whines, “But to have the school authorities think that I have no control over her, that I can’t--” and Jason rebukes her, making her cry: “‘Well,’ I says, ‘You can’t, can you? You never have tried to do anything with her,’ I says. ‘How do you expect to begin this late, when she’s seventeen years old?’” Control is a dominant theme in this

section, the only way Jason and his mother relate to the girl. “But to have them think...” Like her dead son Quentin, Mrs. Compson is most concerned about appearances. “I didn’t even know she had a report card. She told me last fall that they had quit using them this year.”

This example of Mrs. Compson’s gullibility and neglect is comical, setting the tone of satire throughout this section. Faulkner’s ridicule is enhanced by the corrosive sarcasm of Jason himself—his own worst enemy. In the kitchen Jason resorts to physical force to control Quentin. “When people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger.” Dilsey tries to protect the girl. “Dilsey came hobbling along. I turned and kicked the door shut in her face.” Dilsey comes in anyway, tries to stop him and he pushes her around too. Quentin tells Dilsey she wants her mother while Dilsey tries to be a mother to her. “I aint gwine let him tech you.” However, the girl is so alienated and rebellious she knocks Dilsey’s maternal hand away: “You damn old nigger,” she says. She has less respect for Dilsey than any other Compson. She tells Jason she’s going to hell and she doesn’t care.

At work Jason expresses prejudices against “those damn trifling niggers” and against “damn eastern jews.” He backpedals when he realizes that the customer he is talking to might be Jewish. “No,” says the customer. “I’m an American.” That permits Jason to rant, “I have nothing against jews as an individual, I says. ‘It’s just the race’.” Jason is a failure who resents the success of others. He even hates Babe Ruth the baseball hero. He boasts about his knowledge of the stock market and how to play it while posing as indifferent: “After all, like I say money has no value; it’s just the way you spend it. It don’t belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it. It just belongs to the man that can get it and keep it.” Or to the girl who takes his money? His bitterness toward his brothers generates black humor: “I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim and at Sewanee they don’t even teach you what water is. I says you might send me to the state University; maybe I’ll learn how to stop my clock with a nose spray and then you can send Ben to the Navy I says or to the cavalry anyway, they use geldings in the cavalry.”

His 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.” Jason repeats this line and it becomes a motif in this section, comic irony since we could spare Jason more readily than Maury. Also Mrs. Compson, who keeps whining about how she is going to be dead soon and “then we’d all be better off”—what her son Quentin said of his suicide. By now the reader may agree with her. Jason and his mother both objectify Caddy’s baby as “it.” Herbert Head kicked Caddy out once he learned that the baby was not his, and she felt compelled to send her to the family to raise. Jason is angry at having to take her in, whereas Dilsey has open arms: “Who else gwine raise her ‘cep me? Aint I raised eve’y one of y’all?” Jason blames her for everything: “And a damn fine job you made of it.” Mrs. Compson blames the *baby*: “You will never know the suffering you’ve caused.... Dilsey, I forbid you ever to speak that name [Caddy] in her hearing. If she should grow up never to know that she had a mother, I would thank God.” Of course, her own children never really had a mother either.

When Caddy returns home for the funeral of her father in 1912 she asks Jason to see her little daughter Quentin, age 2. Jason reminds her she promised never to return, resents her being there and accuses her, ironically, of being selfish: “You don’t give a damn about anybody.” Caddy has demonstrated all along how much she cares about her daughter, her brother Quentin, Benjy, and both her parents. She understands that Jason hates her because Herbert Head had promised him a job in his bank and Jason blames her for getting rejected after she did not reveal what her mother married her off to conceal. She has to bribe Jason with a hundred dollars to see her own child—and then he only gives her a glimpse by holding the child up to the window of the hack as he rushes “past her like a fire engine.” His driver Mink Snopes associates Jason with the cruel animality and vindictiveness of Mink and others in the Snopes clan.

The pathos of Caddy running down the street after the hack and her persistence in trying to see her child afterward are a measure of her love. Jason threatens to tell on her to their intolerant mother and Uncle Maury—always a tattletale. Then he tells Dilsey that Caddy has leprosy that you will catch if she looks at you. “I put the fear of God into Dilsey. As much as you can into a nigger, that is. That’s the trouble with nigger servants, when they’ve been with you for a long time they get so full of self importance that they’re not worth a damn. Think they run the whole family.” Ironically, Jason is the one so full of self importance

he isn't worth a damn. And Dilsey *does* virtually run the family—as best she can with her efforts so frustrated by Jason: “‘You’s a cold man, Jason, if man you is,’ she says. ‘I thank de Lawd I got mo heart dan dat, even ef hit is black’.” In desperation, trying to redeem herself as a mother, Caddy offers to buy her child from Jason for a thousand dollars, an ironic echo of slavery.

The pathos increases as we see how little the teenage girl Quentin cares about her mother Caddy: “She reached for the money order, hardly glancing at the letter.” Ordered by Jason to read the letter, “She read it fast, in about two looks.” She accuses Jason of being a thief, after Caddy tells her “she’s sent a lot of money here. She says it’s for me.” Jason intimidates her into signing over her check, but then he finds he is losing on the stock market. At home he dupes his mother into thinking she is burning Caddy’s checks—“the wages of sin”—by using fake checks, “destroying them for fifteen years.” The scene is one of the funniest in the novel, as Mrs. Compson clearly wants to cash the check while pretending to be morally above it: “‘I could bring myself to accept them,’ she says, ‘For my children’s sake. I have no pride’.” Ironically, Jason pressures her into burning this check by appealing to her pride as a Bascomb, pretending to be generously giving up the money himself—“We can get along”—while actually stealing it. And he tries to persuade his mother to send Benjy to the state asylum in order to “get that much benefit out of the taxes we pay.”

Jason softens enough to admit to his mother that Herbert Head would probably not have hired him anyway and might not even have owned a bank. He is further humanized by forgiving Caddy and Quentin to their mother: “‘They were all right,’ I says. ‘They did the best they could, I reckon’.” Yet he is “glad I haven’t got the sort of conscience I’ve got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time.” Actually he has no conscience at all, only rationalizations. When he finds he has lost more on the stock market, irrationally he blames Quentin for distracting him. And what he thinks about his boss is ironic too: “I’ve found that when a man gets into a rut the best thing you can do is let him stay there.” Jason is especially irritated by his own unconscious faults perceived in other people: “If there’s one thing gets under my skin, it’s a damn hypocrite. A man that thinks anything he don’t understand all about must be crooked and that first chance he gets he’s morally bound to tell.” Jason the tattletale denounces tattletales.

The black characters outwit Jason, as when he calls one black man a fool. “‘Well,’ he says, ‘I don’t spute dat neither. Ef dat uz a crime, all chain-gangs wouldn’t be black’.” Just after that, Jason begins making a fool of himself chasing after the teenage girl who outwits him. Old black Job tells him, “‘You too smart fer me. Yes, suh,’ he says, looking busy as hell, putting five or six little packages into the wagon, ‘You’s too smart fer me. Aint a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself,’ he says, getting in the wagon and unwrapping the reins. ‘Who’s that?’ I says. ‘Dat’s Mr Jason Compson,’ he says. ‘Git up dar, Dan!’”

Jason thinks his whole family is crazy, “only if I’m crazy too God knows what I’ll do about it just to look at water makes me sick and I’d just as soon swallow gasoline as a glass of whiskey.” He counts his hidden stash of the money he has stolen from Caddy and Quentin “and hid the box again.” Due to the non-linear structure of the novel, Quentin has already taken his money at the end of Benjy’s section, making his miserly feeling of security ironic. When he sees Quentin in a car speeding away with her boyfriend in the red tie “running like hell. I saw red.” The gasoline fumes of his car, like the whole modern world, give Jason a relentless headache. He chases Quentin without yet knowing that she has taken his (her) money: “I’m afraid all the time I’ll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square, like a couple of dogs.” He is a loser all around without knowing it, yet he postures as superior to his neighbors, boasting that “my people owned slaves.”

Jason’s alienation from Nature is evident in the courthouse yard in his dislike of birds, an archetypal image of transcendence because they fly. “First thing you know, bing. Right on your hat.” He advocates putting some poison down in the square, regardless of the harm to dogs, squirrels and other animals. His inability to adapt is comical out in the countryside, where he gets lost in the brush under a hot sun with his pounding headache. Traditionally getting lost in Nature may lead to transcendent consciousness, whereas in Jason’s case it just leads to getting even more pissed off. “I had gotten beggar lice and twigs and stuff all over me, inside my clothes and shoes and all, and then I happened to look around and I had my hand right on a bunch of poison oak.... I’ll make him think that damn red tie is the latch string to hell, if he thinks he

can run the woods with my niece.” But he is a loser again, and does not yet know the worst of it. They drive off leaving him behind and blowing their horn at him “like it was saying Yah. Yah. Yaaahhhhhhhh, going out of sight—taunting him.

Dilsey keeps trying to help Quentin: “I’ll take keer of her ef you’n Miss Cahline’ll let me.” She admonishes Jason like a child: “Go on in dar now and behave yoself twell I git supper on.” Jason then behaves with adolescent cruelty by teasing Luster for having no money and burns a ticket to the show rather than give it to Luster. Dilsey reproaches him for his “devilment” and promises to give Luster a quarter to go to the show tomorrow. The motif of loss continues with Benjy slobbering and moaning over “the dark place on the wall where the mirror used to be.” Saying that Easter is cold now, Luster tries to comfort Benjy by stoking the fire until Jason stops him because “this is not Easter.”

At supper Mrs. Compson calls Jason “the head” of the house, inviting comparisons with Herbert Head. “He’s the nearest thing to a father you’ve ever had,” she tells the girl Quentin. Jason’s sarcastic abuse of Quentin is incessant, impelling her to run away. “Whatever I do, it’s your fault,” she says. ‘If I’m bad, it’s because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead.’ Then she ran.... ‘That’s the first sensible thing she ever said,’ I says.” If cynical Mr. Compson had not drunk himself to death, he might have been able to help Quentin: “He was always saying they didn’t need controlling.” Wallowing in self-pity, Mrs. Compson is always hiding in her bedroom and yet she accuses her children of neglect: “They deliberately shut me out of their lives.... They were always conspiring against me.” Ironically, she blames her “selfish” son Quentin for Caddy’s behavior: “He could have controlled her.”

Jason again “got the box out and counted it again. I could hear the Great American Gelding snoring away like a planing mill.” The juxtaposition of Jason with Benjy suggests parallels between them, as Jason too will become an impotent idiot, unable to be a tattletale when he is most desperate to tell. His stream of consciousness ends with a sadistic image of Benjy’s castration—“they never started soon enough with their cutting, and they quit too quick. I know of two more that needed something like that.” Jason does not yet know that he himself is being emasculated. All his thinking gets him nowhere. He ends obsessed with getting taken on the stock market at the very time he is getting taken at home—both results of his own behavior. His thinking ends as it began, “Like I say once a bitch always a bitch.” He is the one who cannot change. And he is the one who never stops bitching. His monologue is circular, like something getting sucked down the drain of a urinal.

DILSEY

April Eighth 1928

Easter dawned “bleak and chill,” evoking the secular modern world—not the traditional Easter of parades after church and fancy hats and bunnies and children hunting eggs—bleak and chill like the heart of Jason Compson. The three interior monologues of the Compson brothers are subjective, limited and idiotic. By contrast they give the objective narration of the last section an absolute authority, liberate the eloquent style of Faulkner, expand perspective to vision, and elevate consciousness into the transcendence of the Easter sermon in the black church, where sympathetic objectivity unites heart with head in holistic perception, expressed in metaphors. Faulkner also uses the ironic device Melville used in *Moby-Dick* and Twain used in *Huckleberry Finn* of affirming moral values that invert the prejudiced social order, setting black above white—the dark pagan harpooners above the white Christian mates; the escaped slave Jim above Huck and Tom; Dilsey above all the Compsons.

Now that the Compsons have had their say, objectivity immediately replaces them with Dilsey in the foreground as the exemplar in the novel—Faulkner’s rebuttal. Their selfishness is contrasted with her generosity, their idiocy with her practicality, their decadence with her endurance. The physical description of Dilsey is realistic in unflattering detail, emphasizing her spirit over the flesh: with a “paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts.” Fortitude, indomitable, impervious. She also has both wisdom and innocence, as implied in her “expression at once fatalistic and of a child’s astonished disappointment.”

Dilsey lives in a cabin surrounded close by trees and birds, nestled into the natural order in contrast to the Compson mansion looming above it. She emerges wearing a gingham dress and a man's hat, both feminine and masculine, and an army overcoat that suggests what a battle life has been for her. She moves "with a sort of painful and terrific slowness" that is usually successful in the end in contrast to Jason's futile chasing around the countryside after Quentin. She brings in an armload of stove wood and gets called by Mrs. Compson, who is wearing a quilted black satin dressing gown as if for her own funeral. Ironically the pitiful white lady of the mansion is deferential, subservient and cold, begging her black servant for warmth. She needs her red rubber hot water bottle filled, what she has instead of a full heart. Dilsey builds a fire and provides all the human warmth in the house, expressing her transcendence by singing while she works—a tradition of slaves in the Old South. Mrs. Compson nags, "Haven't you started breakfast yet?" 'I'll tend to dat too,' Dilsey said."

"You're not the one who has to bear it,' Mrs. Compson said. 'It's not your responsibility. You can go away. You don't have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out.'" But of course Dilsey *is* the responsible one who is bearing the brunt of it day in and day out. Absurdly, Mrs. Compson criticizes her for being loyal and not walking away from all this work and abuse every day for no pay. "Dilsey said nothing." Her endurance in silence contrasts with the sound and fury of the Compsons. Thanks to her, "The room grew warmer." When the kitchen clock strikes five times, "'Eight o'clock,' Dilsey said." The Compsons are behind the times and it's later than they think, whereas Dilsey transcends the clock time consciousness that Quentin kills himself to escape, as she demonstrates at the Easter service.

After getting to know Benjy from the inside, it is gratifying to finally see him as he looks on the outside. It brings him more vividly to life. He has "a shambling gait like a trained bear," his fine pale hair is "brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerreotypes," and his mouth hangs open "drooling a little." Benjy stands for all those who are innocently different from ourselves and is a challenge to the humanity of each character. Luster teases him at times in harmless ways, but this amuses the reader too and humanizes the boy. He is the one who has to spoonfeed and babysit the big idiot all day long. He has a "sweet vague gaze" and his name relates him to Dilsey, who has "lustrous" skin. His boyish threat to whip Benjy if he does not behave is an ironic echo of slavery days reversing racial roles. Blacks had to become stronger than their white masters in order to survive slavery and now they are free of the decadence represented by the Compsons. Luster calls attention to the racial differences: "Dese is funny folks. Glad I aint none of em." At the same time, however, Dilsey affirms racial equality: "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em."

At breakfast this Easter Sunday, Mrs. Compson mentions having let the servants go to church. "'Go where?' Jason said. 'Hasn't that damn show left yet?'" He mistakes church for a "damn" entertainment and protests that now he will have to eat cold dinner. "I know you blame me," his mother says. "'For what?' Jason said. 'You never resurrected Christ, did you?'" Jason is a mocking anti-Christ and Mrs. Compson is a fake Christian barely able to resurrect herself from bed. The reference to Christ is juxtaposed to "They heard Dilsey mount the final stair, then her slow feet overhead." Jason is described with "hair curled into two stubborn hooks, one on either side of his forehead like a bartender in caricature." His hooks of hair are like the horns of a devil. They turn inward as though growing into his head, for he is his own worst enemy. He and his mother are identified with each other "in identical attitudes," one "cold and shrewd" and the other "cold and querulous."

They rush upstairs and try to reach Quentin--only to control her. "Give me the key, you old fool!" Jason yells at his mother. Her keys are likened to a "medieval jailer's." The psychological key to reaching the girl is love, which Jason and his mother both lack. "He will never find the right" key, his mother says. "'But on Sunday morning [not to mention Easter], in my own house,' Mrs. Compson said. 'When I've tried so hard to raise them Christians. Let me find the right key, Jason,' she said.'" After Dilsey expresses parental love, the door swings open.

The anonymity of Quentin's room is pathetic: "it was not a girl's room. It was not anybody's room." Her interior has "that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses." This girl has no identity, no ego, no confidence. She seems destined to become a prostitute. It could not have helped that she was named after a suicide. "On the floor lay a soiled undergarment or cheap silk a little too pink."

This recalls the soiled undergarment of Caddy up in the tree when Damuddy died. Caddy climbed up a tree, her daughter goes down a tree. Also, a previous image of pink appeared in Quentin's section when he is looking for the dirty little girl's house, a pink garment hanging out a window. Caddy married for the sake of convention, whereas her daughter Quentin rejected convention and judgments of her as "cheap" and "soiled" and fled without her underpants, leaving her window open. Luster tells Dilsey, "Me and Benjy seed her clamb out de window last night.... We sees her doin hit ev'y night." Luster said, 'Clamb right down dat pear tree'." A pear tree is a traditional symbol of fertility, a detail suggesting that now Quentin may become pregnant and get abandoned and robbed like her mother.

The bellowing of Benjy becomes an expression of universal human suffering: "It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets." On the way to church, Dilsey's daughter Frony complains, "I wish you wouldn't keep on bringin him to church, mammy," Frony said. 'Folks talkin'." Though she is black, Dilsey's own daughter has developed a preoccupation with appearances like the Compsons. Dilsey tells Frony to "Tell um de good Lawd don't keer whether he smart er not. Don't nobody but white trash keer dat." This defines Jason and his mother morally as white trash, contrary to their pretensions.

At the church this Easter Sunday, the visiting preacher "had a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey." The simile evokes the origin and evolution of the human race, making this old preacher representative of all humanity. He is small in contrast to the large regular minister, but as he preaches he enlarges. At first the congregation "watched the insignificant looking man sitting dwarfed and countrified by the minister's imposing bulk, with something like consternation." Frony is typical in being unimpressed based on appearances, whereas Dilsey is open to the stranger.

The insignificant looking preacher sounds at first "like 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." Then he changes his tone from white to black: "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..." until "their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words..." and they were "Brethren en sistuhn!" and "his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: 'Yes, Jesus!'"

Dilsey wept. "They did not mark just when his intonation, his pronunciation, became negroid, they just sat swaying a little in their seats as the voice took them into itself." The black style of the preacher is intuitive, emotional, spontaneous, visionary, dramatic, and vivid with images of light and "de blood of de Lamb" and "swingin chariots." His archetypal symbols engage the unconscious, "sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes." The preacher has identified with Jesus as a "tortured crucifix" and his congregation addresses Jesus through him as a medium—"Yes, Jesus!" Appealing to their hearts and their parental love of children he acts out an imaginary scene of a Roman soldier coming to take the baby Jesus from Mary's arms by force, recalling slavery: "We gwine to kill yo little Jesus!" The preacher induces visions of Jesus in rapt members of the congregation—"I sees, O Jesus!" He envisions the crucifixion—"I sees Calvary...dey done kilt Jesus." He sees "de resurrection en de light" and "de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again." Of all the Compsons, ironically, only Benjy responds to this spirit, "rapt in his sweet blue gaze."

On the walk home Dilsey continues to weep, hearing praise for the preacher: "He didn't look like much at first, but hush!" Appearances are deceiving. "Dilsey made no sound," while feeling deeply. Weeping with her head up, she is "unmindful of the talk" and cares nothing about appearances, though Frony does: "Whyn't you quit dat, mammy?..." Wid all dese people lookin. We be passin white folks soon." Frony is still like a slave in her deference to whites, whereas Dilsey is weeping because she has a tragic perspective on history, the dying Compson family, and the Old South: "I've seed de first en de last.... I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin." Dilsey protects Quentin by not telling Jason that Luster knows where she is. Faulkner believes in natural justice, as here in giving Luster the opportunity to pay Jason back in a big way for burning a ticket to the show he wanted so much to see.

Mrs. Compson remains forever bewildered by her son Quentin's suicide, evidence of what a waste it was. She is the only one left in the family who might have understood his pathetic defense of their decadent southern code of honor. She can only attempt to understand it in relation to her own feelings. "Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady." As if God judged manners rather than morals. She wants a Bible nearby, but she does not read it. For her, religion is merely a comfort to be applied with closed eyes like the camphor-soaked cloth she lays upon her brow on Sunday mornings.

Jason has been a tattletale all his life, but now when he is desperate to get the money back, he cannot tell the sheriff the whole truth without implicating himself in theft, that he stole the money he wants recovered: "Jason told him, his sense of injury and impotence feeding upon its own sound.... He repeated his story, harshly recapitulant, seeming to get an actual pleasure out of his outrage and impotence." He rages against Caddy now, blaming her for his failure in life, "The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in town." Quentin and the money "merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it." The sheriff knows Quentin and says to Jason, "You drove her away from home.... And I have some suspicions about who that money belongs to that I don't reckon I'll ever know for certain." Chasing after money, Jason is compared to Satan rebelling against God in a fantasy of "dragging Omnipotence down from His throne."

In a satirical deflation, he slows down when he realizes that the gasoline fumes of his car will soon give him a headache and he has forgotten his camphor. Suddenly he feels impotent, reminding him of his literal impotence with 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. Jason is an impotent idiot like Benjy, "robbed of that which was to have compensated him for the lost job, which he had acquired through so much effort and risk, by the very symbol of the lost job itself, and worst of all, by a bitch of a girl." His head throbbing, he misjudges and provokes a fight with an old man swinging a hatchet. A sign in electric lights includes "a human eye with an electric pupil," an image of dehumanization in the modern world, illuminating and staring at Jason as a specimen—staring also at the reader, a device similar to Eliot direct addressing the reader at the end of "The Waste Land." Passersby in Sunday Easter clothes "looked at him as they passed, at the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life raveling out about him like a wornout sock." His headache is so bad he can no longer drive and has to pay a black man to get him home.

The novel comes full circle, back to the opening scene, when Luster stands beside Benjy at the fence watching golfers. Benjy mourns at a kind of grave he has made using two empty poison bottles at each end of a mound of earth. The bottles like headstones might represent his dead brother and his dead father on opposite sides, both of whom in a sense poisoned themselves. One bottle contains a withered jimson weed, an hallucinogenic, in the other he places a twig. Luster leads Benjy back to the fence to watch the golfers through wild honeysuckle and when one golfer uses the word "caddie" he begins to wail in a hopeless voice. Back in the house "Dilsey led Ben to the bed and drew him down beside her and she held him, rocking back and forth, wiping his drooling mouth upon the hem of her skirt. 'Hush, now,' she said, stroking his head, 'Hush. Dilsey got you'." This touching scene expresses Faulkner's love for Mammy Caroline Barr (1840-1940) "who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.... I grew up with Negro children, my foster mother was a Negro woman, I slept in her bed and the Negro children and I slept in the same bed together."

Dilsey gives Benjy her own hat to wear on a visit to the graveyard, paralleling him to Jesus, "You's de Lawd's chile, anyway." This positive aspect of Benjy is juxtaposed to his negative aspect when Luster gives him a broken narcissus, connoting his wounded narcissism. Luster puts a splint on the flower stem to hold it upright. Dilsey does not trust Luster, says he is full of devilment and cautions that he is headed for a chain gang. Nevertheless she lets him drive Benjy to the cemetery in the carriage, but takes away the whip. Out on the road Luster makes his own whip out of a switch and "assumed a swaggering attitude." At the town square he shows off: "Les show dem niggers how quality does, Benjy." Distracted, he turns to the left of the Civil War monument in the square instead of to the right according to custom. Benjy protests

with his loudest burst of bellowing in the novel—the climax of sound and fury: “Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted...it was horror; shock; agony...just sound...mounting toward its unbelievable crescendo.” Jason comes running out to the carriage, hurls Luster aside and turns the horse around to the right side of the monument. He hits both Luster and Benjy, breaking his flower stalk again. His violence evokes the southern resistance to change that led to the war commemorated by the monument.

In this last scene Benjy personifies the idiotic overreactions of his family against all change, represented by going to “the left.” He has temporarily forgotten Caddy and his castration and quits bellowing when they go to the right as always and everything in the world is once again “in its ordered place.” Only an idiot could think so. The theme of order is set against disorder. Although left and right inevitably have a political connotation, here neither is affirmed since both are negative absolutes—Jason and Benjy at one extreme and Luster at the other. Each of the Compson brothers tries to impose his own narcissistic order on Caddy and the world and each fails because of his own limitations and inability to adapt to Nature. In contrast Dilsey lives in harmony with Nature, tries to maintain a moral order for the good of all and transcends social disorder through faith in a divine order.

APPENDIX

Compson 1699-1945

Faulkner wrote this appendix to the novel in 1945 while Malcolm Cowley was editing *The Portable Faulkner* for Viking Press. “I should have done this when I wrote the book,” he wrote Cowley. “Then the whole thing would have fallen into pattern like a jigsaw puzzle when the magician’s wand touched it.” The account begins with the Chickasaw chief Ikkemotubbe, the Indian precursor of the white slave owners to come, including the Compsons. President Andrew Jackson is selected to epitomize the spirit of the frontier South, “who set the nation above the White House and the health of his new political party above either and above them all set not his wife’s honor but the principle that honor must be defended”—the principle for which Quentin III committed suicide. The first Compson, Quentin MacLachan, was a Scottish war veteran who fled the English to America in 1779 and joined the pioneers with Daniel Boone in Kentucky, whereas Quentin III is a cowardly weakling.

Charles Stuart turns to “the left” and becomes a Kentucky schoolteacher, then gambler who commits treason by joining a plot to secede from the United States, anticipating the later rebellion of the Civil War. Like many schoolteachers today “he talked himself countryless.” He was such a vociferous radical that eventually even his co-plotters forced him to flee Kentucky.

Jason Lycurgus rode down into Mississippi in 1811 and became half-owner of a frontier store. He raced horses against Indians of Ikkemotubbe’s tribe and used his winnings to buy a square mile of land that became the Compson plantation. The town of Jefferson grew up around the Compsons, who included a state Governor, “the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide.” Jason Lycurgus II became a general in the Civil War, lost battles at Shiloh and at Resaca and put the first mortgage on the Compson plantation to a New England carpetbagger in 1866. Old Jefferson got burned down by the Yankees and the new town came to be populated mainly by Snopeses rather than Compsons. Now what is left of the Compson place is ruins in the weeds.

Jason III is Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. He sold most of the remaining Compson property to pay for Caddy’s doomed marriage and for Quentin’s wasted year at Harvard. His son Jason IV sells the mansion and eventually the entire original square mile is replaced by “row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individually-owned demiurban bungalows,” a triumph of ugly collective modern development from the urban North. Quentin III loved honor but “loved death above all.” He waited to kill himself until he had completed the academic year to “get the full value of his paid-in-advance tuition” and because to pay for it the pasture Benjy loved had been sold. So he decided to throw away his life before he got the full value of it and to deprive Ben of his brother as well as his pasture.

Ironically, Caddy had placed no more value on losing her virginity than on losing a hangnail. Her life story is extended beyond her divorce from Herbert Head in 1911. She attained superficial glamour when

she married a movie magnate in Hollywood, but she divorced once more, then vanished in Paris during the German occupation in 1940 and was not heard from again. Jason IV became a buyer and dealer in cotton. During the war against the Nazis, in 1943 the county librarian brings him a magazine photograph of Caddy looking “cold serene and damned” in a sportscar beside a German staff general—a Nazi. Her association with a Nazi is thematically apt, since her family had been fascist in its treatment of her since childhood.

Jason is “a childless bachelor in whom ended that long line of men who had had something in them of decency and pride even after they had begun to fail at the integrity and the pride had become mostly vanity and self pity.” Ironically, recognizing her in the picture, Jason the cad says, “It’s Cad, all right.” But then he denies it is her. The librarian had divined that Jason blackmailed Caddy into staying away from Jefferson and giving him control of the money she sent. She shows the photo to old Dilsey, who claims to be blind because “*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.*” Dilsey understands the whole tragedy, that Caddy is a lost soul, that she is truly “damned.”

Jason IV “held his own with the Snopeses.” He thinks “nothing whatever of God” but is afraid of Dilsey, “whom he could not even force to leave” until his mother dies and he sells the Compson house. “Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers.” Yet he was undone by his white niece, not by the blacks: “he had been robbed not only of his thievings but his savings too, and by his own victim....and now he couldn’t even go to the police for help.” He fantasizes murdering the girl before she spends all the money. When she vanishes his only consolation is that Quentin is parallel to her mother, except that Quentin is more degraded, without the tragic glamour of becoming the consort of a Nazi general. Quentin has already doomed herself by running off with a “pitchman who was already under sentence for bigamy.”

Luster is forgiven for teasing Benjy because he is just a boy and “was not only capable of the complete care and security of an idiot twice his age and three times his size, but could keep him entertained.” Dilsey becomes representative of her race when she is referred to as “They.” She embodies the spiritual endurance of blacks and also exemplifies the human spirit in general transcending a hostile world. We know her so well by now that only two words are sufficient for her, consistent with her own reticence, humility, and evocative resonance. Dilsey has the last word.

Michael Hollister (2013)