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## From Romance to Reality: Faulkner's "Mayday" and "The Sound and the Fury"

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**From Romance to Reality:  
Faulkner's Mayday and The Sound and the Fury**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

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**by**


**John Kelly**

**1988**


**APPROVAL SHEET**

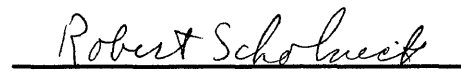
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\_\_\_\_\_  
**Robert Scholnick**

  
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**Walter Wenska**

**For their love and support,  
this thesis is dedicated to my  
Mother and Father**

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## Abstract

This thesis purposes to analyze the thematic and structural similarities between Mayday and The Sound and the Fury, both by William Faulkner. Mayday is an allegorical romance Faulkner wrote for Helen Baird, a woman he wished to marry. Mayday recounts the story of Sir Galwyn, a young knight who searches for an elusive princess. His search finally ends when he steps into a stream and drowns. Mayday was written just prior to The Sound and the Fury and Galwyn's death is similar to Quentin's drowning in Boston.

Mayday is quite simple and obvious in characterization and symbolism but many of the themes Faulkner stated in the short romance are carried over into Quentin's section of The Sound and the Fury. Carvel Collins, in his introduction to Mayday, outlined many similarities between the two books: each narrative is concerned with shadows; both make numerous references to time; Galwyn searches for a princess while Quentin longs for his sister, Candace; each narrative makes mention of Saint Francis of Assisi and his "Sister Death;" and each protagonist commits suicide by drowning.

In addition, Collins argues that the two figures, Hunger and Pain, from Mayday represent Quentin's two brothers, Benjy and Jason. Collins retraces his Freudian analysis of The Sound and the Fury and links it to Mayday. In this interpretation, Hunger and Benjy represent the "id," Pain and Jason represent the "super-ego" and Galwyn and Quentin embody the "ego." Collins' argument is imaginative and insightful, but his focus is too narrow. This thesis will expand Collins' analysis of Mayday and The Sound and the Fury as well as offer other similarities between the two books regarding theme, characterization and narrative sequence.

**"When you pass through the water,  
I shall save you"**

**Isaiah 43:2**

**"We shall find at once a uniformity which assures us  
of the essential identity of the tradition underlying the  
varying forms, and a diversity indicating that that tradition  
has undergone a gradual, but radical, modification in the  
process of literary evolution."**

**Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance**

**FROM ROMANCE TO REALITY:  
FAULKNER'S MAYDAY AND THE SOUND AND THE FURY**



## Introduction

Carvel Collins cites many similarities between Mayday and The Sound and the Fury: both revolve around protagonists who commit suicide by drowning; both contain allusion to Saint Francis of Assisi and his "Sister Death," as well as numerous references to time and shadows. Each story also involves a questing knight, Quentin merely a modern version of Sir Galwyn, and his journey on his last day. Collins discusses all these similarities and more in his introduction to Mayday, but he draws few conclusions beyond the fact that Mayday prefigures The Sound and the Fury.

Collins also summarizes his earlier Freudian analysis of The Sound and the Fury, and then applies this psychological construct to the narrative of Mayday. Hunger and Pain from Mayday are linked to Benjy and Jason, respectively the id and super-ego in this interpretation. But even in this instance, when Collins moves closer to conclusions regarding the similarities, his interpretation remains simple and consistent with his earlier analysis of The Sound and the Fury.

In this thesis, I will examine the similarities between Mayday and The Sound and the Fury, those Collins notes and others he does not, and I will attempt to draw certain conclusions regarding those similarities. I will also extend Collins' Freudian analysis, specifically Faulkner's use of

red and green to symbolize Hunger and Pain in Mayday, and his reworking of those two colors into The Sound and the Fury. Furthermore, Collins argues that the three Compson brothers are physical embodiments of Freud's id, ego and super-ego; I will expand that interpretation and argue that each Compson brother, in his own way, is psychologically complete and each experiences hunger and pain.

William Faulkner often gave vague and misleading answers when asked about his fiction. In light of Mayday, his statement that The Sound and the Fury began with the image of a young girl's "muddied drawers" seems, at the very least, too simple and easy. More likely, The Sound and the Fury germinated from several images and sources, with Sir Galwyn and Mayday elemental in the character of Quentin Compson and his narrative in The Sound and the Fury.

## I

William Faulkner once said that The Sound and the Fury<sup>1</sup>, completed in 1929, began with a picture of a young girl's muddied drawers. Four children, one girl and three boys, were playing in a stream near their house. They were told to play outside because their grandmother, who had been very sick, had died and her funeral was being held. The girl, more adventurous than her brothers, climbed a tree to see what was going on in the house. Watching from below, her brothers noticed that she had muddied her underpants.<sup>2</sup>

Like most statements Faulkner made about his novels, this explanation of the beginnings of The Sound and the Fury should not be accepted uncritically. Although the image of the muddy drawers is thematically important, symbolizing many things including the loss of youthful innocence and the evils inherent in women, to claim the novel germinated from a single image is far too simplistic and pat an explanation. More often than not, creative achievement is a fusion of many ideas and experiences that the author uses to express various purposes. In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner drew heavily from his family and his experiences growing up in Mississippi. The Compsons themselves are very similar to the Faulkners just as the fictional town of Jefferson closely resembles Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner's hometown. But The Sound and the Fury, while infused with Faulkner's own life, is the story of the Compsons and their downfall. Their story is told through four different narratives and each section attempts to explain the decline of the family and of the Old South in general; a romantic South where honor and courage and chastity were revered.

Perhaps the most sympathetic narrator is Quentin because of his youth, his sensitivity and his decision to commit suicide. Faulkner placed his section second, following Benjy's idiotic overture and preceding Jason's manic diatribe, and made it the longest of the four narrative sections. The background for Quentin's monologue is far more involved than a single image of a girl's muddied drawers, complexly deriving from Faulkner's own experience as a young writer in New Orleans and Europe, and involving a young woman, Helen Baird, whom Faulkner courted in

New Orleans in 1925. Helen was an independent woman from a wealthy family who was first drawn to Faulkner because of his eccentricities. They met at parties given by their mutual friend, Sherwood Anderson, and later on Faulkner often stayed at the Baird's summer home in Pascagoula, Mississippi. It was there he fell in love with Helen, writing her poems and dedicating his second novel, Mosquitoes, to her. Faulkner went as far as to ask Helen to marry him but she refused, the second such rejection in his young life. Certainly Helen's refusal had great impact on Faulkner's sensibility as well as his fiction; but also noteworthy is that Helen's family, like the fictional Compsons, consisted of one girl and three boys.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1926 Faulkner wrote and illustrated a small book which he bound himself and titled Mayday.<sup>4</sup> Dedicated and presented to Helen, it is a short medieval romance strikingly similar in theme, characterization and imagery to Quentin's section of The Sound and the Fury.

## II

Mayday recounts the search of Sir Galwyn of Arthgyl for a woman "with long shining hair like a column of fair sunny water."<sup>5</sup> The story opens with Galwyn kneeling in a chapel in the morning:

And the tale tells how at last one came to him. Dawn had already come without, flushing up the high small window so that this high small window which had been throughout the night only a frame for slow and scornful

stars became now as a rose unfolding on the dark wall of the chapel.<sup>6</sup>

Galwyn is dreaming during the first part of his narrative as he rides forth from the chapel accompanied by two designs named Pain and Hunger. They come upon a stream whose waters present an endless sequence of pictures, like an unfolding tapestry. In the stream Galwyn sees the woman he seeks and close by the banks stands a tree who is also Saint Francis. When Galwyn asks the meaning of what he has seen, the two designs reply "Wait."<sup>7</sup> Since he is dreaming, Galwyn has no choice and he finally awakens when one comes to him saying, "Rise, Sir Galwyn, be faithful, fortunate and brave."<sup>8</sup>

Galwyn proceeds to dress himself in his armor similar to the way Quentin dresses himself on the morning of his suicide. He then rides out into a forest where the trees "writhed in agony, and where one bough touched another they made desolate moaning."<sup>9</sup> These trees, who have experienced the hardships of life, stand in opposition to the youthful innocence of Galwyn: "His bright smooth face whereon naught was as yet written...and his beautiful blank shield whereon naught was yet written."<sup>10</sup> Farther on, Galwyn greets and speaks with a man called Time about Pain and Hunger as well as life itself. Galwyn describes the ideal woman he seeks; Time informs him of the various princesses in the area who fit the description. Galwyn takes leave of Time, eventually encounters three princesses - Yseult, Elys and Aelia - and winds up bedding all three. Still unsatisfied in his quest, Galwyn is told by Hunger there is one more woman to seek out and calls her his sister. They

proceed to the stream Galwyn dreamed of earlier. Near the stream and the tree that is Saint Francis stands a man who calls himself "The Lord of Sleep." Galwyn is then given two alternatives: to cross the stream and relive phases of his life, to be "a shadow subject to all shadowy ills,"<sup>11</sup> or to immerse himself in the stream and rid himself of his temporal existence. Galwyn gazes into the stream and sees the images of three princesses and of another "with long shining hair like a column of fair sunny water."<sup>12</sup> As he steps into the water, "Hunger and Pain went away from him, and as the water touched him it seemed to him that he knelt in a dark room waiting for day."<sup>13</sup>

Galwyn appropriately begins his quest at dawn after completing an overnight vigil with his armor. We soon find that Galwyn's quest vaguely resembles a traditional medieval quest. In From Ritual to Romance,<sup>14</sup> Jessie Weston examines the Grail legend from pagan rituals through the more romantic notions of knights and chivalry and describes the circumstances surrounding the search for it. Faulkner's Galwyn seems to fuse, both in name and action, the Grail knights, Galahad and Gwain, as he battles other knights and searches for his elusive princess. For instance, like Galahad, Galwyn at times seems to epitomize chivalry and knighthood; but like Gwain, he is also a womanizer. Like Galwyn, Quentin is also a knight errant; on his last day, Quentin tries to help a small girl whom he refers to as his "sister," battles both Spode and Julio, and is referred to as Lochinvar, another medieval knight. Quentin is also called a "half-baked Galahad"<sup>15</sup> by Caddy's fiance, Herbert Head, after he(Quentin) refuses to take money from Head. Galwyn's search, although

less heroic than the quest for the Grail, involves the same elements as other medieval quests: a hero, damsels, companions and a vague and elusive goal. While Gwain and Galahad are accompanied by other knights on their journey, Galwyn's companions are the two small designs named Pain and Hunger.<sup>16</sup>

Like Galwyn, Quentin Compson begins his day alone in a room. Quentin is lying in bed as he watches the morning shadows move: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and I was in time again, hearing the watch."<sup>17</sup> Taken alone, the fact that Mayday and The Sound and the Fury both begin at dawn is of minor significance, but in conjunction with the other similarities between the two books, the timing seems to be of great importance. Mayday begins with the sentence, "And the tale tells how at last one came to him." The conjunction "and" invokes an image of prior action and the sentence itself is repeated in several versions during the course of the narrative. Dawn is both a beginning and end to our solar cycle just as the opening of Mayday begins and ends Galwyn's fatal quest: in the end one does come to him. Images repeat both in Galwyn's dream and his reality and this recurrent pattern works well within the circular structure of the entire narrative; the repetition gives the effect of time passing with little or no effect.

As always, Quentin's situation is a bit more complex and less clearly allegorical. He sees the shadow of the curtains and hears his watch "and then(he) was in time again." Throughout Quentin's narrative crucial moments in the past are repeated over and over in his memory and, like

Galwyn, the form of his story is circular. The ticking of his watch (and the many other references to time: the bells for example) brings Quentin back to consciousness, back into time with his cycle and the day's journey which will ultimately lead him to death and unconsciousness. Again the conjunction "and" is present to imply prior action, and the dawn is both an initiation and a completion of the daily cycle, as the end brings us back to the beginning.

### III

The action of Mayday begins on May 1 - according to Collins a "traditionally optimistic time of new beginning"<sup>18</sup> - while Quentin's narrative is dated June 2, 1910. Ironically, in Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur, May Day is also connected to death by drowning:

Than kynge Authure lette sende for all the children that were borne in May-day, begotyn of lordis and borne of ladyes; for Merlyon tolde kynge Arthure that he that sholde destroy hym and all the londe sholde be borne on May-day. Wherefore he sente for hem all in payne of dethe, and so there were founde many lordis sonnys and many knyghtes sonnes, and all were sente unto the kynge. And so was Mordred sente by kynge Lottis wyff. And all were putte in a shyppe to the se; and som were four wekis olde and som lesse. And so by fortune the shyppe drove unto a castelle, and was to-ryven and destroyed the moste party, save that Mordred was cast up...<sup>19</sup>

Except for Mordred, the rest of the male infants of noble birth born on May 1 were drowned. Faulkner never mentioned reading Malory, but he



was consistently vague regarding his sources. Of course the date and the drownings could be coincidental, but Faulkner was extremely well read and it is possible, perhaps even probable, that he incorporated May Day and the "death of the innocents" into his own fictional drownings.

Faulkner's title, Mayday, also proves ironic considering Galwyn's drowning, and is surely a play on the french, " m'aidez, " the universal distress signal. Galwyn, having " completed the cycle "20 allowed him by the " Lord of Sleep," walks unaided into the water; Quentin, however, drowns himself on June 2,

waiting first to complete the current academic year and so get the full value of his paid-in-advance tuition...because the remaining piece of the old Compson mile which had been sold to pay for his sister's wedding and his year at Harvard had been the one thing, excepting that same sister and the sight of an open fire which his youngest brother, born an idiot, had loved.<sup>21</sup>

Quentin's academic year is a different kind of cycle and the delay is simply another in the long line of Quentin's fatal gestures. Although Quentin commits suicide one month later than Galwyn, the season is the same (" june foliage in New England not much thicker than April at home in Mississippi "22) and their deaths could not come at a more ironic time. This calls to mind other ironic beginnings which are also endings, such as Caddy's wedding, and the entire structure of The Sound and the Fury, a novel of the Compson's downfall, centered on Easter weekend.

The problem of time, and man's relationship to it, is central to both narratives. Galwyn is often described as hurried or impatient. Early in his journey, he encounters a man who calls himself Time. Galwyn, believing "that Time is an old gentleman with a long white beard"<sup>23</sup> loses his romantic notions when he asks for proof. Time asks Galwyn's two companions, Pain and Hunger, what the knight actually is and they answer together:

He is but a handful of clay which we draw hither and yon at will until the moisture is gone completely out of him, as two adverse winds toy with a feather; and when the moisture is all gone out of him he will be as any other pinch of dust and we will not be concerned with him any longer.<sup>24</sup>

Here the innocence of Galwyn stands in stark opposition to the cynicism of Time and the two designs; but Galwyn still does not believe Time or the two shadows and calls them doddering fools. Time replies:

Ah, Sir Galwyn...what would I not give to be also young and heedless, yet with your sublime faith in your ability to control that destiny which some invisible and rather unimaginative practical joker has devised for you! Ah, but I too would then find this mad world an uncomplex place of light and shadow and good earth on which to disport me. Still, everyone to his taste. And certainly the taking of prodigious pains to overtake a fate which it is already written will inevitably find me, is not mine. So there is naught left but for each to follow the path which seems - no, not good: rather, let us say, less evil - to him; and I who an immortal find it in my heart to envy you who are mortal and who inherited with the doubtful privilege of breathing a legacy of pain and sorrow and, at last, oblivion.<sup>25</sup>

Time's reply is similar in tone and content to the inherent wisdom  
 Quentin receives from his father:

the strange thing is that man who is conceived by  
 accident and whose every breath is a fresh cast with  
 dice already loaded against him will not face that final  
 main which he knows before hand he has assuredly to  
 face without essaying expedients ranging all the way  
 from violence to petty chicanery that would not deceive  
 a child until some day in very disgust he risks  
 everything on a single blind turn of a card no man ever  
 does that under the first fury of despair or remorse or  
 bereavement he does it only when he has realized that  
 even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not  
 particularly important to the dark diceman<sup>26</sup>

Both Galwyn and Quentin receive the same type of dark, bleak  
 philosophy - Galwyn from the allegorical figure of Time and Quentin,  
 more realistically, from his father.

The first paragraph of Quentin's narrative, besides introducing  
 two important themes in The Sound and the Fury-time and, as we shall  
 see, shadows- also shows how Quentin's thought processes are haunted  
 by his father's pessimistic philosophy:

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. It was Grandfather's and  
 when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you  
 the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather  
 excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the  
 reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit  
 your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his  
 father's. I give it to you not that you may remember  
 time, but that you might forget it now and then for a  
 moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer

it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.<sup>27</sup>

This advice is similar to the counsel Hunger gives Galwyn about love and life in general:

I remember to have remarked once that man is a buzzing insect blundering through a strange world, seeking something he can neither name nor recognize, and probably will not want. I think now that I shall refine this aphorism to: Man is abuzzing fly beneath the inverted glass tumbler of his illusions.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout his last day Quentin recalls the pronouncements his father gave him regarding many things, but the statements about time seem the most numerous and nihilistic: "Father said that the constant speculation regarding the position of mechanical hands on an arbitrary dial which is a symptom of mind-function. Excrement Father said, like sweating."<sup>29</sup> Certainly Quentin is obsessed with time for in the first ten pages of his narrative he tells time by a shadow, listens to his watch then smashes its face and tears off its hands, listens to the college chimes, and finally takes his broken watch to a jewelry store whose window is filled with watches. There Quentin actually meets a more realistic Father-Time figure:

He was working at the table behind the window. He was going bald. There was glass in his eye - a metal tube screwed into his face. I went in. The place was full of ticking, like crickets in September grass, and I could hear a big clock on the wall above his head. He looked

up, his eye big and blurred and rushing beyond the glass.<sup>30</sup>

Although Quentin asks the jeweler if any of the watches are right, he does not want to know the correct time. This seems abnormal, but not to Quentin for he desires the meaningful structure his father could not give him while he longs for a timeless world, one ungoverned by watches, where he and Caddy could be alone and protected. He is obsessed by time because it is forced upon him simply by the fact that he is human. Throughout his section, Quentin asks people where clocks are (the boys fishing for example) and listens for hourly chimes while he is actually trying to run away from time. He remembers his father stating that being bound to time is a human tragedy: "only when the clock stops does time come to life."<sup>31</sup> But Quentin wishes to stop the clock, not to bring time to life: rather, he wants to give himself to death.

Both the character of Time in Mayday and Mr. Compson in The Sound and the Fury offer options to Galwyn and Quentin. Time tells Galwyn of the beautiful princesses available while Mr. Compson, somewhat more pessimistically, expounds about life and the choices that Quentin must make. In Mayday, the "Lord of Sleep" also offers Galwyn options: sleep/death, or in essence, non-time. Both Time and Mr. Compson are extremely negative regarding temporal existence; the romantic setting of Mayday is ironically undercut by the things that Time says, but by the time Mr. Compson is heard voicing his nihilistic outlook on life, the irony has been stripped away by the reality of the situation in the Compson family.

## V

Along with time, shadows figure prominently in both narratives. For Galwyn, the shadows include his companions, Pain and Hunger. While riding with them, Galwyn's own "shadow circled tireless before beneath and behind him."<sup>32</sup> In his discourse with Pain, Hunger and Time, Galwyn, in a fit of anger, states that he is wasting his "youth talking with two shadows and a doddering fool who would convince me that I am not even a shadow."<sup>33</sup> When Galwyn seduces Princess Yseult it is in the shade of trees; after that encounter, Galwyn and his two companions discuss the situation and Galwyn states, "I now know that she is no different from all the other girls I have known, be they plain or beautiful. It occurs to me...that it is not the thing itself that man wants so much as the wanting of it."<sup>34</sup> Hunger then replies,

But that, Sir Galwyn, is what life is: a ceaseless fretting to gain shadows to which there is no substance. To my notion man is a buzzing fly blundering through a strange world, seeking something he can neither name nor recognize and probably will not want.<sup>35</sup>

The last sentence echos Time's remarks about existence and seems to reflect Faulkner's own ideas concerning life: "Life is a phenomenon but not a novelty, the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere."<sup>36</sup> Each of these philosophic statements recalls Macbeth's soliloquy when he "hears that Lady Macbeth is dead:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing.<sup>37</sup>

Like Time from Mayday and Mr. Compson and, to a certain extent, Faulkner himself, Macbeth believed that life was essentially meaningless and that time brought only defeat and loss. From the beginning to the end of his last day, most of what Quentin remembers his father saying deals with the absurdity and futility of life, echoing the definition of man that Hunger and Pain give Galwyn:

Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not.<sup>38</sup>

Quentin's father casts a large shadow over Quentin's narrative, perhaps the largest, but his is not the only shadow he encounters on his last day. In fact Quentin seems to see more shadow than reality: shadows of curtains, bridges, trees and, of course, himself. Throughout part of his final day, Quentin is shadowed by the small Italian girl and by unhappy memories of Natalie and Caddy. He is constantly aware of his own shadow - he steps on it, tries to trick it and, foreshadowing his own death, even imagines it drowned while he watches Harvard's crew on the Charles River:

The shadow of the bridge, the tiers of railing, my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it that would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned, the shadow of the package like two shoes wrapped up lying on the water.<sup>39</sup>

Also rowing on the Charles is Quentin's fellow Southerner, Gerald Bland, and he too shadows Quentin on his last day. As Quentin watches Gerald row, he remembers the stories Gerald and his mother relate about Gerald's intelligence and his relations with women and blacks, recalling that the stories are more fiction than fact. Farther along on his last day, Quentin realizes his time is quickly coming to an end and the ticking of his watch again reminds him of Gerald:

I could hear my watch and the train dying away, as though it were running through another summer somewhere, rushing away under the poised gull and all things rushing. Except Gerald. He would be sort of grand too, pulling in a lonely state across the noon, rowing himself right out of noon, up the long bright air like an apotheosis, mounting into drowsing infinity where only he and the gull, the one terrifically motionless, the other in a steady and measured pull and recover that partook of inertia itself, the world punily beneath their shadows on the sun.<sup>40</sup>

Quentin's obsession with shadows points to one of the major themes Faulkner examines in The Sound and the Fury: what is real and what is shadow? With regard to the text, one way to answer the question is to say that Quentin lives in the shadow of the past. Certainly his memories of Candace are more real to him than his preparations for his suicide.



Quite often Quentin's action in the present, in Cambridge, can be summarized in a few lines while his memories of the past are much more full and rich. It could also be argued that Quentin is a pale copy of a normal man, the same way a shadow is a copy of reality. Like a shadow, Quentin cannot effectively deal with the real world: he does not shoot Caddy's first lover, Dalton Ames, when he has the chance; he cannot make love to Caddy when they are alone by the branch, and when he has his knife at her throat, he cannot kill her either. When he fights with Gerald Bland in Boston, Bland boxes the hell out of Quentin and bloodies his clothes. In this instance in particular, Quentin not only loses the fight, a loss he seems to desire, but he fights Gerald because he is thinking of Dalton Ames. Not only is Quentin ineffective in the real world, but his reasons for his actions in the present are inseparable from his memories of the past. The frequent mention of shadows in Quentin's narrative recalls Macbeth's assertion that "Life is but a walking shadow," for Quentin's life certainly is. It also reminds us of T.S. Eliot, a contemporary of Faulkner, when he wrote "Between the motion/ and the art/ Falls the shadow."<sup>41</sup> for surely Quentin is a "hollow man."

## VI

The two designs or shades that ride with Galwyn, Pain and Hunger, are two of the most basic human feelings. Although the characters are somewhat stylized, on one level they represent facts of life that Galwyn

cannot escape until he dies. The allegorical significance of Mayday, and specifically of Pain and Hunger, has been suggested by Carvel Collins, the editor of Mayday:

In The Sound and the Fury Faulkner wrote a Jocyean allegory which shows a realistic surface but has much going on symbolically beneath it, whereas in Mayday he wrote a Bunyanesque allegory. One of the major values of Mayday is that, as a piece related to the much more important novel: and as an allegory of the older type with no necessity to be realistic, it shows Faulkner's interest in allegory and plainly displays some of the significant elements which in The Sound and the Fury lie below the surface.<sup>42</sup>

One such significant element, Collins argues, involves the relation of Pain and Hunger to Quentin's brothers and fellow narrators, Jason and Benjy. Collins' argument builds on his earlier analysis of The Sound and the Fury and the claim that the three Compson brothers are based in part on Freudian concepts of the id, ego and superego.<sup>43</sup> In this assessment Benjy is the id, "a cauldron full of seething excitations...filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs."<sup>44</sup> Jason represents the superego, that part of the psyche that "observes the ego, gives it orders, judges it and threatens it with punishments."<sup>45</sup> This analysis leaves Quentin to embody the ego, mediating between the claims of id and superego.<sup>46</sup> Freud's writings were available to Faulkner and this psychological interpretation is useful and somewhat accurate, but not as the explanation of fictional characters.

However, like Mayday, it is an extremely useful aid in understanding The Sound and the Fury.

Transferring the Freudian theory to Mayday is easily done; Hunger is the id and Pain is the super-ego. Extending this interpretation to The Sound and the Fury, Collins argues that Benjy is Hunger and Jason is Pain, thus leaving Quentin as the fictional embodiment of the ego. Evidence to support this theory abounds. Benjy seems to hunger insatiably for three things: Caddy, the pasture and the sight of an open fire. Jason constantly inflicts pain, on himself and others; his headache that grows through his narrative is an obvious example of this. And Quentin is the questing knight caught between his own sexual/instinctual needs and cultural demands. Further evidence to support this theory exists in the fact that when Quentin longs, one could say hungers, for Caddy his narrative closely resembles Benjy's and when he is contemplating suicide and the pain that such a decision entails, his monologue moves closer to Jason's in style. In Mayday, Collins sees an earlier version of this psycho-drama where Galwyn stands between two "bluntly allegorical figures" which "pull and haul" him about. Hunger suggests the hunger for pleasure-giving affection that Benjy seeks in The Sound and the Fury. Pain suggests Jason's "censorious" objections to his sister and niece as well as his tendency to inflict pain. Like Galwyn positioned between Pain and Hunger, Quentin is torn between his longing for Caddy and the pain of her loss of innocence. Collins elaborates further:

If we visualize the three monologists a speaking to us from a stage, we are aware that Quentin is in the middle, with Benjy on his right hand and Jason on his

left hand. Faulkner placed Sir Galwyn of Mayday in the same position, for the young knight finds that he is accompanied by "a small green design with a hundred prehensile mouths which stood at his right hand, and the small green design was called Hunger" and by "a small red design with a hundred restless hands, which stood at his left hand, and the small red design was called Pain."<sup>47</sup>

Although this spatial arrangement, and the rest of Collins' argument, is plausible, it is far too simplistic and, in its own way, narrowly allegorical. I would argue that each Compson brother embodies the ego; that both Benjy and Jason, and not just Quentin, are torn between hunger and pain. If we use the colors green and red to symbolize hunger and pain, as Faulkner himself did in Mayday, then the argument that each narrator embodies the ego, that each brother is a psychological unity, becomes even more evident. In the opening pages of Benjy's monologue we are presented with two striking visual images: the green pasture which has been turned into a golf course and a red flag indicating a pin placement. The pasture is one of the things Benjy loves and longs for. One could say he hungers for it and the mere sight of it satisfies him, "even better sold than before because now he and TP could not only follow timeless along the fence the motions which it did not even matter to him were humanbeings swinging golfsticks."<sup>48</sup> When the golfers call "caddie," meaning the boy who among other things carries golf bags and tends the pin on each green, Benjy associates their title with his sister's name and, quite naturally, starts blubbering. Benjy's blubbering or crying is his natural reaction to the painful loss of his sister whom he associates with

(green) trees, a reaction that arises, in this specific instance, as a result of the proximity of the golf course. In relation to the color motif, Benjy notices that the flag "was red, flapping on the pasture."<sup>49</sup> Thus pleasure/Hunger/green is inextricably intertwined with bellowing/Pain/red both visually and thematically.

Similarly, Jason's situation is more complex than Collins' simple psychological allegory would have it, again involving the colors green and red. For Jason, green is the color of money. It is the one thing he hungers for above all else. Throughout his narrative, Jason is obsessed with money. He hoards it, he steals it, he seeks to make more of it, he uses it with his whore-mistress to gain pleasure. At the end of his section, we find Jason fantasizing about the money he has lost in the stock market. What this clarifies is that, as with Galwyn, pain and loss also accompany hunger and desire throughout Jason's narrative. Through both his actions and his words, Jason constantly inflicts pain not only on those around him, but on himself. What he most hungers for, money, is invariably associated with its loss and consequent pain. Throughout much of his narrative, Jason experiences a headache: "It felt like somebody was inside with a hammer, beating on it."<sup>50</sup> This headache is most evident while he is chasing his niece, Quentin, who goes for a drive with a man wearing a "red tie": "So when I looked around the door the first thing I saw was the red tie he had on and I was thinking what the hell kind of a man would wear a red tie."<sup>51</sup> The image of the red tie seems to make his headache worsen and in the next fourteen pages of Jason's narrative, the red tie is mentioned ten times. The mere sight of it angers Jason so much that he

even forgets about his headache for a time: "I saw red. When I recognized that red tie, after all I had told her, I forgot about everything. I never thought about my head even until I came to the first forks and had to stop."<sup>52</sup> The phrase, "I saw red," literally means Jason is angry, but it also implies that the idea that his niece- the niece who symbolizes to him the lost job in Herbert's bank- is running around with some drifter from the carnival is too much pain for Jason to bear. The allegory of color to emotion is much more subtle and complex than the obvious red and green designs that symbolize pain and hunger in Mayday. Jason does not allegorically represent, as Collins would have it, pain, but rather the complex interrelationships of hunger/desire and pain.

Quentin, too, has his hungers and pains and they are both complex and colorful. Early in his narrative, Quentin breaks the glass face of his watch and cuts his finger: "There was a red smear on the dial. When I saw it my thumb began to smart."<sup>53</sup> Like his brothers, Quentin fuses the color red with feelings of pain, even to the point in this case that he does not know he is in pain until he sees red. With regard to hunger, Quentin desires two things: his sister and his honor. Faulkner expounded upon Quentin's desires (one could use the word 'hungers') in the "Appendix" written for Malcolm Cowley's edition of The Portable Faulkner:

Quentin III. Who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of all the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal.<sup>54</sup>

Quentin's preoccupation with his sister and their family's honor is often described within the setting of the green shade of the woods near the Compson mansion. One such scene, when Quentin slaps Caddy for kissing a local boy, delineates the complex nature of the colors red and green and their corresponding emotions:

It's for letting it be some darn town squirt I slapped you you will will you now I guess you say calf rope. My red hand coming up out of her face. What do you think of that: scouring her head into the. Grass sticks crisscrossed into the flesh tingling scouring her head.<sup>55</sup>

Certainly a slap that produces such a red mark also involves a certain amount of pain, but the point is that Quentin, too, is hurt by the slap, even more because his pain is psychological, and that this redness is associated with green grass, an apt symbol of the life-processes that will take Caddy away from him. Similarly, Caddy, as a physical example of the family honor, can be both Quentin's love and his hate, represents both his hunger and his pain.

## VII

David Minter, in his critical biography of Faulkner, has pointed out other similarities between Mayday and The Sound and the Fury. Death in Mayday, writes Minter, "is linked to 'Little Sister Death' - a phrase Faulkner had taken from Saint Francis of Assisi; had used in one of his New Orleans sketches; and would use again in The Sound and the Fury in

connection with the most important of all his failed knights."<sup>56</sup> Both Mayday and The Sound and the Fury contain references to Saint Francis and his "Sister Death." Galwyn speaks with Francis twice and meets "Little Sister Death" as he immerses himself in the stream; Quentin thinks about "the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death"<sup>57</sup> on his last day, and encounters a small Italian girl whom Quentin calls 'sister': "a little dirty child with eyes like a toy bear's and two patent-leather pig-tails."<sup>58</sup> She seems Quentin's realistic perception of the symbolic 'Sister Death.' Oddly enough, this feminine portent of doom comes from a poem Saint Francis wrote called "Cantico di Frate Sole."<sup>59</sup> Strictly translated, it means "Canticle of Brother Sun," but it is more commonly known in English as "The Song of the Creatures." In it, Francis describes and praises the wonder and beauty of God's world. It is a poem composed over a period of time, with the last stanza written on his death bed:

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister  
Bodily Death,  
From whom no living man can escape.<sup>60</sup>

Faulkner often commented on his early reading, but he made no special mention of Saint Francis or the reason he alluded to him in his fiction. Perhaps Saint Francis, who was a lover of nature and remains today a figure of simple virtue, was simply available to Faulkner: a well known figure whose saintly goodness and celibacy added even more irony and sympathy to the suicidal decisions of Galwyn and Quentin. Certainly Saint Francis and his "Little Sister Death" add a religious texture to both books, while, at the same time, neatly symbolizing the focus of each protagonist's



quest: in Galwyn's case a "woman with long shining hair like a column of sunny water" and in Quentin's, honor embodied by his actual sister, Candace. In Mayday the reference is saved for the last lines of the book:

What sayest thou, good Saint Francis?  
 "Little Sister Death," said the good Saint Francis.  
 Thus it was in the old days.<sup>61</sup>

Although the exact meaning of the reference to Saint Francis remains obscure, perhaps the answer lies in the fact that both Francis and Faulkner loved nature. On a deeper more symbolic level, the references involve sacrifice. Saint Francis, by the nature of his religious calling, relinquished his worldly possessions, while Galwyn and Quentin, forced by their own lives, choose to relinquish themselves to death.

A less complex similarity between the two books deals with the association of woods and sexuality. In Mayday Galwyn journeys through the woods where he meets and seduces three princesses. The woods themselves are alive and enchanted and as Galwyn ventures deeper into them, he becomes more sexually aware. He also becomes aware of the emptiness of such sexual conquests. In The Sound and the Fury, Quentin, in his own inimitable way, equates sexuality with blacks, darkness and the woods:

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.<sup>62</sup>

By the time Faulkner wrote The Sound and the Fury, the enchanted woods of Mayday had turned into a labyrinth of real human emotion!

## VIII

Although The Sound and the Fury is organized within the framework of Eastertide, Quentin's section lies outside Holy Week. In a novel concerned with the struggle for order, this detachment exhibits a distancing from such a struggle. Quentin's confession of incest is his futile attempt to render his life experience meaningful. He recalls another conversation with his father, this one about incest:

and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into horror and then exorcise it with the truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and i i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldnt have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the world would roar away and he and now this other you are not lying now either but you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every mans brow even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite disregard you will not even be dead and i temporary...<sup>63</sup>

Quentin's father celebrates his "finitude" of existence, his own submission to the "sequence of events," by drinking himself to death, but his words have crucial effect. Quentin begins to understand that his desire to commit incest is merely an attempt to deny the "temporary" confusion of existence; it is an attempt to establish some order by transforming momentary "folly" into eternal "sin," to make "the mad world an uncomplex place of light and shadow."

Therefore, it is not because of his incestuous desire that Quentin commits suicide, nor because of Caddy's marriage, but because he is deprived of any way in which he might see the desire, the marriage or the family's suffering in any meaningful, non-painful perspective. Similarly, Galwyn does not commit suicide because he has had his fill of women, but because the women he has had have not given any pleasurable meaning to his existence. Through his father, Quentin becomes aware that his attempt to transform his temporal complexity into some external order is an empty example of mortal futility and confusion. The result of this awareness, of his acceptance of the meaninglessness of human life, is his suicide: "It's not when you realize that nothing can help you - religion, pride, anything - it's when you realize that you don't need any aid."<sup>64</sup> In Mayday's more romantic setting, Galwyn also believes he needs no assistance, however the implications of the title as a distress signal ironically undercut this belief.

Quentin's striving for coherence is consistently equated with his concern with time and although his search for order is an attempt at the eternal, it is interesting that the search itself is associated with time and

clocks. For Quentin, the "constant speculation" becomes the symbol of his consciousness. The destruction of his grandfather's watch and his flight away from bells and whistles that mark time are pre-enactments of his suicide. The arbitrary measurement of time has come to represent the arbitrary but ceaseless function of the mind itself and the order it must strive to create. Because Quentin is aware of the arbitrary nature of time, he realizes he can conquer it, and consciousness, not by an act of ultimate and immutable vision, but only through an act of relinquishment: "flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning. Committed suicide in Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 1910."<sup>65</sup>

## IX

Carvel Collins is one of the most knowledgeable of all Faulkner scholars, especially regarding the novelist's early career. He has compiled and edited William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry and a volume of short stories and journalistic pieces titled New Orleans Sketches that Faulkner wrote in the early 1920's. These two books are invaluable aids to those who study the life and art of William Faulkner, but his edition of Mayday is, perhaps, his most important scholarly achievement. With the publication of Mayday, Collins has made Faulkner more accessible: by studying the allegorical romance, Mayday, and noting the similarities between it and The Sound and the Fury, Quentin's narrative becomes

more coherent and focused. Since The Sound and the Fury held such a special place in Faulkner's heart, and since the novel is universally acclaimed among the best in any language, Collins' work with Mayday is that much more significant and important.

Collins' introduction to Mayday is both useful and enlightening, but Faulkner's novels are not simply and easily explained. To believe that the characters in Mayday and The Sound and the Fury are purely fictional representations of Freudian theory is as unfounded and naive as believing The Sound and the Fury germinated from the single image of a young girl's muddied drawers. Surely Faulkner's fictional world is much more than an "uncomplex world of light and shadow," and his characters, like Galwyn and especially Quentin, are also too complex to be defined neatly and easily.

Many similarities between Galwyn and Quentin are self-evident, with their suicides by drowning the most obvious. The question, however, is not how similar the two stories are, but how Faulkner reworked the personal, romantic material from Mayday into Quentin's section of The Sound and the Fury. Mayday is not the source for Quentin's narrative any more than Freud is the source for Faulkner's characterizations; however, an understanding of Freudian psychology and a familiarity with Mayday and the story of Sir Galwyn adds greatly to an appreciation of Quentin Compson and The Sound and the Fury.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley eds. , Faulkner at West Point (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 419, 438, 508-19.

<sup>4</sup> William Faulkner, Mayday (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Mayday, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Mayday, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Mayday, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Mayday, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Mayday, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Mayday, pp. 52-53.

<sup>11</sup> Mayday, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Mayday, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> Mayday, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957).

15 The Sound and the Fury, p. 136.

16 Slatoff traces the quest motif in Faulkner's fiction in his book, Quest For Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960). He argues that Faulkner's quests involve unresolved ambiguities, incomplete patterns and vague symbolism; he also leaves no doubt regarding the consistency and purpose of Faulkner's deliberate preoccupation with narrative confusion. Slatoff's conclusion labels this preoccupation as a "quest for failure," a quest which may suggest the greatness of what has been attempted, but too often simply emphasizes the inconclusiveness and hopelessness of the attempt itself.

17 The Sound and the Fury, p.93.

18 Mayday, p. 38.

19 Eugene Vinaver ed., Malory: Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 37.

20 Mayday, p. 83.

21 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 411-12.

22 The Sound and the Fury, p. 138.

23 Mayday, p. 56.

24 Mayday, pp. 57-8.

25 Mayday, p. 59.

26 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 220-21.

27 The Sound and the Fury, p. 93.

28 Mayday, p. 80.

29 The Sound and the Fury, p. 94.

30 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 102-03.

- 31 The Sound and the Fury, p. 105.
- 32 Mayday, p. 53.
- 33 Mayday, p. 58.
- 34 Mayday, p. 71.
- 35 Mayday, p. 71.
- 36 Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 15.
- 38 The Sound and the Fury, p. 218.
- 39 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 110-11.
- 40 The Sound and the Fury, p. 149.
- 41 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in Modern Poetry vol. VII, Maynard Mack, Lenord Dean and William Frost, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1951), p. 165.
- 42 Mayday, p. 32.
- 43 Carvel Collins, "The Interior Monologues of The Sound and the Fury," English Institute Essays 1952, Alan S. Downer, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), pp. 29-56.
- 44 Ronald W. Clark, Freud: The Man and the Cause (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 436.
- 45 Freud, p. 437.
- 46 Mayday, pp. 33-36.
- 47 Mayday, p. 34.
- 48 The Sound and the Fury, p. 423.
- 49 The Sound and the Fury, p. 2.



- 50 The Sound and the Fury, p. 297.
- 51 The Sound and the Fury, p. 291.
- 52 The Sound and the Fury, p. 297.
- 53 The Sound and the Fury, p. 99.
- 54 The Sound and the Fury, p. 411.
- 55 The Sound and the Fury, p. 166 (italics are Faulkner's).
- 56 David Minter, William Faulkner: His Life and Work (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), p.62.
- 57 The Sound and the Fury, p. 94.
- 58 The Sound and the Fury, p. 155.
- 59 Lawrence Cunningham, Saint Francis of Assisi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 37. Also of note is a short critical biography of the life of Saint Francis by G. K. Chesterton (Saint Francis of Assisi, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1924). The significance lies in the date of the trade publication (1924), the date of the first printing (1928), and the availability of the book to Faulkner just prior to his writing Mayday and The Sound and the Fury. Of course, "Sister Death" is mentioned in the text, and it is also interesting that Chesterton, while discussing whether or not Saint Francis actually existed, called such an argument a "reductio ad absurdum," not once, but twice (Chesterton, Saint Francis of Assisi, pp. 136-37). See The Sound and the Fury, p. 93.
- 60 Cunningham, Saint Francis of Assisi, p. 38.
- 61 Mayday, p.87.
- 62 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 113-14.
- 63 The Sound and the Fury, pp. 219-20.
- 64 The Sound and the Fury, p. 98.
- 65 The Sound and the Fury, p. 411.

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