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## Jason Compson and the Mother Complex

THE WEALTH OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MATERIAL in Faulkner's work is now a matter of record. Psychological conflicts pervade the flawed existence of Faulkner's fictional characters; well-delineated psychic paradigms are often manifested in a character's complex and highly developed fictional personality and actions. The narrative of Jason Compson from *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, is an example of the way psychology—the formation of human subjectivity—is incorporated within Faulkner's art. A Freudian reading of Jason's narrative reveals its inherent psychological tensions, and signifies the great depth of Faulkner's understanding of human character and of the ideas that understanding shares with the psychoanalytic model of the subject and its beginnings in the primal scene, loss, and the origin of desire.

Freud relied on his idea that unconscious desires—grounded in the Oedipal complex—reveal themselves in refracted forms within speech for patient analysis. For Freud, the unconscious reveals itself through language, through one's telling stories about one's self. Shoshana Felman writes, "From the *Letters to Fliess* to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, what Freud is instituting is a radically new way of writing one's autobiography, by transforming personal narration into a pathbreaking theoretical discovery."<sup>1</sup> Lacan's return to Freud also recognizes the unconscious nature of desire, and finds confirmation of his theory within the structures of language, which he sees as the symbolic expression of a desire that is no longer recognizable by the speaking subject.<sup>2</sup> Davis writes, "Narration exists, finally,

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<sup>1</sup>Shoshana Felman, "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis," in *Lacan and Narration: The Psychoanalytic Difference in Narrative Theory*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 1022.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 281. A helpful discussion of Lacan can be found in Samuel Weber's *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

within the context of an unconscious 'discourse,' within the bounds of what Lacan calls the 'discourse of the Other.'<sup>3</sup> Freud's theory of the unconscious nature of desire poses the Freudian subject as a speaking subject who reveals desire (libido) through narration. The narrative details of a patient's story he compares to a puzzle, which must then be interpreted mainly through a principle of substitution in which one thing stands for another. For Lacan, unconscious desire shows itself in the "gaps" and "slips" of narration.

The following reading is one based on the literal text, but looks for an interpretation built on the presence of an unconscious desire that props up the literal text and actually generates its form. This reading will rely on Freud's idea that the narrative is a puzzle in which the scheme of substitutions must be discovered in order to "hear" the voice of unconscious desire. Using Lacan's theory of visuality and the gaze to explore visual experience within Jason's narrative will support and clarify the tentative solution to the "puzzle" of the unconscious. Freud's theories, then, will provide a "clinical" reading of Jason, while Lacan's more ontological concerns will provide the construct for a reading which will reinforce and enhance the clinical one.

Jason Compson is a character with little to recommend him, save perhaps a sense of humor which spares no one, least of all himself. Critics have generally taken the view that Jason is the villain of *The Sound and the Fury*. For example, Richard Chase calls him a "mean-spirited materialist."<sup>4</sup> Olga Vickery writes that he is "calculating," "cold," and "controlling."<sup>5</sup> Cleanth Brooks finds him to be "brutal," "inhuman," and even "sadistic."<sup>6</sup> Jason's character displays an interesting assortment of eccentricities. Why, for instance, is Jason so insistent about hating Caddy? Why is he so bent on

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Con Davis, "Introduction: Lacan and Narration," in *Lacan and Narration: The Psychoanalytic Difference in Narrative Theory*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 848.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Chase, "Faulkner—The Great Years: *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Norton Critical Edition of "The Sound and the Fury"*, ed. David Minter (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987), p. 316.

<sup>5</sup>Olga Vickery, "*The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective*" (*Norton Critical Edition*, p. 306).

<sup>6</sup>Cleanth Brooks, "Man, Time, and Eternity" (*Norton Critical Edition*, p. 331).

making Quentin miserable? Why does he apparently hate almost everybody? How do we account for the fact that he is all but consumed with thoughts of money?

A Freudian and Lacanian approach supports the speculation that Jason, as Faulkner's text presents him to us, is a victim of mother-fixation that influences his perceptions of and visual relation to the world. Jason's fixation on his mother cripples him psychologically and establishes his hopelessly clouded and myopic view of human life. Gary Storhoff writes that "Faulkner's novel reveals the interactive bond that develops among family members as they negotiate conflicts through codes of stability they tacitly, and always covertly, create."<sup>7</sup> Jason's perspective on life—for example his obsession with Quentin, his hostility to Caddy, his extreme preoccupation with money, and his rampant paranoia—is determined according to codes which ultimately centralize within his relationship with his mother. While Jason's narrative is comprised of a host of character traits that suggest he is simply a villain, these traits reveal a certain logic when we understand them in the context of his relation to his mother, Caroline Compson. The narrative is determined by the mother-fixation which continually acts as a screen of mediation between Jason and the other.<sup>8</sup>

The term "mother-fixation" relies on two Freudian concepts, the Oedipal complex and the term "fixation." "Fixation" is a term used in contrast to the free movement of the libido, where a child remains tied to one particular point in time, or to a particular object, when he should have moved on. A fixation "always means that an undue amount of libido has been left behind."<sup>9</sup> The child who is "fixated" has a very strong instinctual or emotional investment in the moment or object to which he is tied, and

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<sup>7</sup>Gary Storhoff, "Caddy and the Infinite Loop: The Dynamics of Alcoholism in *The Sound and the Fury*," *Faulkner Journal*, 12 (Spring 1997), 3.

<sup>8</sup>For three important psychoanalytic readings of Jason Compson in relation to Mrs. Compson see Doreen Fowler, *Faulkner: the Return of the Repressed* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Noel Polk, *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996). While none deal with the mother complex in the way I do here, all three provide compelling perspectives on the Compson family relationships through a psychoanalytic frame.

<sup>9</sup>Anna Freud, *The Analysis of Defense: The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense Revisited*, ed. Joseph Sandler (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1985), p. 198.

develops a complex structure of defenses and neuroses as he carries this unconscious attachment into later life.

Sigmund Freud writes, in his lecture "Fixation to Traumas—The Unconscious," that an adult fixated to a particular moment of his past is unable to free himself from it. Consequently, he is "alienated from the present and the future" and remains "lodged in [his] illness in the sort of way in which in earlier days people retreated into a monastery in order to bear the burden there of their ill-fated lives."<sup>10</sup> Freud calls this a "neurotic attitude to life" (p. 282).

A mother-fixation suggests an arrest in development tied to the mother, and Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex provides an explanation. In "The Development of the Libido," Freud writes that at the time of puberty the human individual has to "devote himself to the great task of detaching himself from his parents" (*Lectures*, p. 335). For the male child this means detaching his libidinal wishes from his mother and choosing another love-object. This is a somewhat difficult process because the child must both accept his father as a more powerful rival for the mother and reconcile himself to his father so as to identify with him. Certain neurotics, explains Freud, fail in successfully completing these tasks. They remain in opposition to the father, and are unable to transfer their libido to an outside sexual object. "In this sense the Oedipus complex may justly be regarded as the nucleus of neuroses" (p. 337). Anna Freud tells us that men with mother-fixations rarely marry. Jason, at least in his mid-thirties since his younger brother Benjy is thirty-three, is unmarried. He tells his mother he has no intention of marrying, especially since, if he did, she would "go up like a balloon . . . get right up out of [her] grave."<sup>11</sup> Peter Gay's study of Freud, specifically in his discussion of a fixation, points out that a fixation is a defense against anxiety. The fixated person is afraid to take the next step in psychological development. He writes that the fears are centered chiefly on "insecurity, failure, and punishment."<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to speculate on this regarding Jason and his relationship with his mother because the psychoanalytic system provides us with one more way to see

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<sup>10</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Fixation to Traumas—The Unconscious," in *Lectures*, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup>William Faulkner, (*Norton Critical Edition of "The Sound and the Fury"*), p. 148.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Times* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1988), p. 94.

Faulkner's interest in the power of family relationships in forming an individual's character and life experiences.

Many commentators have looked at Mrs. Compson's consummate selfishness, and at her apparent inability to be a mother in any good sense to her children.<sup>13</sup> Jason is the one child to whom she seems attached in some way. Yet when we look at their relationship from Jason's point of view, we find certain patterns. Jason is forever commenting on his mother's tears, his need to protect her female sensibilities and reputation, and he is forever hearing about how he, "thank God," is a Bascomb rather than a Compson: "Mother called me back and cried on me a while. . . . While we were waiting there for them to start she says Thank God if he had to be taken too, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson" (p. 121). She appears to have quite a hold on Jason in that he still seems to need her approval. She encourages him to believe that he is all to and for her, and he fears losing this special status with her. Stephen Ross writes:

Jason is clearly his mother's [son], for his adolescent perversity can be traced to his role as her favorite. . . . It becomes evident, in fact, that Jason directs most of what he says and thinks at Mrs. Compson . . . much of what he appears to be merely stating turns out on closer examination to be something he has said or would like to say to Mrs. Compson.<sup>14</sup>

Ross goes on to allude to psychoanalytic elements in their relationship, but he does not develop his reading. He notes, for instance, that "the important interlocutor, the 'other' against whose implied discourse Jason defines himself, is his mother," and that "Jason spends his entire monologue, and we can assume his entire life, trying to prove himself a man in her eyes" (p.

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<sup>13</sup>Many scholars have noted the lack of adequate mothering in the Compson family. See Deborah Clarke, "Faulkner and *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Faulkner and Psychology: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1991*, ed. Donald Kartiganer and Ann Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), for an alternate view of Caroline Compson. Clarke's feminist perspective traces the role of mothering in the novel. She argues that at the center of Faulkner's work there is a "maternal subtext," which concerns the "imprint of mothering on the male psyche, the psychological presence of the mother" as a palimpsest (p. 64). Noel Polk writes of Carolyn Compson as a victim of the Oedipal tensions and sexual repression which she in turn generates (p. 74). Philip Weinstein helps us see Mr. Compson as reflecting a Faulkner paradigm of "ideological insinuations perverting maternal function." His reading is that Mrs. Compson is a kind of "ideological monster . . . deformed by her social training" (pp. 31-32).

<sup>14</sup>Stephen M. Ross, *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 177.

Much in the text supports the idea that Jason has an unusual and important tie with Mother. He is unable to deal with Quentin in his own way because his mother, he says, always "Interferes." He frequently curbs his behavior at a word or a show of tears from her. He resorts to incredible subterfuge at times to avoid her scrutinizing gaze. Her importance in his mind can be seen in that she is the dominant subject of his narrative. It is true that a large portion of Jason's story is taken up with Quentin. Yet Mrs. Compson seems deeply implicated in Jason's relation with Quentin in that he claims that his mother's good name and Christian sensibilities are the motive and force behind his dealings with Quentin. This is all textual evidence which suggests Jason's fixated development.

The last section of the novel, recounted in third person by an "objective" voice, provides an interesting piece of evidence of Jason's mother fixation. Jason and Mrs. Compson are linked by the narrator in this section so as to suggest their extreme likeness to one another: "he and his mother appeared to wait across the table from one another in identical attitudes; the one cold and shrewd . . . [with] hazel eyes with black-ringed irises like marbles, the other cold and querulous, with . . . eyes . . . so dark as to appear to be all pupil or all iris" (p. 167). This narrative ploy of course suggests the strong resemblance between these two characters. Both the likeness of the look in their eye, and the "identical attitudes" they share, suggest a resemblance which goes deeper than mere physical appearance. Mother and son seem to agree on most things, and this moment in the narrative is only one example of that shared attitude. This resemblance becomes striking in regard to my argument here when one reads Freud's idea, in "Dissection of the Personality," that "it is however possible to identify oneself with someone whom, for instance, one has taken as a sexual object, and to alter one's ego on his model" (*Lectures*, p. 527). Freud defines identification in this essay as "the assimilation of one ego to another one, as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain respects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up into itself. It is a very important form of attachment to someone else, probably the very first" (p. 527). We can speculate, I think, on the applicability of Freud's comments to Jason's libidinal attachment to Mrs. Compson.

There is further evidence of Jason's mother-fixation as well, and here we must rely again on Freud for the solution to solve the "puzzle" of unconscious desire within Jason's narrative. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is apparent that the women in Jason's life are all mother-surrogates for him. He relates to them as deputy figures for his mother, and each of them—Caddy, Quentin, and Lorraine—is a substitute who in some way allows for the enactment of some aspect of his mother-fixation. To see this, it is necessary to look at Freud's idea regarding the libidinal object-choices made by men, and at his theory of projection.

In his essay "A Special Type of Object-Choice," Freud claims that men always choose women who are in some way derivative of their mothers, and that this is so because of the mother-complex men go through during the Oedipal process, which is repressed but is unconsciously influencing their choice in a partner. Freud is concerned in this essay in part with the seemingly contradictory relation between a son's consistent choice of love-objects which are somehow derivative of the mother, and the choice of some men (of which Jason is one) for prostitutes. After all, he writes, "the grown man's conscious mind likes to regard the mother as a personification of impeccable moral purity, and few suggestions from without are so insulting, or from within so painful, as those which cast doubt on the mother's character in this respect" (*Lectures*, p. 198). Freud resolves the seeming contradiction in this way:

This very relation, however, of sharpest possible contrast between the "mother" and the "harlot" would prompt us to study the developmental history of the two complexes and unconscious relation between them, since we long ago discovered that a thing which in consciousness makes its appearance as two contraries is often in the unconscious a united whole. Investigation then leads us back to the period in the boy's life at which he first obtained more or less detailed knowledge of the sexual relations between adults. . . . The greatest impression on the child who is being initiated is made by the relation the information bears to his own parents. . . . Along with this piece of "sexual enlightenment" there seldom fails to go, as a corollary, a further one about the existence of certain women who practice sexual intercourse as a means of livelihood . . . [and] he says to himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is after all not so very great, since at bottom they do the same thing. (pp. 198-199)

Freud here claims that the man's choice of a woman with a "loose character" derives "directly from the mother-complex" (p. 199). In fact, writes Freud, the mother's infidelity is "by far the most favored" subject of a son's

fantasies, and what's more, the "type of erotic life in men [who choose prostitutes as love-objects] is easily to be understood as a fixation on the fantasies formed by the boy during puberty" (p. 200).

Jason's relationship with the prostitute Lorraine, then, suggests his mother-fixation, yet we can go further, I think, based on Freud's discussion above, and argue that Quentin, too, represents this "promiscuous" aspect of his mother for him, and is a stand-in for her in his unconscious mind. After all, Jason apparently thinks of Quentin solely in terms of sexual promiscuity. In fact, Freud's essay allows us to speculate that promiscuity is not the only trait a man may focus on to choose a woman as a mother-surrogate. Caddy and Damuddy, too, can be seen as mother-surrogates for Jason in that they represent some aspect of his mother for him.<sup>15</sup> Freud writes:

If the love-objects chosen by [one who has a mother fixation] are above everything mother-surrogates, then the formation of a long series of them . . . [brings] to light that the pressing desire in the unconscious for some irreplaceable thing often resolves itself into an endless series in actuality—endless for the very reason that the satisfaction longed for is in spite of all never found in any surrogate.<sup>16</sup>

Freud is primarily talking about promiscuous men here, but I think he sheds some light on Jason's relationship with women. All but Lorraine are family members, ranging from his grandmother, whom he slept with until she died, to his niece Quentin. Many critics have written on the theme of incest in Faulkner's work.<sup>17</sup> Here, however, I will only speculate that perhaps a family member is a closer, and therefore unconsciously more satisfying, substitute for the mother. It is possible to look at Jason's view of these women as represented in the text in order to see the particular fetishized role they play for him in terms of his mother-fixation. Jason's relationships

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<sup>15</sup>Linda Welshimer Wagner points out that "[o]f these many women characters, it seems strange that none is a mother" ("Jason Compson: The Demands of Honor," *Sewanee Review*, 79 [Autumn 1971], 571), with the possible exception of Damuddy, whose influence on Jason is too limited. In this sense, they all mirror the lack of Carolyn Compson, which increases their ability to stand for her in Jason's private logic.

<sup>16</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, authorized translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), IV, 198.

<sup>17</sup>One of the best psychoanalytic readings of Faulkner is John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).



with women all suggest that Jason is unduly compelled by some unconscious part of his mind which retains a libidinal attachment to his mother.

We find evidence for this idea in the text when we notice that all the women in Jason's life—Mother, Caddy, Quentin, Lorraine, Damuddy—are at times indistinguishable from one another in the structural form of Jason's narrative. I am thinking, for instance, of interesting moments in the narrative, rendered in stream-of-consciousness, in which these female characters seem to be all jumbled in his mind into the same figure, or in which they are all somehow interchangeable with one another in his thoughts or words.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting for my purposes here because stream-of-consciousness follows a logic of association which is idiosyncratic and private. It is a kind of discourse in which unconscious desires are apt to show themselves in ways less disguised than in more controlled, deliberate thinking. Notice in the following how Jason is initially reporting his discussion with Lorraine, but how his thoughts of her somehow lead to and get jumbled with thoughts of Mother and of Quentin in such a way as to suggest that they are linked somehow in Jason's mind: "because I've got every respect for a good honest whore because with Mother's health and the position I try to uphold to have her with no more respect for what I try to do for her than to make her name and my name and my Mother's name a byword in the town" (p. 140). The syntax of this passage suggests that there is an unconscious association of these women for Jason. His stream of associations captures, within a relatively short span of words, the fact that, on some unconscious level, Mrs. Compson, Lorraine, and Quentin stand in for one another. The path of his associations is clear: his reference to Lorraine as "a good honest whore" is associated with Mrs. Compson's reputation and good name, which in turn is associated with Quentin's imagined promiscuity. For Jason, the similarity and identification of these women allow his contradictory views of Mrs. Compson to exist simultaneously. The common feature, in Jason's statement, of these three women—sexual activity or its absence—allows Jason to consistently maintain the contradictory relation between his choice of a love-object which is both the "mother" and the "harlot." Mrs. Compson remains "a Christian forbearing woman" while the multiple representations of her in the persons of Lorraine and Quentin allow displacement of the disturbing and

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<sup>18</sup>See also Polk's discussion (pp. 117-128).

contradictory awareness of his mother's sexual relations with his father ("that the difference between his mother and a whore is after all not so very great, since at bottom they do the same thing"). This narrative strategy occurs a number of times in Jason's narrative, where the series of associations point to his unconscious failure to distinguish between these women: Lorraine as a prostitute, Quentin as a promiscuous tramp masquerading as a virtuous woman, and Mrs. Compson as a Christian woman are clearly identified with one another: "it's a good thing her [Mrs. Compson's] eyes are giving out, with that little whore [Quentin] in the house, a Christian forbearing woman like Mother . . . but I says that's your business, if you want to keep her and raise her in your house just because of Father. Then she would begin to cry and say it was her own flesh and blood" (p. 130). For Jason, Quentin is in the house "just because of Father," a telling unconscious association between his mother's "promiscuity" and his father. In Jason's unconscious, private logic, fantasies regarding his mother's promiscuity, represented for Jason by Quentin, associate her in his mind with his father.

Jason's ambivalence regarding his mother is worked out through his relation with Quentin. Freud explains what he terms "ambivalence" in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." Ambivalence is the ego's ability to absorb the part of the outside world that gives it pleasure into itself, and to allow the remainder to be separated off, which then is considered to be external to itself and so alien. This remainder is regarded by the ego as hostile, and is hated. In this way an object can call forth antithetical responses simultaneously from the ego. An object can be the source of both pain and pleasure, love and hate. Quentin allows Jason to separate off that part of his mother that is external to him, her infidelity, while retaining for himself that part of her with which he feels unity and identification. As Jason tells his story we can see that Quentin bears the greatest share of his libidinal fantasies, and she is the most victimized by them. If we remember that Freud asserts that "the grown man's conscious mind likes to regard the mother as a personification of impeccable moral purity"—and this is behavior certainly manifested by Jason towards his mother—we can see that the element most disturbing to him, that she "does what the prostitute does," is projected onto Quentin. She embodies what most both disturbs and fascinates Jason simultaneously regarding the object choice of his libido—his mother. Quentin is fetishized in that, for him, she holds out the promise of

satisfaction for his libidinal desire. In Freudian terms, the "satisfaction longed for is in spite of all never found in any surrogate," and hence is a continuously frustrating pursuit for him in that Quentin can never provide what in fact he wants. While she in part represents the object of Jason's sexual fantasies of his mother, she also represents his mother's unfaithfulness and promiscuity, and draws his bitterness and hostility as well. Quentin is actually the displaced substitute offered by his ego to his unconscious desire to possess his mother. Unconsciously, Quentin is a special object-choice for Jason's libidinal desires, and his obsession with her is far from merely the concerned interest of an uncle.

Quentin herself senses this about Jason. She screams at one point, "He won't let me alone . . . why won't he let me go back to— . . . why won't he let me alone?" (p. 156). We can see Jason's obsession underlying the conscious justification he provides himself and his listener in the statement "Me, without any hat, in the middle of the afternoon, having to chase up and down back alleys because of my mother's good name" (p. 140). His obsession with Quentin's sexual activity is linked once again to Mrs. Compson, and again we see the place Quentin holds in Jason's fixation as he keeps that aspect of his mother he sees as loyal to him—"her good name," as he says—tied to yet distinct from that aspect of her that is disturbing. Unconsciously, his mother's "good name" needs to be preserved for him, and hence Quentin must be the surrogate object of his libidinal desire.

Jason's obsession with Quentin is represented in the text to a substantial degree through the visual register. In this way, Jason's voyeuristic propensity toward Quentin establishes her as o/Other for him, and depicts the conditions under which his gaze operates.<sup>19</sup> Looking at the visual elements in the text surrounding the interaction of these two characters exposes the psychological basis of Jason's scopophilic drive. Jason's mission, he frequently reminds us, is to watch Quentin, and Quentin is constantly referred to by Jason using visual terms, suggesting his unconscious association of her with libidinal desire: "I'll take her to school and I'm going

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<sup>19</sup>The Other and the gaze are constructs from Lacan's theory of the human subject. For further explanation, see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

to *see* that she stays there" (p. 111); "Then I can *watch* her during the day and you can use Ben for the night shift" (p. 110); "You dont *look* all the way naked . . . , even if that stuff on your face does hide more of you than anything else you've got on" (p. 113); "I could *watch* her trying to think of a lie to tell" (p. 129); "Tell me what you want with [the money], and I'll *see* about it" (p. 129) (emphasis added). Jason's unconscious system of meaning where Quentin stands in for his mother imparts a kind of private logic to the obsessive watching she invokes in him.

Jason's perception of Quentin is grounded in his view of her as the object of his scopic drive. She is both threatening and desirable, as we shall see. As other, she represents both what he lacks, and what would make up that lack. She is castrating in that she threatens to expose Jason as lacking to the gaze of the Other. (Freud would perhaps say that, *as* Mother, she has the power to deny Jason her love and affection, an aspect of his fear regarding her that I have suggested above is responsible for his fixation.) Quentin is also fetishized in that she is frequently pictured by Jason as representing the phallus—veiled, partially hidden, escaping the power of his eye, the lure of his scopic drive (what Freud would call that "irreplaceable thing" sought for in unconscious desire). Lacan discusses the mother fixation in his essay "On the Possible Treatment of Psychosis" in this way:

The whole problem of the perversions consists in conceiving how the child, in his relation to the mother, a relation constituted in analysis not by his vital dependence on her, but by his dependence on her love, that is to say, by the desire for her desire, identifies himself with the imaginary object of this desire in so far as the mother herself symbolizes it in the phallus. (*Écrits*, pp. 197-198)

Using Lacan's idea here, Jason views Quentin as a mother-substitute who has the phallus, and can either give it and provide wholeness, or withhold it and expose him as lacking.

Seeing and being seen constitute the subject for Lacan. These constituting processes—seeing and being seen—take very telling forms in Jason's narrative. Quentin screams at Jason at one point, "Whatever I do, it's your fault. . . . If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me" (p. 156). Voyeurism and masquerade, activities associated with sexual mating, are evident in the first long sequence between Jason and Quentin, a sequence I am calling the kimono scene (pp. 110ff). We can recognize the part

Quentin plays as (M)Other in this early sequence of the narrative, and it is a good example of the play of desire as it forms in the visual exchange between Jason and Quentin. Quentin functions like a picture for Jason in that, looking at her, he sees the "desire of the Other to show itself."<sup>20</sup> The desire of the other to show itself is what Jason sees when, for example, he looks at Quentin and notices that her kimono drops off her shoulder, or falls open to show her, in Jason's words, "dam near naked" (p. 111). Her make-up, or face paint as Jason constantly refers to it, and her partially open kimono, lure his eye like a trompe l'oeil painting, promising to reveal what it can't possibly reveal—wholeness, reality, the real.

At the same time, his effort to penetrate the visual field is accompanied by a sense of being observed. The gaze of the other asserts itself and reconfigures the lack of Jason's gaze when Quentin looks at him with eyes "wide and black," "holding her kimono shut" and "pulling it tight around her" (pp. 110-111). Quentin's coverings or veils symbolically conceal the absent phallus. By the end of the sequence, her eyes "wide and black," and her tightly closed kimono give her an implied phallic power. She functions in the theory of the gaze as the "object a." Because Jason looks at her through the screen of his fixation, however, the physical reality that lures his eye is a look that always functions in the context of sexual attraction, promiscuity and infidelity, and as a libidinal desire for the mother.

There are other, similar scenes in Jason's narrative which space doesn't allow me to expand on here. Perhaps one of the more interesting ones is a passage where Jason plays the role of the voyeur, hiding in the doorway of Earl's store, watching Quentin. She can't see him, and so her threatening gaze is neutralized. Because of this, the unconscious libidinal desire of Jason's gaze is readily apparent:

so I stood there and watched her go on past, with her face painted up like a dam clown's and her hair all gummed and twisted and a dress that if a woman had come out doors even on Gayoso or Beale street when I was a young fellow with no more than that to cover her legs and behind, she'd been thrown in jail. I'll be damned if they dont dress like they were trying to make every man they passed on the street want to reach out and clap his hand on it. (pp. 139-140)

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<sup>20</sup>Sheldon Brivic, *The Veil of Signs: Joyce, Lacan, and Perception* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 89.

Jason's view of Quentin as an erotic object is only disguised by a thin layer of righteous indignation.

In another sequence, Quentin's appearance threatens to interfere with the way Jason wants to be seen by the other. Quentin tries to tear her dress off in public in a moment of defiance, but in this sequence of the narrative Jason uses violence to prevent what he seemingly wanted just minutes earlier, i.e., to see Quentin unveiled. The difference is that now his desire can be seen by others. He notices or imagines that "there was about a dozen people looking" (p. 114). Being seen in such a context is a threatening moment for Jason on two fronts. Not only would Jason's libidinal desire be exposed to the gaze of society, and in that sense it would be a punishing gaze, but society's gaze would be a competitor in his mind for a view of the promiscuous (M)Other. Quentin's threat to remove her clothing, the veils which invite the voyeuristic gaze, would expose her to others along with Jason once they are out on the street. Quentin/Mother's promiscuity is something Jason wants to reserve for himself alone.

According to Anna Freud neurotic anxiety is produced when the id threatens to overwhelm the ego and superego in its demand for an object-choice (pp. 192-193). The development of personality is determined in large measure by the kinds of defenses formed in the ego to deal with neurotic anxiety. The ego may use projection to transform neurotic anxiety into objective anxiety. Using this form of defense changes an internal danger to an external one, and thereby makes it easier for the ego to deal with it. Jason's fixation produces neurotic anxiety that is dealt with by projection. The ego's defense against the critical and judgmental response of the superego to the id's demand for the mother is to project that judgmental criticism onto others. Jason believes that he is persecuted and disliked by everyone except Mother, and this leaves him deeply paranoid.

Jason is obsessively aware of the gaze of the townspeople, a gaze that functions as an other much like a superego. Jason's defensive measures against his self-directed guilt are consistently shown by his intent throughout his narrative and in section four of the novel to trick or evade this critical gaze as he unconsciously works to deal with satisfying the demands of his

fixation. For example, when Jason runs around town setting up his check scam he continuously feels the gaze of Earl on him:

And right there he'd stay, watching that door like a hawk until I came through it again . . . and Earl watching the door like a hawk . . . so I dodged up a few more alleys so Earl couldn't see me. . . . I couldn't see Earl looking up and down the street, with one eye on the clock, because I couldn't see the door from here . . . I caught a glimpse of Earl in the door across the square. (pp. 130-131)

His paranoia concerning the critical gaze of Earl can be seen as a form of self-aggression projected onto Earl and through which Jason's ego obtains relief in that "the aggression is outside and not inside anymore," as Anna Freud writes (p. 193). She writes that this is a "successful" defense because it allows the ego to keep the forbidden impulse from entering consciousness. Jason's guilt would force his fixation to consciousness, and so it must be defended against. The ego's defense against self-criticism is manifested in Jason's paranoia regarding the gaze of Earl, a successful defense in that it allows Jason's unconscious desires to enter consciousness in a disguised form.

Another aspect of Jason's mother-fixation is that he views many of the men in his life as threatening father-figures competing for the desire of his mother. Embedded in Jason's narrative are memories of his father, and these memories present further evidence of Jason's mother fixation. The two past moments he recalls and recounts are the day Mr. Compson brings home Caddy's daughter, Quentin, and the day Mr. Compson dies. We can see that Jason associates his father with the promiscuity of the mother-figures Caddy and Quentin. Mr. Compson is clearly associated with the promiscuity of Caddy (as stand-in for Mrs. Compson) in that, according to Jason, Mr. Compson insists not only on seeing Caddy but on bringing her illegitimate daughter, Quentin, home. Jason's repeated memory of his mother saying to him "thank God you're not a Compson" is important to him because it allies him with her and "against" Father. Mother appears unusually righteous in these particular passages, which suggests that Jason is again resorting to ambivalence (leaving the "good" mother intact, and projecting the "bad" mother onto Caddy), and she and Jason seem to be set in opposition to Mr. Compson around the issue of Caddy's promiscuity. Mr. Compson's role as a powerful rival is played out in a translated form in Jason's dominant idea that it is Mr. Compson's insistence that brings

Quentin, the product of Caddy's promiscuity, into the house. Surrounding these troubling associations is the memory of Mr. Compson's funeral, and unconsciously Jason finds solace in remembering that his rival is dead. Yet even so, because of Jason's mother-fixation, he is unable to resolve the Oedipal view of his father. He cannot, of course, actually possess his mother, nor is he able to give her up. Even though his father is dead, Jason must replace him with substitutes in order to continue the pattern upon which his fixation rests.

When Jason recalls the funeral, Uncle Maury functions unconsciously for him in the same way Lorraine and Quentin do. That is, just as other women allow Jason to maintain contradictory views of his mother simultaneously, his Uncle Maury becomes identified unconsciously for him with Mr. Compson: "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" (p. 119). This memory pattern is repeated several passages later, and at a later point in that day:

While we were waiting there for them to start she says Thank God if he had to be taken too, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson, because all I have left now is you and Maury and I says, Well I could spare Uncle Maury myself. Well, he kept on patting her hand with his black glove. (p. 121)

Jason's viewpoint is that Maury is a competitor for Mrs. Compson's attention. He interprets Maury's decision to leave the funeral with her as an arbitrary act of dominance and recalls that he and Caddy

stood there, looking at the grave, and then I got to thinking about when we were little and one thing and another and I got to feeling funny again, kind of mad or something, thinking about now we'd have Uncle Maury around the house all the time, running things like the way he left me to come home in the rain by myself. (p. 122)

Jason's confusion over Uncle Maury's presence in the house signals the unconscious association his uncle has for him in the powerful dynamic of his fixation.

Jason's preoccupation with money—hoarding it, cheating Caddy, Quentin, and Mrs. Compson for it, rewarding Lorraine with it—is also related to his mother fixation. To understand this we must remember that,



for Freud, money represents what feces does for the child. In his essay "Anal Erotism and Castration," Freud writes:

Faeces are the child's first gift, the first sacrifice on behalf of his affection, a portion of his own body which he is ready to part with, but only for the sake of some one he loves. To use faeces as an expression of defiance . . . is merely to turn this earlier "gift" meaning into the negative. . . . The meaning of faeces as *money* branches off from the "gift" meaning in another direction. (*Collected Works*, pp. 81-82)

Money is a tool for Jason whereby he can merit his mother's affection or withhold his own. It is a means of manipulation used to bond with his mother or punish her for her promiscuity. Unconsciously, it has both of these somewhat contradictory meanings for Jason at the same time. As Freud says of his patient with this neurosis, "money, in fact, had been withdrawn from his conscious control, and meant for him something quite different" (p. 73).

Jason's manipulation of money is more than simple stinginess.<sup>21</sup> It is a neurotic symptom of the psychic anxiety related to his fixation. It symbolizes his power and control of his mother. He gives Lorraine money to buy her affection and make her "his." He toys with Quentin and Caddy, using money in a strange mesh of both withholding in part and bestowing in part which signals his ambivalent notion towards his mother (as both the object of his desire and one who is unfaithful to him with the father). Ultimately, however, it must be said that his hoarding of money gives him a tremendous sense of phallic power. Jason says, "After all, like I say money has no value; it's just the way you spend it. . . . It just belongs to the man that can get it and keep it" (p. 117). After all, as Freud writes, "the handing over of faeces for the sake of (out of love for) some one else becomes a prototype of castration" (*Collected Works*, p. 84). Jason, while unconsciously feeling that his refusal to give up his mother poses the threat of castration, is apparently unwilling to identify with the feminine in spite of his inability to identify with the father.

Losing his money, then, becomes psychically very significant for Jason.

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<sup>21</sup>Doreen Fowler examines Jason's relation to money as stemming from the castration complex. Money represents phallic power for him, a way to bolster his "failing masculinity" throughout his narrative (p. 38).

It not only denies him the means with which to merit his mother's love and also withhold his own, but it castrates him as well, to punish him for his refusal to give her up. This explains the hysterical attack we read of in the novel's last section. The man with the red tie (father) makes off with Quentin (mother) and all the money.

Faulkner's writing persistently explores the interpsychic relations among human subjects. Characters are never, in Linda Welshimer Wagner's words, "simply good or evil" (p. 554) but are human subjects who come to life in Faulkner's text with great psychological reality. It is with characters such as Jason Compson, whose ambivalences, paradoxes, and misguided urges constitute the components of character, that Faulkner is able to turn the psychoanalytic narrative of the human subject into the material for great creative artistry.



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