WALKING RELINQUISHMENTS: SACRIFICE IN WILLIAM

FAULKNER’S THE SOUND AND THE FURY,

AS I LAY DYING, AND “THE BEAR”

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English

by

Jennifer Jean Rose Warren

Spring 2009
WALKING RELINQUISHMENTS: SACRIFICE IN WILLIAM

FAULKNER’S THE SOUND AND THE FURY,

AS I LAY DYING, AND “THE BEAR”

A Thesis

by

Jennifer Jean Rose Warren

Spring 2009

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF

GRADUATE, INTERNATIONAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES:

_________________________________

Susan E. Place, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

_________________________________       _________________________________

Robert G. Davidson, Ph.D.         Andrea Lerner, Ph.D., Chair
Graduate Coordinator

_________________________________

Aiping Zhang, Ph.D.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Andrea Lerner,

a prodigy, my mentor, my friend.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Channeling Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Shadows Stalking the Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sound and the Fury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Scratches in the Coffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I Lay Dying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Echoes in the Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Bear”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Lonely Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

WALKING RELINQUISHMENTS: SACRIFICE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER’S THE SOUND AND THE FURY, AS I LAY DYING, AND “THE BEAR”

by

Jennifer Jean Rose Warren

Master of Arts in English

California State University, Chico

Spring 2009

The works of William Faulkner continue to raise questions and entice scholars to attempt answers. His troubled characters never fail in commanding a great amount of scholarship. Although many have worked to unpack the motivations behind his character’s actions, a gap exists as to the implications of the sacrifices the characters yield to and the subsequent relinquishment of a part of themselves that accompanies each sacrifice. By analyzing The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), and “The Bear” (1942), three of Faulkner’s widely recognized works, I was able to break down how Faulkner uses sacrifice and relinquishment and examine the implications for the characters and the work itself. A grasp on Faulkner’s use of sacrifice enlivens the characters, revealing their inner truths and capturing the essence of their plight through life.
It also serves to illuminate a better picture of the society where Faulkner places his characters. My study points to Faulkner utilizing sacrifice to display inner conflicts with the human spirit. He shows his characters drowning under the weight of social pressure. Through my analysis, it is evident that Faulkner displays the inevitability of sacrifice and relinquishment as a human condition.
CHAPTER I

CHANNELING FAULKNER

Over forty years after his death, the *New York Times* ran an article that cited
Faulkner as “…more than of his time. He is not just our greatest 20th-century novelist. . . .
Faulkner is No. 1 . . .” (Gussow 1). The Nobel Prize winning author has received
virtually every literary award possible, including being twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize.
This prolific writer, who captured the unsettled soul of the American South, the author of
twenty novels and numerous short stories, continues to hold a central place in American
literature.

Writing in the tradition of Southern writers, Faulkner’s works are emotionally
charged with historical angst. He captures the legacy of racism and one’s relationship
with their community and history by “sublimating the actual into the apocryphal” (*Lion
in the Garden* 255). With Faulkner’s large body of work as well as his international fame,
there is no shortage of critical studies on his work. Many Faulkner scholars have studied
his breakthrough use of time, his technique of “stream of consciousness” writing, and his
characters’ various states of being. While a detailed discussion of the entirety of Faulkner
scholarship is beyond my scope, I have chosen instead to examine the varying trends of
literary reception afforded to Faulkner over the last eighty years.

Beginning in the 1930s and through the 1940s, criticism centered mainly on
Faulkner as a moralist. George Marion O’ Donnell wrote his very influential article in
1939 titled, “Faulkner’s Mythology.” In the article he refers to Faulkner as a “traditional moralist, in the best sense” (285). He argues that Faulkner’s work revolves around “the conflict between traditionalism and the anti-traditional modern world in which it is immersed” (285). As O’Donnell points out, this is evident in both The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.

As 1940 dawned, although Faulkner had penned many of his greatest works, literary attention diminished. In those years the public stopped reading Faulkner’s works —due to its difficulty in comprehension, and many of the books went out of print. Reviving the life of Faulkner’s works was influential literary critic, Malcolm Cowley, through the 1946 publication of The Portable Faulkner. The book rescued Faulkner from obscurity by offering a comprehensive view of Yoknapatawpha County, bringing a whole new generation of readers to experience the essence of the South. It is with this work that Faulkner achieved his full recognition as a writer of lasting importance. Three years later he went on to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature (Cowley).

Olga Vickery headed the formalist criticism movement for Faulkner with her 1959 widely influential book, The Novels of William Faulkner A Critical Interpretation. In her 1954 article, “The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective,” she unpacks the textual markings in relation to Benjy’s thinking pattern: “With consummate skill the repetitions and identifying sensations which are used to guide the reader are also used as the basis of Benjy’s own ordering of experience” (1022). Through her interpretation and evaluations of the features in Faulkner’s texts, she sheds light on his works in their entirety. Cleanth Brooks was also part of this formalist movement for Faulkner’s works.

From the sixties to the eighties, Faulkner scholarship reflected the social concerns of the time. Civil Rights, African American Identity, and feminism are the major forces reflected in Faulkner Scholarship of this time. Such themes found ready material in Faulkner’s Yoknapatpha County where issues of race, class and relationships were central. Faulkner’s work often seemed to raise questions about the persistence of slavery in not only the American South but in the entire country. Scholars began asking how Faulkner was depicting his female characters as well as his Black characters. Feminist scholars began questioning Faulkner’s depictions of women or reassessing the centrality of his female characters. One of the key critics of this time, Olga Vickery was astute in pointing out the ways in which Addie was indeed the central figure in As I Lay Dying. In her article, “The Dimensions of Consciousness: As I Lay Dying,” she points out: “Thus, it is Addie not as a mother, corpse, or promise but as an element in the blood of her children who dominates and shapes their complex psychological reactions” (52). This observation is symbolic of the realization that contrary to earlier criticism, which slighted Addie’s importance in its brief and peripheral account of her, she was now beginning to be seen as a central and overarching force in the novel. Influential critical texts of this period, included Dorothy Tuck’s Crowell’s Handbook of Faulkner (1964) which raises questions of gender representation in Faulkner’s novels. At the same time there was burgeoning attention to the subject of race in Faulkner. Scholars including Blyden Jackson, Thadeus Davis, and Noel Polk raised questions of the ways in which black characters in the early novels appeared to conform to racial stereotypes; another
common form of inquiry regarding race tended to focus on the role of Blacks in a
predominately white Southern landscape. Approaches to race and gender have continued
to be examined by contemporary critics including Eric Sundquest, Henry Louis Gates,
Pamela Barnett, Jill Bergman, and Mimrose Gwin.

During the 1990s, psychoanalytical criticism took center stage. Scholars in
this period often looked back to John T. Irwin’s influential book published in 1975,
*Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner.*
Although written in the mid seventies, the book still holds influence today. In the last
twenty years, critical and theoretical approaches to Faulkner have dominated the
scholarly attention. Yuan Yuan’s application of Lacanian approaches garnered much
attention as did Judith Wittenberg’s Freudian approach and Stacy Burton’s essay,
“Bakhtin, Temporality, and Modern Narrative: Writing ‘the Whole Triumphant

New scholarship focuses on an array of criticisms. However, many scholars
are focusing more on Faulkner’s use of the apocryphal within his works. Joseph Urgo
describes Yoknapatawpha in his 2004 article, “The Yoknapatawpha Project: The Map of
a Deeper Existence” as a place that “comes into existence not simply by encountering
life’s cosmic significance, but by *countering* it with something else, by probing, sharing,
or revealing the deeper existence led by people who are at once rooted and transcendent”
(643). Many scholars are currently unpacking Faulkner’s use of Christ figures. Margaret
Bauer wrote an influential article in 2000 titled, “‘I have sinned in that I have betrayed
the innocent blood’: Quentin’s Recognition of his Guilt,” where she analyzes Caddy
Compson as a Christ figure and parallels Quentin with Jesus’ traitor, Judas, from the Bible.

Despite the volume and variety of critical approaches, what has been neglected is Faulkner’s often nihilistic portrayals of sacrifice in his works. A thorough reading of Faulkner’s works displays various sacrifices characters are forced to confront. This thesis seeks to explore Faulkner’s use of moments of crisis where characters are forced to give up some aspect of themselves in an attempt to alleviate their turmoil in three of his widely known works: The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and “The Bear.” These three works span a course of thirteen years. As a writer, Faulkner’s own views on what it means to exist seep through into his works. Therefore, a study of this nature allows for a deeper view into Faulkner’s vision. A better comprehension of the significance of events within these works, reveals for the reader Faulkner’s views on life.

To be alive is to face moments of crises. No one is exempt from this, as this is a condition of living. In these times of crises, a decision must be made. But that decision will come with a sacrifice. Regardless of the form of the sacrifice, it accompanies some loss to the self. There is always a price one must endure for freedom from a crisis. This price is the sacrifice they must bear. In trying to maintain control of our lives we further lose it. In Faulkner’s 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he referred to sacrifice multiple times and calls writers to embrace “problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (Faulkner 109). Faulkner achieved this magnificently in his writing through his depictions of the trials his characters faced. It was these desperate moments within his texts that his characters sought out an answer to their crisis. All resulted in a sacrifice, a forbearance to the self.
All of Faulkner’s works illustrate how one’s sacrifices affect others. With the chapter analyzing The Sound and the Fury (1929), readers see Faulkner’s earlier exploration into the human experience. Caddy’s actions begin a downward spiraling and the entire Compson household suffers. Her promiscuity spawns into a pregnancy that forces her to abandon her little brother who desperately needs her, as well as leave her older brother to dwell obsessively over her loss of purity, and ultimately cast herself out of the family leaving her illegitimate daughter behind. Faulkner displays how one person’s actions and subsequent sacrifice affect those around who inadvertently fall victim to the loss sacrifice brings. The characters find themselves in dimensions of relinquishment that reflect both outer sacrifices, public, and internal, private sacrifices as well.

As I Lay Dying (1930) explores public and private sacrifices different from those we find in The Sound and the Fury. One way that this work differs from the former is in Faulkner’s technique of juxtaposing opposite motivations with each ending inevitably in a sacrifice of the self. This novel reflects on its matriarch, Addie Bundren, and her familial and individual sacrifices, while Faulkner also draws on her children to portray individual sacrifices.

Finally, written over a decade after The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner displays his most optimistic outlook on existence with a character able to surmount life’s obstacles through embracing sacrifice. “The Bear’s” youthful protagonist, Isaac McCaslin, does what, up to that point, none of Faulkner’s characters had been able to achieve. He finds inner peace through his relinquishment and repudiation of everything worldly. Isaac sacrifices all of Man’s excess to live in communion with the world. While both Caddy
and Addie acted to regain control of their lives, Isaac fully gives up control. He gives up his inheritance which spawns a series of reactions. His sacrifice encompasses that of material, past, and future. Faulkner’s acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize indirectly speaks to Isaac’s character in “The Bear”: “I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance” (Faulkner 109). Isaac exuded compassion when he learned of the wrongs committed by his family and past generations. He therefore sacrificed everything to obtain inner peace. Isaac endured.

This work seeks to unpack Faulkner’s exploration of Man’s plight through life. It will observe how Faulkner depicts “problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (Faulkner 109). I will uncover his characters’ sacrifices and relinquishments. Finally, the analysis will conclude with how Faulkner offers a vision of Man thriving.
CHAPTER II

SHADOWS STALKING THE LAND

The Sound and the Fury

William Faulkner is known for placing his characters in desperate situations. In almost all of these dilemmas, two elements are present: a difficult choice and an unavoidable sacrifice. Regardless of the choice, the sacrifice will result in some loss of the self. Faulkner’s most well-known work came in 1929 with The Sound and the Fury. Packed in the novel are moments of crisis where characters make a choice in how to alleviate their crisis and subsequently make a sacrifice. The story illustrates the demise of the Compson family through the sacrifices of the only daughter, Caddy. Her character in the novel is the driving force behind the action. Everyone, somehow, is affected by her loss when she sacrifices her place within the family. Caddy experiences an early sexual awakening that results in pregnancy. Trying to resolve her situation, Caddy marries. However, her marriage does not last very long as her husband realizes she is pregnant with another man’s child. Conscious of her distinguished family name, Caddy’s mother Caroline, disowns Caddy when it becomes known that her child is illegitimate. Both her younger brother Benjy and oldest brother Quentin are struck hard by her absence and held captive by her memory. They reel from the repercussions of the sacrifice that she is forced into. Benjy dwells the rest of his life lamenting her loss. Quentin, in turn, will allow himself to make a drastic sacrifice in an effort to rid himself of memories.
associated with her. Caddy’s daughter, Miss Quentin, will encapsulate Caddy’s final sacrifice and retribution for her choices. By the end of the novel, Faulkner has established that no one can dodge a sacrifice, whether their own or not, unscathed.

Caddy’s relationship to her youngest brother Benjy goes beyond that of a brother-sister relationship. Mentally retarded, Benjy requires the most concern for his development. As the Compson children are raised with a mentally absent, self-pitying mother, Caddy is forced to fill in for her mother’s role. Mark Spilka refers to Caddy’s role as surrogate mother in his article, “Quentin Compson’s Universal Grief.” He states: “As the bravest and most loving Compson, Caddy has stepped in as the children’s ringleader; she wants them to mind her, on the day of grandmother’s death, when her symbolic role is established; she mothers motherless Benjy; . . .” (460). Benjy’s narrative is clustered with moments of Caddy assisting him to develop by helping him to identify and understand his surrounding environment. Caddy not only takes on the role of mother for Benjy, but embraces it.

Benjy does not receive this care from anyone else in the family. In fact, his mother refers to him as punishment for her sins: “… I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me …” (103). Faulkner has made it clear that her view of Benjy as a punishment does not allow her to regard or raise him as a treasured person. In her article, “Language and Act: Caddy Compson,” Linda Wagner points out a scene where Mrs. Compson pities herself and Benjy, calling him “poor baby.” Caddy contradicts this by immediately telling Benjy: “You’re not a poor baby. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your
Caddy?” (qtd. in Wagner 52). Wagner has demonstrated how Caddy “rejects the maudlin and useless sympathy which only debilitates; she will teach Benjy so that he can live and speak for himself” (52). While Wagner is content to point out Caddy’s encouragement towards Benjy, in fact, Caddy is also insinuating her necessary presence for him. Without Caddy, Benjy is stagnant. Her presence ensures development and support as her words invoke a sense of protection and authority. Caddy’s presence makes Benjy a more legitimate human being. Everyone else speaks of him as a baby, or even worse, an idiot. Jason cruelly cuts up his paper dolls, and Luster enjoys taunting him. Caddy is his true protector. She enforces a sense of humanity for Benjy, rebuking Jason, Luster, or anyone else for any cruelty aimed at him. Yet Caddy will eventually be forced to relinquish him fully into the Compson’s care, without her protective, nurturing presence. Benjy senses this is inevitable.

Throughout the novel, Benjy repeatedly refers to Caddy as “smelling like trees” and revolts when her smell is tainted. He recalls a past memory of Caddy playing in the river with the other Compson children when she muddies her undergarments. Benjy immediately starts crying disliking the disruption to his sense of order. In her article, “The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective,” Olga Vickery speaks on Caddy’s actions to appease Benjy’s sense of security: “Caddy both realizes and respects his fear of change . . .” (1024). But this is greatly understated. Caddy does much more than Vickery gives her credit for, in merely realizing and respecting Benjy’s sense of order. Rather, she lives by it. As her muddy undergarments disrupt his sense of order and he seemingly comprehends it as a sign of impurity, Caddy proceeds to wash the mud off her undergarments therefore removing the taint and purifying herself. Benjy states that
“Caddy smelled like trees” (19). For Benjy, Caddy washing away the mud on her drawers is necessary for his sense of security. His happiness centers around her staying the little girl that she is, in her pure state. As Caddy works to help Benjy develop, he demands she remain just as she is. Caddy acquiesces to this as a child.

As Caddy grows older she cannot help but branch out from her childhood state of being. At one point she experiments with perfume. Benjy smells it on her and begins to cry and moan. Caddy’s smell is abnormal and tainted. Benjy’s sense of order is disrupted. His moans of protest do not cease until she washes off the tainting perfume. Order is restored and once again Caddy goes back to her pure state of smelling like trees. Benjy recalls: “I went to the bathroom door. I could hear the water … I couldn’t hear the water, and Caddy opened the door. … Caddy smelled like trees” (42). Caddy does not want to be a source of pain for Benjy and moves to remove the source of his anger. She understands Benjy’s need to have her remain in the same, pure state for him. Vickery reinforces this when she establishes: “As long as Caddy is in time, she cannot free either herself or his world from change. His dependence on her physical presence, her scent of trees, is subject to constant threats which he fends off to the best of his ability. Sin and perfume are equally resented as intrusions of change into his arbitrary and absolute pattern” (1024). Therefore, this scene where Caddie washes off her perfume demonstrates Caddie allowing Benjy, as Vickery states, a “dependence on her physical presence, her scent of trees . . .” (1024). She shows devotion to him by this act of purification on his behalf. But on a deeper level, she is holding off on her natural development to pacify Benjy. For now, she will choose pleasing Benjy over her own desire to wear perfume. But as her development continues, this will become a difficult struggle.
When Caddy is caught kissing Charlie, it further substantiates Caddy’s loyalty to Benjy. When Benjy becomes upset at Caddy’s actions, she chooses him over her date and tries to send him away: “Go away, Charlie. He doesn’t like you” (47). At this point, Caddy is able to choose Benjy over a boyfriend. When Charlie does not leave, Caddy takes control of the situation and leaves with Benjy. It is here that she vocalizes her promise to Benjy which she has already been abiding by: “I wont.” she said. ‘I wont anymore, ever. Benjy. Benjy’” (48). This is an agreement that she will not upset him in the future by straying from her purity. She will refrain from tainting herself for Benjy’s peace. To confirm this she then proceeds to wash her mouth with soap, keeping her agreement with Benjy and demonstrating her loyalty to him. Benjy is satisfied, as he states: “Caddy smelled like trees” (48). But Caddy cannot always remain that way for Benjy. This agreement restrains her from natural development that calls for change. Time will eventually catch up with Caddy and she will give in to her own wants and desires regardless of her pact with Benjy. The breaking of this promise will result in the demise of Caddy’s relationship with him as well as his well-being.

When Caddy does break her promise to Benjy, she does so by tainting herself through the loss of her virginity, the pinnacle of purity. The scene is set up with her coming in through the door and Benjy immediately sensing something awry and beginning to cry. This time, Caddy does not attempt to comfort him, but instead avoids him. Benjy recalls: “We could hear Caddy walking fast. … Caddy passed it [the door], walking fast. She didn’t look. She walked fast. … Her eyes flew at me, and away. I began to cry. … I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder . . .” (68-69). There is no consolation for Benjy as Caddy realizes she
cannot wash her impurity away. Her taint is permanent. In trying to please Benjy by remaining pure, she was unable to ignore her inner sexual awakening. Consequently, life for both Benjy and Caddy will never be the same.

As a result of her sexual activity, Caddy becomes pregnant. She has no choice but to leave Benjy and get married. This is a shifting point in Benjy’s life; it has permanently been altered. Wagner’s article highlights the crux of the problem for Benjy within the novel. She points out that: “she, [Caddy] in short, gives us the plot of the novel in nine words: ‘You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.’ Faulkner structurally has shaped the Benjy section of *The Sound and the Fury* so that Caddy’s presence or absence does create or diminish Benjy’s life” (52). As Vickery earlier established Benjy’s dependence on Caddy’s physical presence and her scent of trees, he now has lost both. Caddy is both tainted and no longer living under the same roof as him. This throws his life into an abyss of chaos.

After Caddy’s departure from the Compson household, Faulkner paints a disturbing picture of Benjy’s life. Wagner points out the dichotomy of Benjy’s life with the presence and absence of Caddy:

The first flashback, a structural decision of import as to what will be the opening scene, is of Caddy and Benjy together, doing something as equals, with Caddy instructing Benjy. The second flashback is Benjy waiting by the gate for Caddy, a poignantly charged image, for we see him often-fenced in, captive, waiting for a release that never comes. (53)

Wagner has indirectly pointed to Benjy losing his sense of order in the world. Caddy’s departure marks the end of his development and sense of security. He is trapped in his now unsecured, chaotic world, with only flashbacks and yearning for his lost sister.
Faulkner offers glimpses into Benjy’s life after the loss of Caddy that portray his dire circumstances. Without his protector, Benjy has been left vulnerable to those around him. Luster only confirms this all too well: “You know what they going to do with you when Miss Cahline die. They going to send you to Jackson, where you belong. Mr Jason say so. Where you can hold the bars all day long with the rest of the looneys and slobber. How you like that” (54). Benjy begins to cry. Luster only continues to taunt a defenseless Benjy: “‘Beller.’ Luster said ‘Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy.’ he whispered, ‘Caddy. Beller now. Caddy’” (55). Luster’s tone more than implies that Benjy is on borrowed time while not in Jackson. Although unable to speak, it is clear to those around that Benjy is stricken with the loss of Caddy. Benjy’s current life and treatment by those around him reflect Caddy’s biggest fear. In effect, Benjy’s development comes to halt and he is stagnant in his everlasting pining for her. As Benjy suffers lasting consequences, Caddy endures permanent pain herself as she battles for control in her life.

Caddy’s loss of virginity has created a crisis through her pregnancy. She tries to regain stability with a marriage to Herbert. She tells Quentin: “I’ve got to marry somebody” (115). A marriage is the only way to make her child legitimate. Caddy does not want to marry Herbert, but marrying him, as well as leaving Benjy are sacrifices she must make. While her motivation was to satisfy her own desires and live out her sexual nature, the ramifications result in her surrendering someone she truly loves and adores for someone she seemingly does not love. The act of marrying Herbert encompasses both internal and external sacrifices for Caddy. Benjy is left behind embodying her internal relinquishment while her marriage to Herbert embodies an external concession to “settle”
in a marriage. Caddy is separated from Benjy and he is no longer able to grow under her guidance, nor be protected under her wing. She tries to make Quentin promise to take care of Benjy in her absence: “Promise I’m sick you’ll have to promise” (106). Quentin reiterates that Caddy’s actions have made Benjy vulnerable: “If they need any looking after it’s because of you . . .” (111). Caddy is trying to prevent Benjy from being sent to Jackson: “. . . don’t let them send him to Jackson Promise” (112). Caddy’s actions have resulted in a desperation to make her child legitimate. In her search to mend her situation, Benjy will never again shelter himself under Caddy’s protection. She must hope in Quentin’s promise to care for Benjy and leave him to live with her husband and baby.

Although she has already endured sacrifices to regain control of her life, control is not accomplished. It does not take Herbert long to realize that Caddy is carrying another man’s child. Caddy does not even know who the father is as Quentin asks: “Have there been very many Caddy” (115). Her answer confirms that there indeed have been as she does not know who the baby’s father is: “I don’t know too many . . .” (115). Her effort to raise Miss Quentin in a legitimate family environment did not go through. Once again, she is forced to make a sacrifice on behalf of her sexual awakening. Now divorced, she either has the choice to raise Miss Quentin on her own or to hand her over to her now estranged family. She moves to allow Miss Quentin to grow up in the Compson household, forced to accept the condition that she doesn’t have contact with her daughter. In effect, Caddy has sacrificed any relationship she could have had with her daughter. Faulkner reveals through Roskus that Caddy’s name is not to be spoken anymore: “They aint no luck going be on no place where one of they own chillen’s name aint never spoke … Raising a child not to know its own mammy’s name” (31). Caddy has
been erased from the Compson household. Miss Quentin is not to recognize her as her mother. With Caddy’s motivation to offer her daughter a good life, Caddy has had to endure the repercussions of not raising or knowing her child. Wagner writes about Quentin’s proposal for a joint suicide, where he tells Caddy: “yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now” (qtd. in Wagner 189). Wagner notes: “His [Quentin’s] reference to Benjy points to her almost obsessive responsibility for the youngest brother, responsibility that-like that for her own child-she must relinquish, unwillingly, for the sake of the family pride” (57). This family pride is established by the mother of the family, Caroline, who passionately upholds Southern values. In his article, “‘Felt, Not Seen Not Heard’: Quentin Compson, Modernist Suicide and Southern History,” Nathaniel Miller writes that Caddy’s social role was based around a convention that valued purity. Women were expected “to be virtuous, chaste, virginal, and so forth” (41). Not upholding those values, Caddy becomes banished from her family.

Caddy is a victim of her own biology. Although a young girl who grew up in the South who was supposed to uphold values including virginity, Caddy did not encompass that virtue. In following the Southern Code, Caddy would have led a pious life and remained a virgin until she married. The breaking of this code in the early 1900’s meant a tarnished family name marked by shame. Caddy does not live up to the standards set for her by her mother. Her father does not display any concern for her promiscuity, but her mother’s obsession with a woman’s virtue ultimately sets the stage for the sacrifices Caddy will have to take on. Caddy could not have lived in the Compson household and been pregnant, or have had a child without a husband. Resulting from her sexuality and subsequently following her divorce, she was forced to sacrifice her
daughter. Wagner speaks to Caddy’s desire to be with Miss Quentin although her situation has forced her to disown her daughter: “She wants desperately to have her child, but she accepts the reality of her life and allows Jason to keep Quentin” (60). In trying to live a whole existence, satisfying her wants and desires, Caddy had to sacrifice her two most meaningful relationships with her brother Benjy and her daughter.

But just as Benjy suffered because of the sacrifices Caddy made, so Miss Quentin suffers the consequences of living under her uncle Jason’s roof. Jason schemes for financial gain even to the detriment of his niece. Although Caddy sends money for Miss Quentin’s care, Jason hoards it for himself. She mirrors Caddy’s promiscuity without questioning it. For her own survival, she takes the money from her mother that Jason has been keeping and runs away with a man. Her fate is questionable and can be linked to a sacrifice Caddy had to make years beforehand on account of the Southern code of conduct.

Caddy’s brother Quentin grew up under that same roof with a mother that strove to live under the Southern code and their prominent family name. Wagner reinforces this when she notes: “In the latter conflict lies the heart of Faulkner’s indictment of the Compson family as family: that they allow themselves to be dominated by the least loving of the adults, Caroline Compson, a woman motivated only by social pressure and status” (55). In Quentin’s section of the novel, he flashes back to his mother’s ranting to his father, and it is clear to readers why Quentin believed Caddy was destroying the family name:

. . . I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not but I never dreamed when I held her in my arms that any daughter of mine could let herself dont you know I can look at her eyes and tell you may think she’d tell you
but she doesn’t tell things she is secretive you don’t know her I know things she’s done that I’d die before I’d have you know . . . we are to sit back with our hands folded while she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very air your children breathe . . . (103-104)

Caroline has instilled in Quentin a necessity to honor the Southern code of conduct. As she establishes in her quote, to live outside of that code brings dishonor and corruption to the family name. On behalf of this code Caroline disowns her only daughter to salvage the integrity of the family name and to save her other children from Caddy’s corruption.

Like Benjy, Quentin laments the loss of their sister. His feelings for Caddy are minced with his inability to defend her honor. He grieves to his father: “Why couldn’t it have been me and not her who is unvirgin . . .” (78). When he discovers that Caddy had sex with Dalton Ames, his first instinct is to ask if he made her do it and then kill him: “did he make you then he made you do it let him he was stronger than you and he tomorrow Ill kill him I swear I will . . .” (150). Quentin cannot come to terms with his sister going against the Southern values that his mother has tried to instill in them. It is his hope that Caddy was forced into premarital sex so her guilt would be alleviated. This is not the case. When Caddy asks him if he’s ever had sex, Quentin responds “yes yes lots of times with lots of girls” (151). However, it is immediately following this response that Quentin recalls “then I was crying . . .” (151). His only way to resolve the issue is for a joint suicide which does not go through. Quentin cannot make Caddy a virgin nor take on her guilt. In his article, “Quentin Compson’s Universal Grief,” Mark Spilka refers to Quentin as the only brother even capable of assuming guilt for Caddy’s transgressions. He states:

Of the three brothers, he alone knows that Caddy’s dishonor is bound up, somehow, with his own failure to be bold, ruthless, indomitable. Of the three brothers,
accordingly, he alone is capable of significant defeat and of the universal grief which such defeat entails. (454)

As the Compson name held prominence in the South, Caddy damaged that reputation through her promiscuity and illegitimate pregnancy. Quentin’s inability to defend her honor, puts him through so much turmoil he becomes obsessed with her promiscuity and cannot escape his own guilt.

When Caddy becomes pregnant out of wedlock, Quentin is forced to confront her disregard for the virtues he values so dearly as well as his own inability to protect her honor. Even Caddy acknowledges Quentin’s incapacity to accept her illegitimate pregnancy. Quentin asks Caddy: “Why must you marry somebody Caddy?” (122). Caddy’s response shows her realization that Quentin cannot conceive of her being pregnant: “Do you want me to say it do you think that if I say it it wont be” (122). For Quentin, having to accept this will be life changing. In acknowledging Caddy’s promiscuity, Quentin will take on obsessive behavior.

Quentin’s narrative begins with his obsession with time. The very first sentence gives rise to his over-awareness of it: “When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch” (76). Quentin is not just sensitive to the ticking of a watch but is even aware of his shadows to designate time. This awareness is symbolic of Quentin’s inability to escape time. His narrative tells readers of his attempts to surmount it, but to no avail: “I got up and went to the dresser and slid my hand along it and touched the watch and turned it face-down and went back to bed. But the shadow of the sash was still there and I had learned to tell almost to the minute, so I’d have to turn my back to it, . . .” (77). But
Quentin cannot turn his back on time. He is a prisoner to it. Even when he tries to break his watch, he still hears the ticking: “I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on” (80). Soon after, Faulkner shows just how imprisoned Quentin is when “The quarter hour sounded. I stopped and listened to it until the chimes ceased” (81). Literally, the chimes sounding forces Quentin into submission. He has to stop and listen until the chimes stop sounding before he can return to his life. Quentin goes through his days either working to fight against time, or just being a slave to it.

Quentin associates time with Caddy’s shift in character. Over time, Caddy changed from his little sister, to a girl going against Southern values. In his article, “The Words of ‘The Sound and the Fury,’” Robert Martin stakes the claim that

Quentin seems always to be in movement trying to distance himself from his shadow, that part of himself that possesses all the humanity and non-order that he cannot accept. What Quentin cannot understand is that all people have shadows, yet they must learn not to fight the shadows but to understand them, shed light on what shadows mean in their lives . . . (50-51)

What Martin overlooked was Quentin’s inability to understand his “shadow.” He attempts this multiple times within the text, but can never come to terms with Caddy’s actions. His shadows point directly to his ineffectiveness of accomplishing this.

As Quentin uses shadows to determine time, in a flashback to Caddy’s wedding, he blurs the two: “Then she was across the porch I couldn’t hear her heels then in the moonlight like a cloud, the floating shadow of the veil running across the grass, . . .” (81). In Quentin’s failed attempts to come to terms with Caddy, he appoints time to register her change. His flashbacks shift from Caddy back into the present with his focus
on time: “Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy? Why must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods. And after a while I had been hearing my watch for some time … and I leaned on the railing, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it” (92). When Quentin’s flashbacks become too painful, he turns his energy to his battle with time, yet another losing fight.

As Quentin thinks back to getting in trouble for spying on Caddy, he flashes back to questioning her promiscuity. As he can never achieve a satisfying explanation, he is rescued by the chimes of the clock: “But why did she The chimes began as I stepped on my shadow, . . .” (96). Quentin cannot grasp his sister’s actions and therefore has posited time to fill the gaps to his questions.

As Quentin lives out his last day before his suicide, he is continually haunted by memories of Caddy. After a series of flashbacks, Quentin finds himself at a bakery with a little Italian girl. He immediately greets her, referring to her as “sister”: “Hello, sister” (125). He instinctively takes on a protective role with her, defending her to the owner of the bakery who accuses her of stealing bread. He is projecting his protective role for Caddy onto the little girl. As the child is without a parent, so Quentin begins taking on these qualities by feeding her and seeing her home safe.

Leaving the bakery, Quentin continues to refer to the little girl as “sister” and then asks her to ice cream. After eating ice cream with the girl, Quentin begins slipping in and out of flashbacks to Caddy. He tries to part ways with the girl, but then changes his mind and takes it upon himself to see her home. Flashbacks of Caddy return along with his battle with shadows. At one point, he turns to the girl and tells her: “Poor kid, you’re just a girl. … Nothing but a girl. Poor sister” (138). This scene is significant to highlight
Quentin’s sympathy for the girl on account of her gender. Because he regards her as “just a girl” he feels she automatically requires a protector. This is something he was not able to provide for Caddy. Suddenly, the girl’s brother, Julio, begins beating on Quentin. The girl’s brother beating Quentin, is what Quentin fantasized about doing to Dalton Ames, a guy Caddy was intimately involved with. The beating that Quentin endured was the beating meant for Dalton Ames. Quentin’s beating on account of the little girl’s brother, forces him to confront his inability to protect Caddy.

Quentin recognizes this irony. Before being taken to the police station for allegedly kidnapping the girl, he begins laughing. It is in this moment that the world has caught up with Quentin, and he decides to sacrifice his life to alleviate his pain. Appearing to be referring to his laughing spell, Quentin is actually foreshadowing his death: “I’ll h-have to qu-quit,’ I said. ‘It’ll stop in a mu-minute. … they watching me, and the little girl with her streaked face and the gnawed looking loaf, and the water swift and peaceful below the path”’ (140) Quentin is disclosing his intentions to quit his life. In mere minutes his pain will cease. It should be noted that there are no shadows to torture Quentin within this scene. It is the first time he mentions anything regarding time without undertones of pain or angst. He sees the little girl’s face, Quentin’s “little sister.” The “gnawed looking loaf” parallels Quentin after the pain of Caddy’s demise and the torture of time have run over him. The “swift water” represents his pain rushing away. In “The Language of Chaos: Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury,” May Brown remarks on Quentin’s associations with water:

Although Quentin cannot perceive fully the death which he envisions, he can become one
Brown has touched on an essential problem for Quentin. Time, what he used to mark Caddy’s transition from innocence to guilt, has associations with water in the novel. Brown points out the collision of water with the past and present through its flowing movement. As the water flows, so time ticks away. It is therefore fitting that Quentin has decided he will end his anguish over Caddy and his obsession with time by drowning himself.

His decision to kill himself is confirmed yet again when he is with his friends driving back from the police station. As they drive past the house where the little girl stands, she noticeably is not holding the bread. This signals Quentin possibly rethinking his decision. At this point, he has forgotten about his current state of depression. He waves at the girl who only blankly stares back: “I waved my hand, but she made no reply, only her head turned slowly as the car passed, following us with her unwinking gaze” (147). At this Quentin begins reflecting on shadows again and starts laughing: “Then we ran beside the wall, our shadows running along the wall, … and I began to laugh again” (147). The shadows and the laughing signal his confirmed intention to commit suicide. At this point his haunting thoughts begin to escalate: “. . . I knew that if I tried too hard to stop it [laughing] I’d be crying and I thought about how I’d thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girl voices lingering in the shadowy places . . .” (147). Caddy and time have collided, and
Quentin breaks down. In his desire to escape both Caddy and time, he will sacrifice his life.

As a consequence to her actions, Caddy was forced to separate from her family and make very public sacrifices. Losing her connection with Benjy and her daughter, Caddy ultimately sacrificed her entire family. Quentin’s sacrifices were private. Before his suicide, he surrenders his life to obsessions with Caddy and time, internalizing his pain. Only in his actual suicide, does his sacrifice become public.

Benjy’s character is plagued with both private and public sacrifices as his brother Quentin’s were. Due to his retardation, Benjy cannot understand cause and effect. He could not have known that what he attempted to preserve with Caddy, her physical presence and purity, was beyond her boundaries. Although an innocent request, he is destined to suffer on account of Caddy’s sins. He holds internal sufferings because of his now chaotic, private world. However, he works to make his suffering public by moaning to the world his grief. This grief gave way to his castration. As he attempts to tell a girl walking home from school that he misses his estranged Caddy, his sounds and torment are not understood and taken for sexual aggression. As a result, he is castrated. It is through Benjy’s castration that Faulkner continues to show that life forces people to give up precious parts of themselves. Caddy lost her innocence, her relationship with her family, and her own daughter. Quentin lost his sanity and his life. Benjy lost the one person who gave his life meaning and joy, as well as a sacred body part.

Many regard Benjy’s character as Christ-like because of this innocence and suffering. Lawrence E. Bowling points out in his article, “Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence,” Faulkner’s correlation between Benjy and Jesus:
His [Benjy’s] section of the book takes place on his thirty-third birthday; the second and fourth sections take place on Good Friday and Easter Sunday respectively; on Easter Sunday, Benjy attends the local Negro church with Dilsey and hears the minister deliver a sermon on the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. These and other details suggest a parallel between Benjy and the Messiah. (484)

As Bowling points out technical parallels, Faulkner’s paramount associations between Benjy’s character and Jesus come in the form of life’s misgivings. Both advocated a pure existence. As Jesus lived a life outside of sin he pleaded with humanity to live a life of purity. Ultimately, he suffered due to the world’s sin. As Benjy lives a life of innocence, he attempts to keep Caddy from venturing outside her purity; he ultimately suffers because of Caddy’s natural sin. As Christ sacrificed his physical body, Benjy lost a part of his physical self. Both Jesus and Benjy are examples of the world being flawed, tainted with sin where sacrifice and suffering are inevitable.

Faulkner seems to put forth the question of whether one is able to escape the throes of life’s sacrifices. Through the Compsons, Faulkner displays how everyone is vulnerable to these repercussions. Caddy’s character suggests that life forces people to give up parts of themselves and others as a natural consequence of living.

Another heroin of Faulkner’s will live out a similar tragic tale. In As I Lay Dying, Addie Bundren will sacrifice herself and others. As shown through the Compson family, one’s sacrifices seep into others’ lives, creating obstacles for them. Caddy could not go from being a sister to merely vanishing. Likewise, Addie cannot go from mother and just merely vanish. As Caddy’s sacrifice created a despairing domino effect forever altering her family, Addie’s actions will change the Bundren family permanently as well.
CHAPTER III

SCRATCHES IN THE COFFIN

As I Lay Dying

Published just a year after The Sound and the Fury came William Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying (1930). This work further explores the concept of sacrifice and what it means to exist. As the action of the previous novel was centered around Caddy, so Addie Bundren controls the forward movement of As I Lay Dying, even though she is deceased for the vast majority of the novel. It is after she sacrifices her own life to escape from her life of domestication that she sets the novel in motion as her survived family must confront their own demons and obstacles. As Caddy’s sacrifice directly affected those around her, Addie’s sacrifice yields the same effect. While the Bundren family’s motivation is to fulfill Addie’s last request to be buried in Jefferson, each member has his/her own motivation that seeps through the journey. As each sets off on the journey with a common goal, it is revealed on the trip just how little each member of the family has in common. Faulkner is intent on displaying each individuals’ experience as the journey sheds light on each character’s hidden motivations. Sacrifice appears throughout the story as one’s motivations outweigh the ramifications they may be faced with. They come in different forms from physical to mental, and public to private. Each sacrifice shares a relinquishment of some aspect of the self. In his article, “As I Lay Dying: Faulkner’s Inner Reporter,” William Handy notes, “Faulkner is concerned not so much
with a pattern of events as he is with a pattern of individual existences” (437). Within these existences lay internal struggles that the characters try to balance.

In fifty-nine chapters titled after different characters’ names, Faulkner allows for a glimpse inside the minds of fifteen individuals. For the purposes of this study, I will be looking at the narratives surrounding Addie, Darl, and Dewey Dell, as each sacrificed a part of them themselves in an attempt for freedom from their struggles.

Readers are briefly acquainted with Addie before she dies. Meeting her on her deathbed, she transforms from a mother to a dead body. The transition is quick, with very little explanation given as to why she is passing away at a seemingly youthful age. Her narrative however, reveals her prerogative to resist the conventions society has thrust upon her to bear children and live a life of domestication.

Addie’s life is characterized by a pull from two opposite directions. She is a woman who cherishes her aloneness, basking in her isolation. However, society maintains standards for women that calls for them to live communal lives with a husband and children. In her essay, “The Abjection of Addie and other Myths of the Maternal,” Diana Blaine explains that Addie’s gender forces her to seek out a husband for financial security. She points out that Anse has a house and a farm, but more importantly adds that Addie is in need of “… not only income but the social approbation that comes from being a married woman” (96). Without an escape from society’s push for domestication, Addie sacrificed her aloneness at society’s behest. Handy and I part ways when he makes the claim that within Addie’s confession, “... we have the gradual development of an image of a woman of great physical and spiritual vitality, dedicated to a conviction that life must be shared to be meaningful, that withdrawal meant rejection of one’s responsibility to live
meaningfully . . .” (449). I assert that in a society that pushes marriage and family, Addie found herself robbed of her precious aloneness, with a husband and children filling the gaps. Addie was not on a search for connections with her fellow man. Rather, she had contentment within her circle of one and fell victim to gender.

She refers to her family life as a force that broke her away from her isolation: “My aloneness has been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, and what you will, outside the circle” (1757). Her lot in life is to go against her personal makeup which drives her to seek out refuge from the world into her own ball of one: “In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them. It would be quiet there then, . . .” (1755). However, Addie is a woman living in a society where marriage is inevitable. Therefore Addie “took” Anse: “So I took Anse” (1756). However, she does not take him until he tells her that he doesn’t have any family: “I aint got no people. So that wont be no worry to you” (1756). She therefore chose a man without any family to live with in isolation together, a compromise for domestication. In “As I Lay Dying: Demise of Vision,” Carolyn Slaughter asserts Addie’s antagonism towards the morals of society: “Living in her terms is evil in the terms of her culture, too: Mississippi bible-belt terms which counsel to suffer the little children, not to relish whipping them; … to submit to the husband, not to deny unequivocally his significance; to bring up a child in the way he should go … not to commit adultery; not to refuse to confess or repent; . . .” (17). Although Slaughter points out the ways that Addie opposes society, she fails to affirm Addie’s priority not to live as society deems she should, but rather to divorce herself from those very morals. Addie
attempted to go along with societal conventions through her marriage. She willingly made this sacrifice to appease society’s demand that women live lives devoted to domesticity. But upon being thrust into family life, she dedicated herself to living her life based on her own terms. It is after she sacrifices her aloneness for society that she moves to regain control of her life and claim her isolation. Unable to return to the place where she can be alone, Addie seeks out ways to escape the bonds that bind her to her family. She refuses to surrender to domestication and makes herself inviolable. Her narrative is largely devoted to her retelling how she never succumbs to true domestication. She retaliates mentally, physically, and morally. Her death is her ultimate sacrifice for isolation from her family.

Mentally, Addie comes to regard motherhood and love as just words. Living a life surrounded by “family” leaves her so disenchanted that she reduces those around her to mere words which eventually fall into shapes that fill the gaps. Motherhood becomes an abstract concept when she feels terrible repercussions after discovering she is pregnant for the first time. Incredibly disillusioned, she moves to replace the idea of motherhood with just a mere word: “And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are not good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it … we had to use one another by words . . .” (1756). Addie reiterates that motherhood is just a word when she relates that Cora Tull would tell her she was not a “true” mother: “. . . I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless . . .” (1757). Addie is not affected by Cora Tull’s accusation as motherhood is not a living state for her, rather, it is
a concept which is solidified by the appointment of a word. Life and death appear to be just words to her. She tells herself Anse is dead, but he is very much alive. As the story progresses, Addie who lies dead in a coffin still pushes the family forward as if she were living.

Her children are not the only victims of Addie’s mental war against the family. Anse himself becomes reduced to a word, then a shape. When Addie is reflecting on his name, she reduces Anse to embody the mere shape that fills the word: “I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame: and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar” (1757). By mentally placing Anse into this state of being, she has closed in on a main threat to her aloneness. Through being reduced from a word to a shape, Anse has ceased to have recognition within Addie’s life as her husband. By not even acknowledging him as a person, she is enlarging the space between their relationship as a husband and wife. She moves to posit her children into the same abstract category: “And when I would think Cash and Darl that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what they call them” (1757). This move gives Addie the ability to further distance herself from those surrounding her. Through this thinking inevitably Anse suffers the biggest blow and becomes dead to her: “And then he died. He did not know he was dead” (1757). Addie has metaphorically killed her husband. Mentally, she views herself as without
Anse. Accordingly, she has mentally distanced herself from her children and removed her husband from her existence.

Physically, Addie moves to retaliate against the traditional conventions that marriage brings and further pushes Anse away. She has an affair with the local preacher, Whitfield, thus breaking the sacred bonds that marriage encapsulates. Not only does she give her body to another man, but she physically refuses herself to Anse. Within the same line, she compares this to refusing her breast to her children: “Then I would lay with Anse again-I did not lie to him: I just refused, just as I refused my breast to Cash and Darl after their time was up- . . .” (1758). Addie is treating her physical time with Anse as a period that expires with a natural expiration as breast feeding brings. She is alluding to her physical relationship with Anse as one that is not marked by a life long pact, but one that has succumbed to her judgment that it is no longer necessary. Addie has therefore put herself in a position of control. Her domination within the marriage shows a lack of compromise that a typical marriage would bring as well as a disregard for the other person in the relationship. Because to Addie, there is no relationship. Her single-mindedness displays her quest to be in control of her life and isolate her husband from it. Not only has she gone physically outside the marriage, she has also ended the physical portion of her relationship with Anse, further pushing him outside of her circle.

Morally, Addie rebels against any sacredness marriage could bring. She is enticed by the idea of having an adulterous relationship with a preacher, someone who should obey the sanctity of marriage:

I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the world’s face, . . . the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God . . . waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin. I
would think of him as thinking of me dressed in sin, he the more beautiful since the
garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. (1758)

Addie is showing a complete disregard for anything holy and is openly mocking the
sanctity of marriage by committing adultery with a man who presumably joins couples in
holy matrimony as part of his job. Her committing such a transgression with a man who
is supposed to uphold self discipline and moral values, is the ultimate strike to marriage
and domestication. Her affair with the preacher Whitfield serves to further isolate her
from her husband and even the world as she acknowledges it would put her at even
greater odds with the community: “I hid nothing. I tried to deceive no one. I would not
have cared. I merely took the precautions that he thought necessary for his sake, not for
my safety, but just as I wore clothes in the world’s face” (1758). Clothes for Addie are a
cover for the truth that lies beneath. She is insinuating the difference between a public
and private life. Just as she walks about as the wife of Anse and a mother of five, so are
the clothes she wears signaling a concealment of one’s inner truths. Clothes are what one
allows society to view. Her affair signals her inner disregard for vows to remain faithful
and loyal to her husband. Yet, the question remains if Addie even considers this an
adulterous relationship. In effect, Anse is dead to her. Addie has ceased to allow him to
play a role within their relationship. The only role she still holds is a minimal caretaker
for their children.

Her subsequent pregnancy from the affair leaves her with Jewel—the apple of
her eye. It is no coincidence the child resulting from an affair is shown to be her favorite.
Again, Addie is rebelling against her marriage to Anse and their legitimate children by
favoring her illegitimate child spawned from outside the confines of her marriage bed. At
this point, she resolves to bear children for Anse and then go to her secluded grave:

“Then I found that I had Jewel … I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I
gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of” (1758). Having settled her
emotional debt to Anse, Addie is free to die, to return to her beloved aloneness: “And
now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die”
(1758). As Addie lies on her deathbed, waiting for her coveted aloneness to “keep her
dead a long time,” she does not feel compelled to confess her transgression toward her
husband. She never considers the moral laws she broke. Rather, she passes on confident
she has repaid Anse in full through giving him his desired children.

As Faulkner contrasted Caddy against the morals of the South through her
mother, he contrasts Addie with her neighbor Cora to display just how fallen Addie is.
Separating Addie from Caddy, is that Addie does not question her “fall from grace” as
Caddy did. Cora is a pious woman, living the life of a God-fearing, domesticated woman.
Looking at Addie before she passes away she thinks: “But the eternal and the everlasting
salvation and grace is not upon her” (1697). Cora has essentially damned her. Faulkner
further establishes society’s damning of Addie by showing her put in her coffin upside
down through Tull, Cora’s husband’s point of view. The last image Tull sees of Addie is
the visual of a fallen woman going to her grave of seclusion.

Even the doctor, Peabody, sees Addie’s death as her own choice. As he looks
at her lying on her deathbed he thinks to himself: “‘When Anse finally sent for me of his
own accord, I said ‘He has wore her out at last.’ … I can remember how when I was
young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a
function of the mind- . . .” (1708-1709). He is conceding to Addie’s disdain for Anse and choice of death. Addie seeks out her ultimate isolation in the sacrifice of her own life.

Addie’s motivation was needing to be isolated from her family. The ramifications for her sacrifice came at the loss of her own life. Living in a house full of children, Addie sought out death to deliver her to a beloved quiet. Addie has therefore mentally, physically, and morally armored herself against domestication and fought to keep herself alone, leading her to welcome the ultimate distance from her family in death. As Addie sacrificed her own life for her coveted aloneness, her son Darl will sacrifice his freedom for a mother who never even mothered him.

Darl is given high priority within the novel. Faulkner gives him the majority of the voice and offers an in-depth look at the Bundrens and their true motivations through his eyes. It is at first glance that Darl is on the journey towards Jefferson to carry out his mother’s last wish of being buried there. But something happens to Darl along the way. On route to Jefferson, he suddenly begins trying to thwart the family plans. He makes two attempts to get rid of Addie’s coffin where her body waits to be laid to rest. Seeking to free his mother from her dishonor as the family fails to give her a proper burial and Anse seeks her replacement, Darl sacrifices his own freedom.

As the Bundren family journeys to Jefferson to bury Addie, her body is continually mutilated. Within a few days Faulkner’s use of graphic details leaves Addie’s body so desecrated for readers that it has transformed to a mere corpse. Darl’s younger brother Vardaman has unintentionally objectified Addie by accidentally hammering nails into her face. As her body is being transported in a wagon, its exposure to the scorching Mississippi sun has left it rotting with a choking stench. Darl’s reasoning tells him it
would be better to end the burial process than to continue it. For the Bundrens, Addie is
not a mere corpse but still the mother of the family. It is when the family struggles to
cross a river that Darl seizes his first opportunity to cast his mother to peace.

The pivotal scene, where the Bundrens cross the river, marks Darl’s first
attempt to subvert his family plans to complete Addie’s final wish. When they arrive at
the river, they find the bridge has collapsed and been washed away. Keeping their focus
on burying Addie in Jefferson, the family moves to cross the river. It was during the
moments when the river currents were threatening to carry Addie’s body away that Darl
saw his chance to end the charade of transporting Addie to Jefferson.

As the family tried to cross the river, the current proves too powerful and tips
the wagon, sweeping Addie’s coffin away. This is Darl’s moment to act. Through
Vardaman’s eyes, Darl is shown trying to let his mother slip away into a peaceful rest:

  . . . she fell off and Darl jumped going under . . . Darl had to grabble for her so I
  knew he could catch her because he is the best grabber . . . I hollering catch her darl
catch her . . . he had her under the water coming in to the bank coming in slow
  because in the water she fought to stay under the water but Darl is strong and he
  was coming in slow and so I knew he had her . . . Then he comes up out of the
  water. He comes a long way up slow before his hands do but he’s got to have her
got to so I can bear it. Then his hands come up and all of him above the water . . .
  his hands came empty out of the water emptying the water emptying away Where is
  ma, Darl? . . . you never got her. You knew she is a fish but you let her get away.
  You never got her. Darl. Darl. Darl. (1748)

Darl was not trying to get hold of the coffin. Rather, he was trying to give his mother a
proper, “clean” sendoff through the river and simultaneously save his family from the
trials of the journey. By acting like he was in control of retrieving the coffin, he bought
himself some time by paralyzing everyone else as they watch him, waiting to see if he
can save the coffin. Unfortunately Jewel, Addie’s illegitimate, favored son and Darl’s
younger half brother, seizes his mother’s coffin. Addie’s deceased body once again lies in the Bundren hands. But Darl will not give up just yet.

After Addie’s body has been submerged in water and been subject to the beating sun, the stench of her decomposing body draws the attention not only of the townsfolk, but of local authorities as well. The family’s mission to deliver her body to Jefferson has become the topic of gossip everywhere. This is evident when Anse goes into the nearby town of Motely to make a purchase. A clerk reiterates that

. . . the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet’s hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. [Anse] saying it was a public street and he reckoned he has as much right there as anybody, and the marshal telling him he would have to move on; folks couldn’t stand it. It had been dead eight days, Albert said. They came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out of town. (1769)

The Marshal even asks Anse: “Dont you know you’re liable to jail for endangering the public health” (1769)? With each passing day, the Bundren name becomes more diminished along with any respect Addie, as a woman, may have commanded. Darl silently reaches a breaking point.

Townspeople note that Darl is the “queer” one. But throughout the story, Darl’s ability to see through everyone’s secrets comes to the surface. He knows that Dewey Dell is pregnant, that Jewel is not Anse’s son, and that Anse has ulterior motives for burying Addie in Jefferson. As the Bundrens are moving towards their goal of burying Addie in Jefferson, Darl is able to step back and see what a disservice they are doing to his mother’s remains as well as see the consequences to the surviving members
of the family. Cash has broken his leg for the second time, their mules have drowned, their wagon has been damaged and their lives put in danger. Dewey Dell is too conflicted with her own secret pregnancy to open her eyes to the reality that ensnars her mother’s final sendoff; Cash is too consumed with the physical pain his broken leg yields to comprehend the situation either. Vardaman is too young and too distracted with trying to come to terms with his mother’s death to see the cruelty in their journey. Jewel is not distracted though. He and Darl stand as stark contrasts as each holds a loyalty to their deceased mother. Jewel, the apple of his mother’s eye, will stop at nothing to complete their journey to lay his mother to rest in Jefferson. Darl holds a different loyalty. A loyalty that acts on reason. As the trip progresses and Addie’s body speedily begins decomposing, Darl realizes it would be more respectful to lay her down in a peaceful manner. Sending her off through the river would have been less offensive than allowing her body to continue rotting, thus continuing the gossip and whispers of the community.

It is Cora who recalls the true love from Darl to Addie. As Darl leaves to do a job with Jewel, he knows it will probably be the last time he sees his mother. Cora recalls:

It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. It was like he knew he would never see her again, . . . I always said Darl was different from those others. I always said he was the only one of them that has his mother’s nature, had any natural affection. Not that Jewel, the one she labored so to bear and coddled and petted so . . . Not him to come and tell her goodbye. Not him to miss a chance to make that extra three dollars at the price of his mother’s goodbye kiss. (1701-1702)

Then, in reference to Darl, Cora reflects,

Except Darl. It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. . . . Not Jewel, the one she had always cherished, not him. He was after that three extra dollars. It was Darl, the one folks say is queer, . . . He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and
his mercy... that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was. (1703)

Just as Addie cherished Jewel “... that never loved her...” (1755), Darl has longed for a relationship with his mother and so puts forth an act of love by trying to send her into peace. He never received the love from his mother that Jewel received. He refers to his father as “pa” but to his mother by “Addie Bundren” (1708). He is conflicted over his feelings for her. He claims: “I cannot love my mother because I have no mother” (1728). But Darl’s overpowering reasoning side will not let him forget that she is in fact his mother. Although Darl does not mourn the loss of a mother, he still struggles with the loss of “Addie Bundren” and wants to lay her to rest in a respectful manner and end the farce of a burial. His attempts to lay her to rest are acts of closure. Since Addie always loved Jewel and didn’t allow Darl any of her love, in her death Darl is able to offer his mother the love he repressed and longed to give. It is after his first failed attempt to send her into peace that he becomes even more determined.

Shortly following his failed attempt to free his mother, Darl reveals his feelings to his little brother Vardaman that his mother wishes to be laid to rest. A man named Mr. Gillepsie allows the Bundrens to stay overnight before continuing on towards Jefferson. They have laid Addie’s coffin under an apple tree where Vardaman and Darl sit next to it. Darl tells Vardaman that their mother is talking to God, asking Him to let her rest in peace: “‘Hear?’ Darl says, ‘put your ear close.’ I put my ear close and I can hear her... ‘She’s talking to God,’ Darl says. ‘She is calling on Him to help her... She wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man,... So she can lay down her life,’” (1772). Inadvertently, Darl is disclosing his intentions to be the answer to that prayer. His
mission has now shifted from a repressed love for his mother to strive for the most respectful farewell, to a mission that holds a divine purpose. For Darl, he has overheard a request from his mother to God. Darl now fully takes on the responsibility for this request. Even as his mother lies dead inside the coffin, he perceives she still goes on and will not cease till she is hid “away from the sight of man” (1772).

That evening as Addie’s body waits in her coffin in Mr. Gillepsie’s barn, Darl sees the opportunity to fulfill his mission. He seizes a moment to cremate his mother: “. . . then he [Darl] springs out like a flat figure cut leanly from tin against an abrupt and soundless explosion as the whole loft of the barn takes fire at once, . . .” (1773). As Anse, Mr. Gillepsie, his son Mack, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman come onto the scene, Darl makes a last attempt to finally bid his mother’s remains farewell: “‘Quick,’ I say; ‘the horses’” (1774). He takes the emphasis off his mother’s coffin and places it on the valuable horses. The plan works and everyone scrambles to rescue the animals. After securing the animals, however, Jewel makes a dash into the barn for his mother. Darl cannot prevent Jewel from intervening in his plan. Jewel emerges from the fire with his mother’s coffin in tow.

Jewel has twice proven himself as his mother’s saving force. Saving her from flood and fire, Jewel secures his mother’s remains to honor her wishes as he perceives, and bury her in Jefferson. Darl cannot combat Jewel to offer his mother a more polite send off. William Handy’s analysis of why Darl is at odds with Jewel is useful for understanding why they work against each other to bury Addie. Handy contends that Darl stands at odds with Jewel on account of Addie’s favoritism towards her illegitimate son (449). Within Addie’s brief narrative she reflects on her anger upon realizing she was
pregnant with Darl: “Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse” (1757). Handy affirms that Addie’s “. . . disappointment in her marriage to Anse reaches a climax after the unexpected and unwanted birth of Darl . . .” (449) and that Darl fully comprehended his mother’s favoritism towards Jewel: “Ma always whipped and petted him more” (qtd. in Handy 450). This creates the tension between Darl and Jewel. As Jewel stood as the favored one, he built a loyalty to his mother in return for her loyalty to him. As Jewel understands his mother’s wish to be laid to rest in Jefferson, his loyalty to her forces him to see that request fulfilled. Jewel lacks Darl’s foresight as well as the genuine reason that calls for this type of intervention.

While Darl stood by and yearned for his mother’s love, his own love for her was fostered. In “Tension between Darl and Jewel,” Elizabeth Hayes writes on Darl’s dilemma: “This Darl agonizes over his mother’s rejection: always throughout his probing of and opposition to Jewel run the implied questions, ‘Why does she love Jewel? Why not me?’ He tries to prove through convoluted logic that he actually exists, so unsure is he even of his physical reality- . . .” (60). To expand on this, as Darl battles with his abandonment by his mother, his attempt to reconcile himself to her is to perform a chivalrous act, also establishing his physical presence. It is therefore his reason and unrequited love, not loyalty, that drives him to act on his mother’s behalf. Darl understands that Addie did not foresee the damage that would come to her remains. Darl will demand a place in the world by this physical act. This tension between Darl and Jewel builds as Darl perceives Jewel continuing to dispatch his mother as an unreasonable act from a man with a strong identity.
Darl is also skilled in knowing the secrets and motives behind those around him which pushes him in his pursuit to lay Addie to rest. He is the gatekeeper of the family secrets. He knows that Dewey Dell is pregnant and he knew that his mother was going to die within two days. Dewey Dell speaks to his ability to see beyond: “[Darl] . . . that sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land” (1703). Regarding her pregnancy and their mother’s death, Dewey Dell reveals: “He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know . . .” (1704). This presents a problem for Dewey Dell. She does not want anyone to know about her pregnancy, but somehow Darl has this knowledge.

Darl also knows that Jewel is not Anse’s son. He confronts his younger brother about it: “‘Jewel’ I say, ‘whose son are you? . . . Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel’” (1771)? At this, Jewel is enraged. Darl now stands as a threat to two of his siblings as he knows their secrets. But that is not where he stops.

Darl also presents a threat to his father Anse. It is visible that he understands that Anse has his own hidden motives behind burying Addie in Jefferson. The story not only ends with Anse obtaining his beloved set of teeth that he has been yearning for, but also a new wife. It is through Darl’s eyes that Anse exclaims, “Now I can get them teeth” (1713) after Addie dies. Beforehand, it is revealed that Anse waited too long before calling a doctor for his wife. Darl has realized that Anse wanted his wife dead.
Before Addie passes away, Cora, the Bundren’s neighbor, hints to her husband at Anse’s false motives: “. . . because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it. . . .’ ‘But she wanted to go’ Mr Tull said. ‘It was her own wish to lie among her own people.’ ‘Then why didn’t she go alive?’ I said. ‘Not one of them would have stopped her, . . .’ ‘It was her own wish,’ Mr Tull said. ‘I heard Anse say it was’ ‘And you would believe Anse, of course,’ I said” (1702). Cora is insinuating that there may have been an easier way to get Addie to Jefferson and that Anse made sure she was already dead before making the trip. This is restated when Cora thinks

. . . with those men not worrying about anything except if there was time to earn another three dollars before the rain come and the river got too high to get across it. Like as not, if they hadn’t decided to make that last load, they would have loaded her into the wagon on a quilt and crossed the river first and then stopped and give her time to die what Christian death they would let her. (1702-1703)

Before, it is noted that “Mr Tull says Darl asked them to wait. He said Darl almost begged them on his knees not to force him to leave her in her condition” (1702). If Darl and Jewel wouldn’t have left to do that job, it can be assumed the family could have started on their journey towards Jefferson. However, if Addie were alive in Jefferson, it might thwart Anse’s chance with a new lady. Having sent the boys off on a job, not only brings the family three dollars, but buys Anse more time to have Addie pass away before arriving at Jefferson. This gives him the ability to use his widowhood to his advantage. Seeing through Anse, Darl could easily foil his plans. So his crime of lighting Mr. Gillepsie’s barn on fire allows Anse, Jewel, and Dewey Dell the opportunity to rid themselves of the one who knows too much. Having taunted Dewey Dell and Jewel with
their secrets and knowing everyone’s hidden motivations, Darl fully knew the risks involved with taking on this assignment to free Addie.

In the aftermath of the fire, Darl is seen crying next to his mother’s coffin having failed his mission. So desperate to free his mother from the painstaking, grotesque burial, he has sacrificed himself in vain as he will undoubtedly face repercussions for his actions. In order to avoid being sued and to rid himself of the person who threatens his opportunity to gain a new wife, Anse agrees to send his son to Jackson. Cash reflects: “It wasn’t nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillepsie sue us, because he knowed someway that Darl set fire to it” (1779). Darl, in a moment of attempted chivalry, has signed his life away. Cash opts to not secure Darl before they lay Addie in the ground in Jefferson as “A fellow that’s going to spend the rest of his life locked up, he ought to be let to have what pleasure he can have before he goes” (1779).

Cash understands Darl’s motives in trying to cremate Addie:

But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God’s blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. (1779)

Cash is illustrating a battle of divine proportions. Jewel has thwarted Darl’s sacred mission. By taking the initiative and attempting to give Addie any sense of a dignified goodbye and sparing his family hardship, Darl has sacrificed his freedom as well as the identity he was longing for. He has sealed his fate to spend the rest of his days within the walls of a mental institution in Jackson.

Every sacrifice has different motivations and ramifications. Darl was motivated by his unreciprocated love for his mother and the illogical journey towards her
burial ground. His ramifications came in the form of a loss of freedom. But Darl stays true to Cora’s description of him. Her narrative makes clear the dichotomy between the two brothers. Addie’s partiality towards Jewel is in the end, her final downfall. Cora relates: “. . . the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and considered queer by us mortals and that did love her” (1755). Cora’s description of Darl refers to him as a Jesus figure. Darl is considered “queer by us mortals” because he understands mortality like no other. Jewel is forcing Addie’s dispatch to continue as a tribute to himself, not to his mother. As Jesus suffered the ultimate sacrifice for an undeserving people, so Darl made the ultimate sacrifice of his freedom, for a mother undeserving of his devotion as she never mothered him. Also, Darl is a character who exhibits unselfish behavior and is contrasted with other characters acting on their own demons. In the end, Darl was desperate to show his love for his mother, he tried to offer her a burial that the rest of the family wasn’t capable of. He sacrificed himself in an effort to offer her honor and respect.

Darl’s sister Dewey Dell hardly notices her mother’s demise. Yet she sacrifices herself along their journey to burying Addie as well. Pregnant, with the father unwilling to marry her, she races against time to rid herself of the child before society casts her out as it is not accepting of unmarried mothers. Lafe, the father of the unborn child, gives her ten dollars to buy the abortion. This is how far he will go to help her. Presumably, Lafe is unwilling to “fix” the situation by marrying Dewey Dell. Without a marriage prospect, she is left backed into a corner and now stands vulnerable to the
Cora’s of society waiting to scorn her illegitimate pregnancy. She decides to abort the fetus as this is the only option she can see to alleviate her situation.

Dewey Dell’s decision is a dangerous one. Living in the conservative South, her goal centers around heated controversy. She is risking her physical safety as abortion is illegal and must be acquired on the black market. For her to obtain one puts herself in physical harm as well as presents legal ramifications for any doctor who aids her. It was only in 1873 that the United States Congress passed the Comstock Act; a law “. . . forbidding the use of the U.S. mails for the distribution of obscene literature or anything intended for the prevention of contraception or for abortion” (Rubin 27). Dewey Dell is therefore not only on the hunt for an illegal operation, but on the hunt for someone willing to throw themselves in harm’s way along with her.

Faulkner leaves Dewey Dell in a particularly desperate situation as her mother, the only other woman in the family, has recently died, leaving her to try and cope with her pregnancy while surrounded by males. Faulkner reiterates this being a particularly “female” problem when Dewey Dell tells the male store clerk: “It’s the female trouble, . . . ” (1767). By placing Dewey Dell in an otherwise all male family with her only interacting with male clerks, Faulkner amplifies her hardships on account of her gender. Unable to turn to her incompetent father or her family for fear of the repercussions, she turns to the male clerks to sell her the procedure. The clerks prove just as unhelpful. Faulkner has put a young girl in a society which does not give women voice, in a family overrun with men, in a situation which could have dire consequences for herself and her family. She is left on her own to resolve it.
Her mission is by no means an easy fix. With ten dollars in hand, she plans on going into town to purchase a medicine that will eradicate her pregnancy. Meanwhile, on the way to town, her desperation continues to engulf her: “New Hope three miles. That’s what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events” (1736). The town ironically called “New Hope” signals that Dewey Dell could be on her way to stopping her pregnancy and offers her the hope needed to continue on her quest. With the pregnancy well underway, she becomes bold to obtain the abortion. The first clerk she encounters notices right away that Dewey Dell knows exactly what she wants: “. . . she had already decided before she came in” (1767). After she informs him of her request, he becomes disturbed, making it clear he lives under the morals of the South: “Well, I haven’t got anything in my store you want to buy, … unless it’s a nipple. And I’d advise you to buy that and go back home and tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding license” (1768). But through her determination and charged by her desperate situation, Dewey Dell continues to push the clerk to give her the abortion: “But she didn’t move. ‘Lafe said I could get it at the drugstore. He said to tell you me and him wouldn’t never tell nobody you sold it to us’” (1768). Even after the clerk refuses her again she continues on until it is clear there will be no changing the man’s mind. The clerk’s response and firm tone with Dewey Dell confirm he will not help her. She must continue on her hunt.

As the family comes closer to reaching Jefferson, Dewey Dell knows her chances of buying the abortion are beginning to slim. This is her only time in town. The name “New Hope” is really “Only Hope.” She cannot return home without the drug. It is
the second clerk she encounters that shows Dewey Dell’s extreme desperation in which she relinquishes her body to become free from her pregnancy.

She walks into the store and asks for the doctor. When she’s told there isn’t a doctor, she doesn’t budge. She tells the clerk: “It’s the female trouble, … I got the money” (1783). Dewey Dell knows the situation is not right. She tells the clerk: “You aint the doctor, . . .” (1784). Her language escalates into further desperation: “I need one now, … I got the money” (1785). When the “doctor” asks her the name of the medicine she needs (an obvious blow to his cover), Dewey Dell has no choice but to keep pressing for it: “I got to do something, . . .” (1785). This signals to the clerk just how desperate she is for this abortion. His reply of “How bad do you want to do something” (1785) serves as the contract for what Dewey Dell is to exchange for his service. He stands as her last possible hope; she is within his mercy.

As ten dollars is not a sufficient amount of money for the abortion, Dewey Dell asks the man what it is he wants. The man responds: “You guess three times and then I’ll show you, . . .” (1785). Knowing this is the only time she will find her way into town, Dewey Dell gives her body to the man in exchange for the abortion, saying only “I got to do something, . . .” (1785). However, he does not have any such thing. He gives her something resembling turpentine, to which she is not fooled: “Hit smells like turpentine, . . .” (1785). The man tells her it is the first part of the treatment and tells her to come back that night for the rest. Dewey Dell has no choice but to hope the man will do as he says. Her situation has led her to divulge her body for just the miniscule chance for it to work. She has run out of options. Her attempt to have an abortion has pushed her into a realm of prostitution. After she gives herself to the clerk, she realizes she has been
crossed: “It aint going to work, … That son of a bitch” (1787). In an attempt to free herself from pregnancy, Dewey Dell has further lost control of her body. She has fallen deeper as a victim to her biology by losing complete control of her body through both her pregnancy and offering it in exchange for a service. In trying to balance the scales of her life, she has only relinquished control. As her motivation was to rid herself of her child, the ramification came in the form of a further violation to her body. Dewey Dell is left to beg Lafe to make her an honest woman and their child legitimate.

While Dewey Dell violates her body in an effort to rid herself of her unborn child, earlier in the novel we learn that Addie works to remove herself from society to escape the presence of those around her. Both Dewey Dell and Addie are victims to their gender and attempt to balance their destinies. As marriage and children are inevitable in the society Dewey Dell and Addie live in, Dewey Dell cannot have her child as it is illegitimate, while Addie could not avoid having children as she was married. Joseph Urgo writes in his article, “William Faulkner and the Drama of Meaning: The Discovery of the Figurative in as ‘I Lay Dying’” that Dewey Dell is trying to escape her mother’s lot: “Dewey Dell’s response is to avoid repeating her mother’s fate by attempting to get off the cycle of feminine doom; that is, to have an abortion and not become a mother” (17). This statement contradicts Dewey Dell’s plea for marriage. Along the way to town, she reflects that Lafe could fix the situation should he agree to marry her. Urgo is incorrect in his assertion because in fact, Dewey Dell desires the family that Addie repelled. Faulkner has placed these women in similar situations but with opposite motivations. For Dewey Dell, marriage is the solution to her problems and the end of her suffering. Her baby would not symbolize a life of struggle and isolation. Dewey Dell
longs for this communion and relationships with others. For Addie, this was the opposite. Marriage and children suffocated her, pulling her out of her isolation. Dewey Dell is trying to balance her destiny in a way that Addie wishes she could have done. This juxtaposition suggests an isolation everyone is privy to. Readers will remember that Caddy Compson found herself ousted from her family in complete isolation even from her child. Neither Dewey Dell nor Addie are able to transcend this. All women suffer because of their gender which leads them to harbor shifting attitudes towards marriage. Even as Dewey Dell reaches out for communion, she cannot surmount her isolation as her journey is a solitary one. Addie’s communion as a result of her marriage led her to further seek out her isolation. Faulkner has taken his earlier depiction of Caddy with an illegitimate child in *The Sound and the Fury* and explored it from another angle. Caddy never mentioned abortion, but sought out marriage. Dewey Dell failed in her attempt for marriage with Lafe, so made her next move to gain control of her life by trying to get an abortion. Neither women achieve their desired goal.

Addie strove to break her familial bonds, Darl tried to deliver Addie from her burial, and Dewey Dell attempted to abort her pregnancy. All sacrificed some aspect of the self. Addie gave up her life. Darl lost his freedom. Dewey Dell sold her body. This suggests that a shift comes at a price. One cannot force a change without sacrificing the self. Handy asserts that Faulkner “... is writing out of a conviction that what is most real in human experience is the kind of inner world man inhabits—a world wherein is determined man’s feelings, hopes, desires, aspirations, compulsions and obsessions, and ultimately his attitudes and actions towards his fellow man” (451). I’d like to take this a step further and establish that Faulkner is offering a stance on what it means to fully
release one’s grasp on control. In her article, “Being, Knowing, and Saying in the ‘Addie’ Section of Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying,” Constance Pierce refers to Addie’s father’s words to display Addie’s realization of the trials and ultimate ending that life brings. I argue that Addie’s father’s words are really Faulkner’s view. Pierce states:

She knows ‘at last what [her father] meant’ by ‘the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead’ (p. 167); that life is meaningless, since we can never get a hold on it; that nature, which is all that ‘is’ outside thought and language, is a mechanism that controls us from inside and, in its implications of death, claims Being as its own; that there is no possibility of wholeness outside nature and inside consciousness. (303)

In short, Faulkner’s view on life is bleak. The mind and body are antagonistic. Everyone strives for a wholeness that is not possible. We cannot transcend our isolation. This was portrayed in The Sound and the Fury as well. Caddy, Benjy, and Quentin, all found themselves virtually alone. Humans are destined to struggle with control, but in an attempt to gain control, end up losing it. Even Benjy who lacked normal mental capabilities was constantly vying for control of Caddy’s taint. The implication is that the desire for control is a universal one. Our inner nature presents a series of obstacles which steer our lives beyond our capacities. Sacrifice is synonymous with living. To live is to chip away at our Being.

It will take twelve years before Faulkner’s outlook on existence changes. He will portray a character longing for peace in his life. Although unable to escape the throes of sacrifice, Isaac McCaslin in “The Bear” is able to triumph in his life by fully embracing sacrifice.
CHAPTER IV

ECHOES IN THE FOREST

“The Bear”

Written over a decade after The Sound and the Fury, and As I Lay Dying, Faulkner gives readers a young protagonist, set in the woods, to undergo an education that will aid in his survival. William Faulkner’s “The Bear” is not merely a hunting story. Published in 1942, it presents a complex view of Man versus Wild. It is through Isaac McCaslin’s eyes that Man is shown tainted, corrupting the pure Wilderness. Faulkner displays Isaac (Ike) as he enters his apprenticeship to become a skilled huntsman and then later as a man, when he retaliates against the destructive forces “civilization” brings against nature. Regarding “The Bear,” Lynn Altenbernd claims, “… the novelette is a kind of parable of the American experience, and that, while it is in no sense intended as literal history, it does mythically reconstruct history and comment upon it” (572). Readers are able to see this history through Isaac’s eyes. His reactions to this history enable readers to come away with insights into Man and more specifically, the South’s history. Kenneth LaBudde maintains that the story follows a pattern of primitive rituals of puberty (324). This is true, but it is much more than that. Faulkner uses his work to show Man’s error regarding the land and its inhabitants as well as to display how one must surmount one’s heritage through sacrifice. To do this, he takes us through Isaac
McCaslin’s spiritual coming of age where he is witness to Man’s transgressions, leading him to sacrifice everything to gain peace.

In Part One of “The Bear,” Isaac bears witness as the forces of Man impose themselves upon Nature. In Part Two, Isaac lashes out against slavery and Man’s dominion over Nature. In short, Faulkner transforms him from an adolescent observer to a man of action. Isaac comes of age and acts upon his new knowledge. In his article, R.W.B. Lewis accurately summarizes Isaac McCaslin’s innocence to experience when he . . . becomes reborn and baptized, receives the sacramental blessing and accomplishes his moral liberation. It is the substance of the first half of the story; in a sense . . . it is the whole of the story; the rest of the book tells us how a properly baptized and educated hero may act when confronted with evil. (644)

Faulkner uses Isaac as an example of what it is to coexist with Nature by stripping away the confines of civilization. Throughout his transformation, other characters in the novel are pitted in situations which force them to seek out desperate ways of freeing themselves from their ensuing circumstances. What results in their act of freedom is a relinquishment of the self. Isaac sees all of this and applies it to his own life. The saga begins when boy meets bear.

In the first half of “The Bear,” Faulkner illustrates the struggle of Man vs. Wild as seen through Isaac’s eyes when a group of hunters have become engulfed in taking down a legendary bear named Old Ben. With his innovations, Man has become consumed with progress, finding it necessary to control the Wild. Old Ben is the emblem of the Wilderness, symbolizing the Wild. Any human contraption is shown as something tainted along with the owner. Faulkner shows this through a pivotal moment in Isaac’s coming of age. His first meeting with Old Ben blurs the mundane and the spiritual. Upon first glimpse it is simply a curious boy trying to sneak a look at an old bear. But Faulkner
takes the temporal and collapses it with the spiritual. Isaac does not just sneak a look at Old Ben. He first must strip away all the excess, a somewhat ceremonial purification: “He stood for a moment—a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted” (208). Faulkner is also displaying Old Ben’s ability to sense not man, but man’s innovations—the precursor’s of industrialization. Isaac must strip himself of all that is impure before he can enter Old Ben’s pure, wild domain. When Isaac purifies himself by removing Man’s tainted inventions, the wilderness rewards him with a peek at Old Ben, who himself blends into the wilderness: “Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon’s hot dappling, ... It didn’t walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion...” (209). The implication of these lines are that through Isaac’s purification, he was able to further come of age as he could be in the wilderness untainted. His sighting of Old Ben allows him to see the bear in his pureness, engulfed in the Wild. Faulkner is hinting that Man’s innovations confuse and distort what is pure. As change is inevitable, Man must embrace progress, while remaining respectful to the land. Faulkner is implying that Man is consumed in his race for dominance. Seeing Old Ben in the woods without any of Man’s innovations, allows Isaac to take in and appreciate the untainted.

Faulkner quickly lays out Isaac’s apprenticeship as his coming of age. He introduces Sam Fathers as his mentor into the Wild: “He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness with Sam beside him as he had begun his apprenticeship in miniature to manhood after the rabbits and such with Sam beside him, ...” (195). Further into the
novella Isaac describes his education: “If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the
backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was
his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become
its own engendered progenitor, was his alma mater” (210). Isaac’s description of Old
Ben, or his “alma mater,” solidifies the bear’s legendary status:

... the long legend of corn-cribs broken down and rifled, of shoats and grown pigs
and even calves carried bodily into the woods and devoured and traps and deadfalls
overthrown and dogs mangled and slain and shotgun and even rifle shots delivered
at point-bland range yet with no more effect than so many peas blown through a
tube by a child-a corridor of wreckage and destruction ... (193)

Old Ben is an indomitable force, even having superhero-like qualities of resisting
bullets. Old Ben’s existence “... beginning back before the boy [Isaac] was born ...”
(193) gives a tone to Old Ben being timeless, having originated “once upon a time.” Isaac
views Old Ben through this lens, seeing him as magnificent, something born of the pure
Wild.

Old Ben is paralleled with the Wild as the wilderness is described as “... bigger and older than any recorded document: ...” (191). So Old Ben is seen through
Isaac’s eyes as “... dimensionless ... he didn’t walk into the woods. It faded, ...” (209).
Faulkner is showing Old Ben and the Wild to be interchangeable with Old Ben
representative of the Wild. Sam wastes no time teaching Isaac the ways of the wilderness.
When priming him for his encounters with Old Ben, Sam tells him: “... he’s the head
bear. He’s the man” (198). As Old Ben manages to evade death, he presents a challenge
for the hunters. He is that unsubdued Wild that Man strives to control. This isn’t just a
beast...this is the beast which the hunters have sought to take down. Killing Old Ben will
signify that Man can master and regulate everything.
As the years pass, the hunters hone their craft, coming closer to slaying Old Ben. Isaac has killed his first deer, and Sam has commemorated this spiritual moment, Isaac’s first act of controlling the Wild, by marking “his face with the hot blood” (210). This is a milestone in Isaac’s coming of age. He soon develops a keen knowledge of the wilderness which, as LaBudde claims, “. . . serves as a symbol of the youth’s coming of age spiritually. With his own instincts encouraged, nurtured, and given shape by Sam, Ike comes to possess what he must have before he can see the capture and killing of Old Ben” (327). LaBudde is referring to Isaac needing to develop before he can fully take advantage and embrace Old Ben’s killing. Only then will he be able to apply these lessons to his life. Isaac must be prepared and developed, or else Old Ben’s death will be in vain. Throughout this time, the hunters prepare for their battle with Old Ben. They have a one-eyed mule that “. . . would not spook at the smell of blood, of wild animals” (200). The men are also able to identify the characteristics a dog needs to engage in battle with him. And so their biggest weapon is found in Lion.

Lion is the ultimate dog needed for destroying Old Ben. Faulkner uses him in a way which further conveys Man’s taint. The hunters use Lion against Old Ben. This beast vs. beast battle gives rise to the men’s ability to control and manipulate the Wild. By the men taking control of the “uncontrollable,” the tension between Civilization and Nature becomes more evident as seen with how Lion is utilized by the hunters.

Lion is chosen because he carries all the traits Sam outlines a dog needs in order to successfully fight Old Ben: “He will need to be just a little bigger than smart, and a little braver than either” (212). Before Lion officially meets the hunters, he is speculated to be a panther, or even Old Ben: “But no panther would have jumped that
colt with the dam right there with it. It was Old Ben, . . .” (213). Lion is the dog that the men doubt can ever be tamed, which Sam does not even want to tame: “We don’t want him tame. We want him like he is…. He’s the dog that’s going to stop Old Ben and hold him” (219). Faulkner describes Lion’s savagery when he writes: “. . . Lion inferred not only courage and all else that went to make up the will and desire to pursue and kill, but endurance, the will and desire to endure beyond all imaginable limits of flesh in order to overtake and slay” (237). So with Lion in tow, the hunters have built a artillery against Old Ben.

By the time of the final battle, word has spread to other hunters and everyone has gathered to watch as the men move forward to slay the legendary bear. By this time, the odds have been stacked against Old Ben. It is during his last fight that Faulkner illuminates Old Ben’s inability to defend himself as the hunters are able to unleash every threat they have on him. First he attempts to defend himself and tries to evade the situation. Isaac sees Old Ben:

. . . crashing on ahead of the dogs faster than he had believed it could have moved, drawing away even from the running mules. . . . He heard the changed note in the hounds’ uproar and two hundred yards ahead he saw them. The bear had turned. He saw Lion drive in without pausing and saw the bear strike him aside and lunge into the yelling hounds and kill one of them almost in its tracks and whirl and run again. (238-239)

He then continues to escape from the threat the way he previously did every other encounter prior by crossing the river, but he is outnumbered and outsourced as everyone quickly crosses the river following him. Once the river has been crossed, Old Ben is not able to escape from Lion. Isaac looks on as Old Ben stands erect, backed up to a tree, in the center of a group of hounds. By the time Lion gets to him, there is no hope
for Old Ben. Faulkner then vividly illustrates as Old Ben has no choice but to seek the only freedom now within reach—the freedom that comes with laying down one's life: “This time the bear didn’t strike him down. It caught the dog in both arms, almost loverlike, and they both went down” (240). The description of Old Ben falling enables readers to understand that Old Ben had finally been overpowered. He was not able to evade the situation, nor defend himself any longer: “For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man stride its back, working and probing the buried blade. . . . He had never released the knife and again the boy saw the almost infinitesimal movement of his arm and shoulder as he probed and sought; . . . ” (241). Here on a cursory reading, Faulkner is offering readers, through Isaac’s point of view, a picture of the bear fully surrounded, being overtaken by Lion’s prowess and Man’s steel blade. No longer able to defend, Old Ben takes his last look at his home, before seeking his freedom from his doomed position: “. . . then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned and still carrying the man and the dog it took two or three steps toward the woods . . . ” (241). Old Ben had fought for himself and his life for many lifetimes over. When the hunters look over his body, they see fifty two bullet wounds amongst other damages to the bear’s body. After years of fighting, resisting man’s weapons from guns to traps, taking down dogs and other animals, the hunters had put together all the components necessary to render Old Ben defenseless. Facing the inevitable, Old Ben “. . . didn’t strike him [Lion] down” but chose death (240). Old Ben thus frees himself from his life on the run, of constantly defending his very being, giving himself up. With Old Ben, a legend dies. His freedom from man’s dominion comes at the cost of his very life. But with a more in depth analysis, Faulkner is
actually acting out Man’s conquering of the Wild. Altenbern states “Thus the hunt for the
bear, if successful, will be tantamount to the destruction of the wilderness” (572-573).
Indeed Faulkner shows this when later as a man, Isaac returns to the same wilderness and
sees the train cutting across the land. As Man’s innovations become more advanced, the
Wild becomes more defenseless. Old Ben had been battling these innovations for years.
Isaac notes the trap and gun wounds that clutter across Old Ben’s flesh. As Old Ben falls,
so the Wild falls under Man.

As with Caddy leaving her house, and Addie passing away, when Old Ben
dies, the plot gains momentum. This is not the climax of the story. Instead, Faulkner has
made it Isaac’s point of departure. It is at this point that his life will begin to take on a
new meaning. He will take the lessons of Old Ben and the Wild’s soon to be cultivated
land, and all its implications, to apply them to his life and how he wants to live. Old
Ben’s death begins the ripple effect seen in the previous novels.

As Isaac watches Old Ben’s death, Sam Fathers collapses, not able to bear
civilization overtaking the legend of the Wild. Throughout “The Bear,” Faulkner
constantly intertwines not just Old Ben and the wilderness, but also Old Ben and Sam.
From the beginning of the book, Faulkner alludes to Old Ben being human when he
describes him as having “. . . a definite designation like a living man: . . .” (193). He is
even shown to walk on his hind feet “as a man” (241). Old Ben is described as “. . .
solitary, indomitable, and alone; . . . Childless . . .” (194). Sam as well is childless: “He
had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever
meet again” (215). But their solitary lives are not the only connection the characters
share. Sam is shown seemingly in tune with the bear. He tells Isaac that Old Ben “. . .
come to see who’s here, who’s new in camp this year, whether he can shoot or not, can stay or not. Whether we got the dog yet that can bay and hold him until a man gets there with a gun” (198). Isaac even tells readers that Sam did not even intend to kill Old Ben, rather, he wanted to “. . . keep yearly rendezvous with the bear they did not even intend to kill” (194). Sam has the opportunity to shoot Old Ben, but does not. Isaac asks him why he didn’t take the shot. Sam does not answer. Instead he prophesizes that “Somebody is going to, some day” (212). It is no coincidence that Sam says this as he is looking into the woods where the bear “had vanished” (212), preparing readers for the time when the wilderness would lose its wild beast at the hands of Man.

Sam not only has a sixth sense as to the bear’s fate, but waits for Old Ben to die, to see Man’s ultimate tainting of the Wild and pure, before choosing to die himself. Isaac tells Sam that it must be one of them that kills Old Ben. Sam replies: “So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer” (212). Both men seem to understand the inevitability of the events to come. Older, Sam knows the implications, that Old Ben will tire of constantly defending himself against Man and Man’s innovations and that Civilization will ultimately be his demise. After Old Ben had decided that he didn’t want it to last any longer, so Sam follows, collapsing to the ground. Turning to Sam after Old Ben is slain, Isaac: “. . . saw Sam Fathers lying motionless on his face in the trampled mud” (242). Having collapsed after Old Ben dies, Sam’s body, Isaac notices, doesn’t have any marks or wounds. Rather, Sam awaited Old Ben’s death to take his own leave of the world. Even a doctor acknowledges Sam’s choosing to “quit” when he tells the huntsmen: “He didn’t even catch cold. He just quit. . . . Old people do that sometimes” (248). It is clear that the moment Old Ben dies, Sam chose for his life to
come to an end as well: “It wasn’t the mule. It wasn’t anything. He was off the mule when Boon ran in on the bear. Then we looked up and he was lying on the ground” (242). Sam collapsed because he wanted to—at the sight of Old Ben dying. Sam knows that the end of Old Ben marks the end of the thriving Wild. Man will forever have it under their control and continue to diminish it till its utter demise. Sam chose to evade a world without its wild beast. Isaac witnesses Sam’s decision to leave the world. Full understanding as to why, will come later when he is a man. His understanding comes at key times when he can apply the lessons to his life.

Sam’s life parallels that of Darl from *As I Lay Dying*. Both were sensitive to their surroundings, knowing what was happening before it actually came to fruition. Darl saw his mother’s death before it actually occurred. Sam sees Old Ben’s death before it is time. Faulkner give these characters priority over others in novel as they have more knowledge of their environment than others around them. Their difference is that Sam did not intervene to save Old Ben, but instead let the events unfold. Darl played a foil to his mother’s burial. The implication is that Sam was watching something much larger than himself. Man’s slaying Old Ben and having the Wild tightly under his grasp was inevitable.

Sam’s sixth sense doesn’t just coincide with Old Ben. When Lion comes onto the scene, Sam at once seems to know he is *the* dog that will aid in Old Ben’s demise and is another beast that will suffer taint upon Man’s hands. Upon the first mention of Lion, before anyone is aware even of what Lion exactly is, Sam appears to understand just what is happening and how it will lead to the inevitable events that are destined to unfold. As everyone hypothesizes what type of an animal Lion is, “Sam said nothing . . . inscrutable,
as if he were just waiting for them to stop talking so he could go home. He didn’t even seem to be looking at anything (213). Isaac, in his adulthood, recalls that Sam understood all this:

There was something in Sam’s face now. It was neither exultation nor joy nor hope. Later, a man, the boy realized what is had been, and that Sam had known all the time what had made the tracks and what had torn the throat out of the doe . . . It had been foreknowledge in Sam’s face that morning. And he was glad . . . it was almost over now and he was glad. (214-215)

Isaac can understand the foresight Sam had, knowing Old Ben was going to be killed and he would no longer have the desire to live. He clearly sees the events destined and waiting to unfold: “. . . but Sam’s eyes were probably open again on that profound look which saw further than them or the hunt, further that the death of a bear and the dying of a dog” (245). There is nothing Sam can do to hinder these events. Old Ben is a legend waiting to be taken down. The Wild is a thing Man has sought to tame. With the death of Old Ben, Sam resolves to take his leave of the world. He no longer has the ability to cope knowing the land and all that is truly wild will shortly follow Old Ben’s fate.

When Sam does take his leave of the world, he relinquishes himself back to the wild as his last request is that the men set his body on a platform. There his body is vulnerable, for all the wildlife around to use as they will. Sam’s final act, then, is to return himself back into Nature’s cycle. As the other huntsmen try and fight Boon for Sam’s body, he tells them: “This is the way he wanted it. He told us. He told us exactly how to do it. And by God you aint going to move him” (253). This line uncovers Sam, freeing himself from the world of Man’s destruction, giving himself back to the wild from which he descended. These events unfold before Isaac. He notes that Sam’s platform sits right above where Lion is buried.
Lion’s death is another example of man tainting what is wild and pure, as he had no choice but to do as the men asked to avoid further torture. This explains Isaac’s uneasiness when he first meets Lion. Readers are introduced to Lion when he is in his primitive, untainted state—before being altered through man’s touch. Isaac relates that something had made off with a colt. Sam Fathers and Major de Spain realize that whatever animal it was, it must be large and dangerous. The next day the colt is found, with “. . . its throat torn out and the entrails and one ham partly eaten” (214). This enforces the idea of primitiveness. Lion, unlike domesticated animals, represents a stark opposite. He hunts down his food and eats it as a true lion would. A creature of the wild, he does not rely on humans for food.

Lion’s response to restraint and confinement results in his violent agitation, further displaying his feral qualities. When Sam sets a trap for the beast, they find Lion, without even being able to realize what kind of animal he is. Upon first sight of Lion, the men are witness to his savagery:

. . . peering between the logs, they saw an animal almost the color of a gun or pistol barrel, what little time they had to examine its color or shape. It was not crouched nor even standing. It was in motion, in the air, coming toward them—a heavy body crashing with tremendous force against the door so that the thick door jumped and clattered in its frame, the animal, whatever it was, hurling itself against the door again seemingly before it could have touched the floor and got a new purchase to spring from. (216)

This reinforces a wild animal’s natural reaction to humans. Self sufficient in his wild domain, the humans present a threat to Lion. This threat is confirmed as Sam resolves to starve the massive dog in an attempt to force him into submission. However, Lion’s character remains true: “Each morning they would watch him [Sam] lower a pail of water into the crib while the dog hurled itself tirelessly against the door and dropped back and
leaped again” (217). Faulkner constantly reinforces for readers the “wild” that abides in
Lion. He hunts for his food, taking for his just as a panther or bear would. When seeing a
human come his way he repeatedly leaps forth, ready to take on the avengers. As time
wears on, the men force Lion into submission. Sam starves him until he is unable to
move: “It lay on its side while Sam touched it, its head and the gaunted body, the dog
lying motionless, the yellow eyes open. They were not fierce and there was nothing of
petty malevolence in them, but a cold and almost impersonal malignance like some
natural force” (218). But as Sam begins feeding him, Lion’s inner wildness shows forth
yet again:

. . . the bowl was empty and the dog was lying on its belly, its head up, the cold
yellow eyes watching the door as Sam entered, no change whatever in the cold
yellow eyes and still no sound from it even when it sprang, . . . the dog, still
without having had time to get its feet under it to jump again seemingly, hurled
itself against the door as if the two weeks of starving had never been. (218-219)

Here, Faulkner is highlighting the wildness in Lion to which Isaac is increasingly awed
by. It takes the men starving and confining him to a pen, but Lion eventually is forced to
succumb. Becoming so weak from lack of food, Lion’s only choice to free himself from
the pain starvation brings, is to do as the men want. Boon states: “We just want him to
find out at last that the only way he can get out of that crib and stay out of it is to do what
Sam or somebody tells him to do” (219). Lion has, therefore, in his desperation to avoid
starvation and the confinement of his pen, sacrificed his “wildness,” by keeping in
company with man and living off the food they feed him. Lion has lost himself. His entire
demeanor soon changes.

Isaac soon sees Lion almost playing the role of “man’s best friend,” the
epitome of domestication. Boon not only feeds Lion, but stays by his side as he is eating:
“He [Isaac] watched Boon take over Lion’s feeding . . . He would see Boon squatting in the cold rain beside the kitchen while Lion ate” (220). Lion does not even sleep with the other dogs, but in Boon’s bed with him every night:

And that night the boy and Major de Spain and McCaslin with a lamp entered the back room where Boon slept—the little, tight, airless room rank with the smell of Boon’s unwashed body and his wet hunting-clothes—where Boon, snoring on his back, choked and waked and Lion raised his head beside him and looked back at them from his cold, slumberous yellow eyes. (221)

Not only does this passage reflect Lion’s domestication, but the description of Boon’s room, especially the smell, display Lion’s being tainted from the inside out as man literally absorbs into him.

As Addie from As I Lay Dying tries to go along with society’s expectations and marries, she ultimately loses her life to domestication. Lion suffers the same fate. He is forced to do as the hunters ask of him, to aid in taking down Old Ben. On that fateful day, Lion completes his mission for the hunters. After appeasing the men, Lion decides to lay down his life. Even as the doctor attempts surgery to heal him, Lion has already made his choice to leave the huntsmen. As Lion is being worked on: “. . . he never tried to move. He lay there, the yellow eyes open upon nothing . . .” (246). This expresses the shell that Lion is left in. Now tainted, he has lost his place in the wild. The men have taken him for their own, and after killing Old Ben, there is nothing left for him. Lion, after doing all that the men have asked, has decidedly moved on. Faulkner reiterates the situation Lion is desperate to escape from, the sad overpowering of Man over him as Lion stares off waiting to die: “. . . while the quiet men in the new hunting clothes and in the old ones crowded into the little airless room rank with the smell of Boon’s body and garments. . . ” (246). Isaac realizes the suffocation Lion has endured once discovered and
tainted by the men. Boon acknowledges Lion’s forceful entrance into domestication: “‘. . .
damn it’ he said, ‘he never did want to stay in the house until I made him’” (247). Lion
suffers Addie’s same fate and passes away after full domestication has invaded his
existence. And just like Old Ben, Lion gets to take his last look towards his true home: “. . .
they carried him out to the gallery and put him down facing the woods” (247). As Lion
lays facing the woods, his injuries become symbolic of the damage Man has done to him.
Isaac sees that now tainted by Civilization, Lion cannot ever return to the wild and truly
be wild. It is also unlikely the hunters would ever have given him up. Thus, shortly after
Sam “quits” his life, Lion follows, but not before taking in the woods, possibly
remembering the wild he once could call his own: “. . . from time to time the great blue
dog would open his eyes, not as if he were listening to them but as though to look at the
woods for a moment before closing his eyes again, to remember the woods or to see that
they were still there. He died at sundown” (248). Lion has escaped man’s grip. Lion is the
second animal representing the Wild, that Isaac has witnessed taking in its last glimpses
of the Wild. Isaac understands that the Wild is something that will soon be devoured by
taint.

As Isaac has witnessed Old Ben and Lion suffering blows on behalf of man,
so he now sees the Wild’s struggles against human intrusion. Within the opening pages of
the story, the wilderness is described as “. . . the big woods, bigger and older than any
recorded document: . . .” (191). This shows a sacredness the land holds. Just as Old Ben
was shown to be legendary, so the Wild takes on a majestic feel, as it has existed before
“once upon a time.” But just as readers are introduced to the magnificent Old Ben only to
discover the terrible fate that awaited him on Man’s behalf, so the Wild is destined to
share in that same fate: “...that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes...” (193). Major de Spain is one of the many culprits against the wild: “The camp--the clearing, the house, the barn and its tiny lot with which Major de Spain in his turn had scratched punily and evanescently at the wilderness...” (206). The moral here is that Man cannot live in the wild without destroying it, by forcing ownership over it. Even Sam Fathers who collapses after witnessing Old Ben’s death, plays his own part in taming what is wild. It was Sam who methodically tamed Lion. Altenbernd writes that Faulkner uses Sam with his Indian heritage, to tie in all of Man’s error:

Men-Indians as the forgers of the weapon, white men as their conquerors and heirs, Negroes as the tools of their white masters-are jointly guilty of despoiling the green continent that has made men of them all; an ironic necessity in human affairs requires that the fullest realization of the dream shall destroy the source of the dream. (577)

Altenbernd has highlighted Man’s inability to come of age. Sam’s character, with all its contradictions, suggests that Man must come of age in order to surmount this error. Isaac is only able to do this through his apprenticeship, which could not have happened without Old Ben and Lion’s deaths. Only then is he able to fully realize what Man’s version of progress is priced at. With the advent of civilization impinging on the Wild’s borders, “progress” comes at a high cost to the world.

Isaac’s earlier self purification where he removed from himself the taint of civilization before seeing Old Ben, allows him to understand there will be consequences for Old Ben’s slaughter before it even occurs. He comprehends that Lion is the dog that will successfully aid in Old Ben’s demise and can foresee this will mean a shift: “It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn’t
know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, . . .” (226). He knows Old Ben’s killing is inevitable. Isaac understands this will be an unfavorable occurrence as he reflects: “So he should have hated and feared Lion” (226). As Old Ben coincides with the Wild, his death coincides with Nature’s destruction and Man’s fatal mistake of “gnawing at the immemorial flank” (195). Altenbernd talks about this “gnawing” at the wilderness when she comments that the “. . . assumption of the forests immortality is a miscalculation, for by the third page of his story, Faulkner speaks of the wilderness as doomed, . . .” (573). Isaac sees this miscalculation on Man’s part as he witnesses Old Ben’s death. Olga Vickery articulates Isaac’s epiphany in her essay, “God’s Moral Order and Ike’s Redemption,” when she writes: “Man’s happiness consists in recognizing the greatness and the limitations of his position in the divine order. By forgetting, even momentarily, that he is at once the ruler and the ruled, man destroys that order and with it his proper relationship to God and to nature” (210). Vickery has pin pointed Isaac’s coming of age. Having partially come of age through obtaining knowledge of Man’s wrongs toward the earth, Isaac now has an opportunity to act on this newfound knowledge to complete his education.

Later as a man, Isaac retaliates against this destruction. The second half of "The Bear" opens with disclosing his age of twenty one and describing: “. . . the tamed land which was to have been his [Isaac’s] heritage, . . .” (254). However, Isaac cannot grasp the idea of ownership over the land. Being God’s creation, Isaac holds Man as responsible for obstructing God’s true plan for the earth to be inhabited, by placing “ownership” on it, a concept invented by Man:
Because He told in the Book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance . . . (257)

Isaac also blames slavery on Man’s notion of ownership, which appeared with their concept of owning the land:

. . . the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man’s money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it . . . (254)

Here, Isaac is tying together the sin of ownership over the land with the sin of owning Man. This he states, is the curse the South has brought upon itself: “Don’t you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, . . .” (278). This line gives rise to Isaac’s desperation as he is tied to the past which is responsible for the current curse of the South: “This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, . . .” (278). The land which he has inherited is stigmatized with the horrors on the plantation. This realization is a further development in Isaac’s coming of age.

Isaac learns of Eunice whose character fully discloses the hardships slaves faced on account of his ancestors. Eunice is a character readers only know through the documentation of Isaac’s uncles’ ledgers and serves as an example of the plight of slaves. Isaac recalls the ledger books that his Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy kept, which recorded events, purchases, and deaths of slaves, They tell the tales of the horrors the slaves were
put through, and eventually the horrors from which Eunice sought to escape. Through the ledgers, Isaac has been able to piece through the atrocities his ancestors bequeathed onto their slaves. Particularly appalling is Eunice’s tale. Her story reveals how ownership over the land translated further to ownership over people, and how that power struggle left the weaker completely vulnerable. Isaac knows Eunice’s story speaks for countless other slaves, forced into submission by their all powerful master.

The ledgers read that Eunice was bought in New Orleans in 1807 and married Thucydus and drowned in the creek on Christmas Day in 1832 (267). A couple of pages later, Faulkner reveals within the ledgers that Eunice’s daughter with Isaac’s uncle, was then taken as his mistress. Isaac reflects: “His own daughter His own daughter” (270). Eunice was not able to protect her daughter, nor was she able to bear what the consequences of that atrocity would bring. Eunice’s freedom from her situation in which she could not defend herself reads from the mind of Isaac:

. . . he seemed to see her actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter’s and her lover’s (Her first lover’s he thought. Her first) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who has already had to repudiate belief and hope. (271)

Eunice’s catharsis is driven out as she seeks freedom in her own death. Alive, she was a slave, without right to her own body or kin. Faulkner tells us that she had no belief or hope, only grief and despair. The “griefless” and “ceremonial” way Isaac visions her drowning herself, displays a shell of a woman that once was. Her move to drown herself is her last controlled action. However, with her death comes her relinquishment of herself. Her freedom came at the ultimate price of her life. After piecing together Eunice’s story, Isaac transforms from being a mere
observer, to taking action. He boldly refuses his inheritance in an effort to restore a bit of justice to the family of the wronged. Altenbernd affirms that “. . . owning, buying, selling, and gambling for human beings; making Negro women the involuntary partners in adulterous and incestuous relations. This sin, too, is parallel to the violation of the wilderness, equally grave, and equally a part of Ike’s inheritance” (578). This is established when Isaac moves to repudiate this inheritance, thus trying to break his ties with his family’s past. He allots a thousand dollars to Tomey’s children as well as to Sophonsiba, Lucas’s sister: “He carried a third of the three-thousand-dollar fund in gold in a money-belt, as when he had vainly traced Tennie’s Jim into Tennessee a year ago” (276). Isaac successfully alleviates some of his family’s guilt by giving his wealth to the family of those wronged: “I could say I don’t know why I must do it but that I do know I have got to because I have got myself to live with for the rest of my life and all I want is peace to do it in” (288). Lewis enforces this in his article when he states: “Such a combination of incest and miscegenation represents for Ike an image of the evil condition of the South-and of humanity in general from the beginning of time” (645). By the end of the story, Isaac has given up his inheritance and began working as a carpenter. He has successfully found himself by giving up everything. He has come of age.

As The Sound and the Fury, and As I Lay Dying had Jesus-figures, so Isaac parallels Jesus’ life. Both lived humble lives, relinquishing everything. Isaac turned his back on living by the world’s standards of wealthy. This correlates with Jesus’ words: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version James 4:4)? Isaac has chosen to turn his back on the world in an effort to find peace. He adopts a Christ-like existence. In his article, “The Myth in
Faulkner’s ‘The Bear,’” John Lydenberg applies Isaac’s refrain from participating in Society’s ideologies: “The price of purity, Ike finds, is non-involvement, and he chooses purity” (64). Lyndenberg has defined Isaac’s choice to, like Jesus, oppose the world’s ways, looking at existence with a broader picture. Isaac does not focus on worldly wealth, such as riches. Instead, he opts for a conscience at peace with itself.

In Section Five, Isaac returns to the wilderness where the story begins. As he makes the trip back, the train, man’s exalted innovation, has invaded the wilderness: “the little locomotive shrieked and began to move: . . . and vanish into the wilderness, . . .” (318). The implications are further displayed as:

Walter Ewell has shot a six-point buck from this same moving caboose, and there was the story of the half-grown bear: the train’s first trip in to the cutting thirty miles away, the bear between the rails, its rear end elevated like that of a playing puppy . . . still digging until the driver on the braked engine not fifty feet away blew the whistle at it, . . . (319)

The fact that the bear is regarded as a puppy displays a sense of purity the train has invaded. This purity has been tainted as Isaac realizes: “It [the train] had been harmless then. . . . but it was different now” (320). The wilderness has continued to suffer under Man’s ever intrusive touch. Isaac sees the results of Man’s curse.

Boon falls victim to this curse. In the wilderness, Isaac finds Boon in his desperation trying to shoot squirrels, saying the last lines in the story: “Get out of here! Don’t touch them! Don’t touch a one of them! They’re mine” (331)! Boon has fallen victim to Man’s curse. After all, it was him that performed the actual of slaying of Old Ben. Melvin Backman’s article, titled, “The Wilderness and the Negro in Faulkner’s ‘The Bear’” writes about Boon’s guilt: “Boon’s killing of Old Ben entitles him to glory, but it has involved him too in the white man’s guilt in the destruction of the woods” (597).
Isaac’s final view of Boon then serves to confirm his decision to turn his back on society’s ways. Boon embodies the repercussions of Man’s forceful mastery of his surroundings. This sense of entitlement regresses Man, rather than offers progress, as seen through slavery. In his essay, “Ike McCaslin, Cop Out,” David H. Steward writes of Isaac not actually slaying Old Ben so therefore not having guilt on his shoulders: “[Boon Hogganbeck] . . . commits the final deed and thus absolves Ike as responsible . . .” (214). This is a misinterpretation. Isaac does not free himself of responsibility. He shares in it, which sets his sacrifices into motion. This is the crux of the problem, an error that began long ago and grew with each generation, only building momentum, until the culminating moment. All have suffered on account of this error. All circles around the death of a bear. Isaac never blames just Boon for Old Ben’s death and the taming of the Wild, he holds Man accountable. Boon is just a victim to Man’s understanding of its world. He feels the wild creatures are his possession. Boon, juxtaposed with Isaac’s ability to resist and rise above the curse of the South, displays Faulkner’s notion that to truly find oneself and be at peace, one must relinquish all.

Faulkner intertwines all of the events and the characters within his story to show everyone’s connectedness. First, there is Old Ben, the legend of the forest: “. . . epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life . . .” (193). Then there is Sam, descendant of the Chickasaw squa, an extension of his ancestors who walked the earth at a time when bears and the wild were free to be wild: “. . . the same loneliness through which frail and timorous man had merely passed without altering it, leaving no mark nor scar, which looked exactly as it must have looked when the first ancestor of Sam Fathers’ Chickasaw predecessors crept into it . . .” (202). Then there is Lion, a symbol of the domestication of
the wilderness, and finally the Wild, representative as Man’s ongoing mistake. When Old Ben dies, a sequence of damage to all of these characters ensues. Sam and Lion seek freedom from their lives and Man quickens his impression upon the earth. This is all evident in the monumental scene where Old Ben is finally taken down: “It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once” (241). The bounce could be seen as the repercussion, the wave of reaction soon to ensue. The fact that they all fall together, as a tree falls, represents the wilderness that will crumble under Man’s thumb. It is no coincidence Faulkner describes Old Ben as walking as a man toward the woods before his fall: “. . . then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned and still carrying the man and the dog it took two or three steps toward the woods on its hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down” (241). Faulkner is pointing to Man’s destruction and tainting of what is pure.

Sam’s Indian blood points to a notion of living in harmony with the land. However, readers learn through Isaac that Sam’s descendants were some of the first to claim ownership over the land and sell it for profit.

Faulkner has therefore stayed true to his method of connecting and intertwining all the characters lives within one another. The Sound and the Fury had all of the characters grieve in public and private ways through Caddy’s loss. The same occurred in As I Lay Dying through Addie’s character. With “The Bear,” Faulkner shifts the lives of the characters after Old Ben’s death. Isaac’s life makes dramatic changes. However, these changes, his embracing of relinquishment, end in his favor. He is able to escape the fate of the characters from the previous novels and go on to live a peaceful existence. As
the other characters strove to regain control of their lives when it was thrown into chaos, Isaac gave himself into it.

Clearly, Old Ben, Sam, Lion, and the wilderness, all faced their doom when confronted with an inescapable situation. Pitted against one another, Lion was forced to take down Old Ben, while the wilderness stood idly watching. All were forced into submission. Altenbernd establishes Man’s false assumption that “. . . the green American continent was inexhaustible” (573). All were subjected to Man’s curse upon the land and all its inhabitants. Isaac maps out Civilization’s fatal error when he thinks back to a time “. . . when it was a wilderness of wild beasts and wilder men,” but Man fell to temptation and “. . . cleared it, translated it into something to bequeath . . .” (256). Through “The Bear” and its characters desperately seeking freedom from Man’s reach, Faulkner tells the tale of Man’s ever growing error while showing one man’s evolution from that error. Clearly, Isaac came of age and was able to accomplish this insight. It is also with Isaac that Faulknier offers hope for the future. As Altenbernd claims, “If one man can be redeemed, there is hope for the reconstitution of society in ‘the communal anonymity of brotherhood’” (582). Thus Isaac should be viewed as a beacon of hope for future generations to repudiate a dark heritage and come of age to thrive with the Wild.
CHAPTER V

LONELY ROADS

Faulkner portrays Caddy, Addie, and Isaac spinning in constellations marked by issues of sacrifice. Caddy’s “crisis of heart” came when her illegitimate pregnancy altered her existence. She was forced to confront her pregnancy and act upon it. Her first round of sacrifices forced her to give up her role as mother-figure and protector for Benjy and take on a husband. Her divorce from Herbert set off another stream of sacrifices as she had to decide whether to struggle in raising her daughter alone, or to give her up to her family. Either choice affects the lives of others. This is the significance of Caddy’s character; her crisis yields a ripple effect. The lives around her, especially her brothers Benjy, Quentin, and her daughter, reel from the ripples of her sacrifice throughout their lives. Faulkner is pointing out the connectedness of existence. No one can truly live in isolation, untouched by others’ lives. Yet, Faulkner has clearly demonstrated the isolation his characters endure, especially when facing a crisis. The consequential sacrifice only increases this isolation with the loss it yields. Faulkner exhibits people in a community, feeling isolated, trying to manipulate control in their lives.

In Addie’s death, the lives of those around her were altered as well. Her death set a shockwave of action into motion by the obligation of her family to bury her in Jefferson. This very journey forces Darl into a desperation where he cannot ignore his reason. He must act on what he sees as a farce to bury Addie and he must confront his
love for her that was never returned. The events of this journey will forever impinge on Darl’s existence as he sacrifices his freedom to act on his desperation. Dewey Dell acts upon her own crisis of being pregnant only to lose control of her body a second time. Her failed journey to town for an abortion castes her into a further state of emergency. The novel leaves off with her future uncertain. The dynamics of the Bundren family will be manipulated indefinitely through the loss of Addie. The family loses its matriarch and a son, and adds a new mother. Addie’s sacrificing her life has permanently transmuted the lives of those around her.

Both Caddy and Addie made sacrifices contingent on what society expected of them. Society would expect Caddy to not give in to her sexual urges until marriage. Because Caddy went against this, she was forced to try and rectify her situation and married when she found herself pregnant. She struggled for control. Through her divorce she was forced to try yet again to garner control over her situation.

Addie never wanted marriage. She yearned for a solitary life she could call her own. Her society did not understand this. Following society’s view of what life should entail, she found herself in a marriage with children. The desperation of her circumstances led her to try and alleviate her situation and find a way out. The only remedy she could conceive of came in death.

Both women acted on the expectations and hegemony of society. In failing to live accordingly, both were forced outside of their society as seen in Caddy’s banishment and Addie’s death. Through the disappearance of these two characters from society, Faulkner is calling attention to its narrow ideologies and the suffering on account of it. His most blatant critique comes with Isaac’s story.
Isaac could have followed the same tragic tale. But he is saved through his coming of age when he develops his own set of laws to follow. His laws challenge conventional thinking. He does not see the slaying of the wilderness as “progress” for civilization. He views slavery as inhumane. However, in Isaac’s “crisis of heart” he does not choose what to sacrifice to pacify his life’s aims and gain control. Rather, he gives himself fully into sacrifice’s arms. Through his relinquishment of everything, from the material (his inheritance) to his familial (his wife refuses her body to him, thus not bearing children), Isaac conquers his crisis by achieving inner peace.

Through Caddy, Addie, and Isaac, Faulkner is showing the danger of society. In trying to live in harmony with society’s way of life, our inner desires force us into isolation. Caddy and Addie were no longer able to be active members of society because of their inner disregard for the rules society thrust upon them. Isaac was not allowed to thrive in society in the traditional sense. He stripped himself of his finances and did not achieve a family. His consolation was his soul at peace. Caddy and Addie struggled with trying to abide by society’s laws and standards, only to eventually be pushed out. Isaac found that giving up everything, sacrificing all control, is the only way to gain it. Only then can you have a peaceful existence. Isaac was then allowed, after sacrificing everything, to truly live. The implication Faulkner offers, is a view that one can only truly live, by embracing sacrifice. Everyone is subject to it and will be forced to make choices regarding what to offer in order to fall back in sync with society. One can only be impervious to this by losing oneself entirely. Only then can someone thrive.
WORKS CITED


Bauer, Margaret. “‘I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood’: Quentin’s Recognition of his Guilt.” Southern Literary Journal 32.2 (2000): 70-89.


