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Tracey S. Jordan
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"IT'S A HARD COUNTRY ON MAN": A STUDY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S

AS I LAY DYING AND THE HAMLET

By

Tracey S. Jordan

B.A., University of Montana, 1978

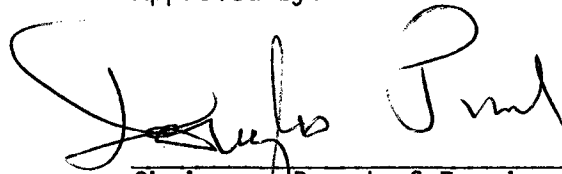
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Literature

"It's a Hard Country on Man": A Study of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* (80. pp.)

Director: Douglas Purl



Women are equated with the land in Faulkner's fiction, the land itself a symbol charged with the same ambivalence characteristic of Faulkner's treatment of women: Eula is lovely as nature, Addie hard and unrelenting as a natural force. The men of *The Hamlet* and *As I Lay Dying* are farmers, tied to the land, resigned both to the power the land has over them and to the powerful women who shape men's lives as surely as the earth itself.

In *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren's power as a mother is equivalent to that of the land, which forms man in its own image. Addie, too, leaves her mark on each of her children. Her chosen sons, Cash and Jewel, are marked by the end of the funeral journey: Jewel has a black, burned back, Cash a black foot. But it is Darl, with his vision of the land and his extraordinary ability to see into the secret lives of those around him, who most resembles his mother. Darl's identification with his mother is a mark of his love for her; his hostility toward Addie, the result of her rejection of him, is consistently betrayed in his behavior toward Jewel and in his efforts to expose his mother's adultery.

The ambivalence which characterizes Darl's reaction toward Addie reappears in the figure of V. K. Ratliff, whose identification of women with the earth leads to his final self-betrayal. Though Ratliff is sympathetic to women, identifying himself with them to the extent that he sews his own shirts, he nevertheless fears women, avoiding romantic involvement with any of the two- or four-legged female creatures which roam the pages of *The Hamlet*. Ratliff's eternal renunciation of women is balanced, in the novel, by Ike Snopes's eternal devotion to his beloved heifer. It is only when Ratliff falls, seduced by the treasure in the earth, that he becomes fully human. The final image with which *The Hamlet* ends, the image of Armstid digging himself back into the earth, testifies to the fatal attraction exerted by women in Faulkner's work.

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INTRODUCTION

The study in conjunction of these two novels, *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet*, is something which requires justification. While unified by the metaphor of the land and the rural community which has invested the land with such value, presented so realistically in both novels, the two works under consideration have nevertheless been taken to represent two different fictional modes: *The Hamlet* is generally regarded as comic, *As I Lay Dying* as tragic. It must be admitted that such a system of classification, applied to these novels, can only be described as woefully inadequate. The critical articles dealing with *As I Lay Dying* as a comedy are at least as plentiful as those which treat the novel as a serious one, many critics insisting that it is both.¹ *The Hamlet*, too, is a work which seems to defy classification, sustaining as it does "a range of style from lyricism to bathos; genial good humor alternating with corrosive irony; a series of episodes in which the tall tale nudges the love idyl and a fantasy in Satan's throne room goes hand in hand with a sombre murder story."² In bringing

¹See Olga W. Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness: *As I Lay Dying*," *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), pp. 50-65; André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, Trans. Roger Little (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1973); William Rosskey, "*As I Lay Dying*: The Insane World," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (Spring, 1962), 87-95.

²Viola Hopkins, "William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*: A Study in Meaning and Form," *Accent*, 15 (Spring, 1955), 125.

the two novels together, therefore, an attempt has been made to emphasize recurring images and structural patterns common to both; in addition, the figure of the artist (Darl in *As I Lay Dying* and Ratliff in *The Hamlet*) is central to each novel and to an understanding of Faulkner's attitude toward his work.

Darl's laughter gives way to Ratliff's humorous detachment and Will Varner's "fierce risibility."³ Yet the laughter itself becomes not only a means of distancing the reader from experience but a critical weapon allowing Faulkner's characters to strip the world bare, revealing it for what it is. It is significant that in Darl we are given a romantic figure, a misfit whose decisive act is an amoral one, unacceptable by conventional social standards,⁴ while in Ratliff we are given a man social by nature, whose critical voice becomes the voice of a moral crusader, upholding the values of the society to which he is so inextricably wedded. Darl's world is a private one, the form Faulkner uses to embody it a series of isolated monologues, each cut off from the other, "hermetically sealed."⁵ Ratliff's world is public, and it

³William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (1940; rpt. New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1956), p. 308. All subsequent references to this work appear as TH in parentheses in the text.

⁴Addie, too, is a misfit who yearns toward a sexual-mystical communion with God and who does not hesitate to commit a sin or, finally, to lay down her life in order to achieve her own salvation. Darl is most like his mother in that he has inherited the same desire to mark the lives around him, his clairvoyance giving him access to their secret selfish lives. Both Darl and Addie are set against the surrounding community: what is sin in Addie is insane in Darl, mother and son completely disregarding conventional social values, romantic figures in a world too small, too narrow to contain them.

⁵Calvin Bedient, "Pride and Nakedness: *As I Lay Dying*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 29 (March, 1968), 64.

takes a much more conventional literary shape, one which borrows from long-established folk traditions.

While *As I Lay Dying* is at once a protest against the solitary lives men are condemned to lead and an insistence on the worth and beauty of each individual life,⁶ in *The Hamlet* what was protest has become disillusionment, a cynicism which allows Ratliff to meet even his own defeat with typical unsurprise, in much the same way that Hightower comments only, "So this is love. I see. I was wrong about it too,"⁷ when he finally realizes that his fiancée's love conceals a desperate need to escape from her present life. Darl's hysterical laughter becomes the measure of his innocence, betraying an unexpected depth of feeling. Yet, Darl's laughter is not so much a response to his betrayal as it is a recognition similar to Hightower's "I see." Darl's "Yes yes yes yes yes" (Darl, p. 243) is an acknowledgment, not of his fate but of his belated recognition of its logical necessity. Darl, who knows so much, who is able to foresee his mother's death and know the instant of it; Darl, who should have known, does not, cannot see the path of his coming destruction. It is only after it has come to pass that Darl sees the truth, knows what Dewey Dell and Jewel and Cash are capable of, knows human nature. Ratliff, too, should have known

⁶William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930; rpt. New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1964). All subsequent references to this work appear as AILD in parentheses in the text, identified by character name (i.e., the name appearing as the chapter heading from which the quotation has been taken).

⁷William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932; rpt. New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1972), p. 455.

better than to be taken in by Flem, his realization of his mistake a kind of awakening:

Because something had clicked in his mind again. It might have been while he was asleep, he didn't know. But he knew that this time it was right. Only I dont want to look at it, hear it, he thought, squatting, holding the skillet steady over the fire, squinting his watering eyes against the smoke which the broken chimney no longer drew out of the house. I dont dare to. Anyway, I dont have to yet. (TH, pp. 358-359).

Both men seek to know the world, that mysterious quality which is human nature. *The Hamlet* occasionally offers the same satisfaction found in a detective story as Ratliff attempts to find out exactly what makes Flem tick:

I quit too soon. I went as far as one Snopes will set fire to another Snopes's barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too. (TH, p. 88.)

Both novels have at their center men who are actively engaged in the study of their fellow man. Yet, while Darl's moment of recognition is a coming alive only to be interred, the bars of his cage in Jackson the horrifying symbol of his isolation, Ratliff's discovery is shared, providing a vital link between himself and every other character in the novel. Together, Ratliff and Bookwright go off to examine their coins and to learn the extent of their folly. When Ratliff falls, he joins the human race, no longer a spectator looking upon the actions of men with amused and musing indifference. Darl is the victim of a society that does not understand him, Ratliff a victim *because* he is part of human society, with all its failings.

The Bundrens each occupy a world apart, a world with its own

language, its own symbols: Vardaman's mother is a fish, Jewel's a horse; Cash's mother, the box he makes for her. Darl has no mother; Dewey Dell will shortly become one. The meaning of the word mother is translated into five different languages, Darl the only character fluent in each, the only character capable of talking the "voiceless speech" (Addie, p. 167). Darl has no need of words. Like Addie, he insists on an intimacy so close words are unnecessary. He and Cash understand each other without words, just as he and Dewey Dell talk "without the words" (Dewey Dell, p. 26). Because he is gifted with this special insight, Darl must be seen as the figure of the artist, perceived as mad by a world which has often failed to distinguish the artist from the madman. In *As I Lay Dying*, it is Darl who takes us beneath the surface of pretence and deceit to reveal the truth. But Darl exists in a world where most people live by the word, content to practice deception because the truth is so often painful. Darl's truth threatens to strip the world bare, leaving its human inhabitants vulnerable in their nakedness. His position in society is precarious, the values he represents not those of the world around him.

In contrast, V. K. Ratliff is perfectly attuned to the community in which he lives. He is almost a man without a private life (it is nearly the end of the novel before we learn that he has a sister with whom he shares a house), his real home the front of Varner's store. In *The Hamlet* the family, dominated by Addie, has been replaced by a larger community, a male society with its own universally-understood codes and rituals, a shared language: when Mink and Houston curse each other on the steps of Varner's store, they are calm and

deliberate, playing the prescribed scene out to its end, and when Bookwright advises Ratliff to go buy his goats before Flem does, he goes "as far and even further than a man can let himself go in another man's trade" (TH, p. 82). Yet the ideal originally presented in *As I Lay Dying* survives in *The Hamlet*: true intimacy, the kind that does not require words, exists between Ike and the cow, both incapable of speech, incapable of falsifying experience. Jewel's relationship with his horse (on which he lavishes all the love he feels for his mother), translated into the world of *The Hamlet*, becomes Ike's relationship with the cow. The ideal of love in both novels is the love that exists between mother and son, but it is an ideal which is constantly undercut, charged with the ambivalence of the Oedipal conflict. Thus it is Ratliff who puts an end to Ike's affair with the cow, just as it is Darl who constantly seeks to expose for what it is Jewel's incestuous love for his horse.

The Oedipal conflict gives rise not only to a fear of women (associated with the fear of castration, realized as death), but ultimately to an identification with them.⁸ Such a supposition goes

⁸John T. Irwin has dealt with Oedipal patterns in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in his recent book, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975). Irwin points out that sex is associated with death, a death which represents a return to the mother's womb:

"We can see how, in the narcissistic *liebestod*, castration is transformed into death, for when the son, out of the fear of castration, performs a psychological self-castration, he identifies himself not with what remains, with what is saved (the living, castrated son) but with what is lost (the dead, detached phallus). In this mechanism, the living subject sees itself as the dead object. And yet by a paradoxical reversal, the son's identification with the detached phallus becomes in a new way an identification with the castrated son, for the

a long way toward explaining the feminization so apparent in some of Faulkner's male characters, a feminization particularly noticeable in Faulkner's artists: both Darl and Ratliff are given feminine traits, Darl credited with a female intuition very similar to his mother's, Ratliff sewing his own shirts. While Darl's burning of his mother's coffin betrays his ambivalence toward the woman who rejected him (representing simultaneously his attempt to save her from any further humiliation and an attempt to destroy her once and for all), Ratliff's reaction to Eula's marriage likewise encompasses two opposing points of view:

But that was all right, it was just meat, just gal-meat he thought, and God knows there was a plenty of that, yesterday and tomorrow too. (TH, p. 149.)

What he felt was outrage at the waste, the useless squandering at a situation intrinsically and inherently wrong by any economy . . . as though the gods themselves had funnelled all the concentrated bright wet-slanted unparadised June onto a dung-heap, breeding pismires. (TH, p. 159.)

Ratliff identifies Eula with the land in the same way that Darl does Addie, with his eyes "full of the land" (Anse, p. 35). Faulkner's women are equated with the land because they *are* maternal figures, earth mothers lovely as nature (Eula), but hard and unrelenting as a natural force (Addie). Peabody's sense of the land as "shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image"

son without a phallus is a woman, and when, in the narcissistic *lieb-
bestod*, the son, who is wholly identified with the detached phallus,
enters the mother's womb, that total *reincorporation* of the son into the
mother becomes an *identification* of the son with the mother--the son
becomes a woman. In the narcissistic love-death, the son plays not just
the two masculine roles in the Oedipal triangle, he plays the feminine
role as well" (p. 152).

(Peabody, p. 44) is precisely what Addie tries to do as a mother, leaving her mark on each of her children. In her maternal role Addie not only creates life but is herself drawn into it, becoming a part of life:

"It's getting into life, getting into it and wrapping it around you, becoming a part of it. Women can do it without art--old biology takes care of that. But men, men . . . A woman conceives: does she care afterward whose seed it was? Not she. . . . But in art a man can create without any assistance at all: what he does is his."⁹

Woman's sheer creative productivity is emphasized again when Labove speaks of Eula as a field capable of "drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of living seed its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the harvest he could ever hope to gather and save" (TH, p. 118). Faulkner's artists necessarily stand in awe of such a creative gift and it is one they seek to emulate through art.¹⁰

⁹William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (1927; new ed. New York, N.Y.: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 264-265.

¹⁰Irwin, *op. cit.*, suggests that in the process of writing the author creates a double, "the author's self . . . reconstituted within the realm of language as the Other, a narcissistic mirroring" (p. 159). This other self is a feminine one. In his analysis of *Mosquitoes*, Irwin calls attention to Faulkner's use of the vase in order to suggest the feminization of the author's self as expressed in his work:

"As Josh and Pat Robyn represent a kind of brother-sister doubling and as Gordon's desire for Pat stands for the masculine artist's desire for his feminine-masculine other self embodied in the work of art, so the triangle is completed in the doubling between Gordon and Josh. Gordon has sculpted the torso of a virgin, Josh spends the whole novel carving the wooden bowl of a pipe. In these parallel activities of the two male figures in the triangle, we find the two images that, along with the myth of Narcissus, dominated Faulkner's sense of the artist's relation to his work, for surely Josh's carving of the bowl of a pipe is the embryonic form of that image of the vase or Grecian urn found in *Sartoris* and *Light in August*, just as Gordon's sculpting of an

Yet, invested with such power, Faulkner's women often become terrifying creations: Addie, harsh and unbending, inflicts her will on her family even after her death. Eula enslaves virtually every man in Frenchman's Bend. If it is the land that creates man, it creates him only "to be its born and fated thrall forever until he die[s]" (TH, p. 359). Darl, with his eyes "full of the land" is chained to the earth, enslaved by his own obsession in the same way that Labove is enthralled by Eula, whom he sees as a piece of "fine land rich and fecund and foul" (TH, p. 118). Nor can Ratliff free himself completely of his desire for the land, undone in the end by the fatal attraction that the Old Frenchman place has always had for him. Women and the land exert such a powerful fascination, threatening to overwhelm and engulf the self, that they must be resisted, Faulkner's heroic men always self-divided, striving against their own obsessive desire.

Perhaps the most significant difference in the vision which

ideal virgin whom he subsequently identifies with Pat is derived from the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Obviously, the urn and the sculpture are conjugate, reversible images. In the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the statue of an ideal woman becomes a real, live girl because of the sculptor's love for his creation, while in the case of Keat's Grecian urn a real, live girl becomes an immortal, ideal woman painted on the side of a vase, her virgin purity preserved forever intact by art--'Thou still unravashied bride of quietness'" (p. 168-169).

Yet, even in the realm of art, sex and death are fused, Irwin acknowledging that the "woman-vase is a dual image: it is the womb of art only because it is also the burial urn of the artist's self" (p. 169). Art is equally self-destroying and self-creating, the writer giving birth to the double which is the work itself and then cutting himself off from it, a separation which represents a "self-castration that transforms the masculine artist into the feminine-masculine vase of the work" (p. 171).

informs *As I Lay Dying* and that which gives us *The Hamlet* lies in the later novel's greater emphasis on this inner conflict. While Darl is seen as a victim of society, Ratliff's enemy is clearly located within, a result of Faulkner's mature artistic vision, a vision increasingly concerned with the "problems of the human heart in conflict with itself."¹¹

Even in the face of Faulkner's own expression of interest in the human heart divided by conflict, it has been all too easy, particularly with respect to *The Hamlet*, for critics to divide Faulkner's world up into good and bad characters. If we are to believe that the "judgment Faulkner makes between the characters [in *The Hamlet*] is always the same: Ratliff--yes; Flem--no,"¹² it is difficult to see where the conflict arises: we have only melodrama, the pure and noble hero pitted against a cardboard villain. Flem Snopes has been condemned for his "rapacity" and an "opportunism" which is, after all, only "a perfect willingness to use whatever comes along" in the service of his ambition.¹³ But what could be closer to Faulkner's conception of the writer as a "completely ruthless" human being who will not even hesitate to "rob his mother" for his art, his "dream"?¹⁴ Flem's dream,

¹¹William Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds. (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 348.

¹²Ann L. Hayes, "The World of *The Hamlet*," *Studies in Faulkner* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1961), p. 7.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: An Interview," *Three Decades of Criticism*, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, eds. (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 68.

like Sutpen's, is an ambitious one, but so is the writer's ("Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don't bother *just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors*. Try to be better than yourself" [italics mine]),⁵ the dream itself sweeping every other consideration away before it, the writer a person who will "rob, borrow, beg, or steal from anybody and everybody to get the work done."¹⁶

The same ruthless insistence on the realization of her own ideals is what gives Addie Bundren her stature as a romantic heroine. But Anse, that Proto-Snopes, is not devoid of the same characteristic. Continually identified with the buzzards that wheel lazily above Addie's coffin, his hand "awkward as a claw" (Darl, p. 51), himself "like a tall bird hunched in the cold weather" (Addie, p. 162), Anse is admirable because he survives, death itself providing him with food for life. Faulkner volunteers this estimation of the buzzard: "You know if I were reincarnated, I'd want to come back a buzzard. Nothing hates him or envies him or wants him or needs him. He is never bothered or in danger, *and he can eat anything*" (italics mine).¹⁷ Eula, the continually-eating center of *The Hamlet*, gives way to Flem, whose constantly-rotating jaw devours all of Frenchmen's Bend. The Bundrens, of course, are last seen calmly digesting their horrendous experience as they munch away mindlessly on a bunch of bananas. Eula, Flem, Anse

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 72.

and his children, all are admirable and appalling at the same time. That is why our hearts break in two at this point, saying 'yes' and 'no' to these characters at one and the same time. To hold that Snopesism poses a threat to the people of Frenchmen's Bend while Eula represents "the richness and promise that might have been fulfilled" is to cheat Faulkner's work of a great deal of its complexity.¹⁸ Eula is attractive, yes--fatally so, like the gaudy-colored Texas ponies so irresistably attractive to the men of the Bend that they willingly rush to their own destruction. In the same way, Anse hurries to take another wife, replacing Addie with a woman just as tough and dangerous as his first. It is appropriate that Jewel takes as a surrogate for his mother a descendant of those wild and untamed ponies which run through *The Hamlet* like a spotted whirlwind. In Faulkner's work, women are undeniably dangerous: Dewey Dell betrays her own brother; Eula gives birth to a daughter who arranges the murder of her own father. It is no wonder that Faulkner's most intelligent men are those who fight against their own desire, for it is a desire which promises only their own destruction. While uniquely sympathetic to women, Ratliff avoids any entanglement with them, *resembling no one as much as Flem* in the complete absence of his desire.

The unwomaned ideal represented by Flem is a violent reaction to Ike's complete romantic servitude, Flem and Ike Snopes creating between them the opposite poles of conflicting ideals. In the figure of V. K. Ratliff, Faulkner attempts to incorporate the best of both worlds. If

¹⁸Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Ratliff is resolved never to be caught, like Ike, and enslaved by a female, he nevertheless remains susceptible to the attraction exerted by Eula and the land. When Ratliff falls, seduced by the promise of the earth's treasure, he becomes fully human, doomed like the rest of mankind to be betrayed by his own desires. Having sought, like Flem, to eradicate desire, Ratliff fails and in failing establishes his own humanity. If Ike and his love are somewhat less than human, so is Flem. In Ratliff, the desire to love and the will to resist it are combined, struggling one against the other in the human heart.

Chapter 1

WOMEN, MOTHERHOOD, AND THE LAND

When I first read *As I Lay Dying*, I thought it was Anse; I thought he was the one who destroyed Addie and that the book was written against him. But it wasn't Anse--that man who is the victim he seems, that man "whose name, 'handle for a container' (French, *anse*), suggests the empty shape he is."¹ Anse is an empty container waiting to be filled with life; in this, he seems almost a woman,² resembling Lena Grove in his uncanny ability to provoke those around him into grudging helpfulness.³ Lena, her swollen belly the all-too-obvious

¹Edward Wasiolek, "As I Lay Dying: Distortion in the Slow Eddy of Current Opinion," *Critique*, 3 (Spring-Fall, 1959), 19.

²In his chapter on the Bundrens, "Odyssey of the Bundrens," *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), Cleanth Brooks suggests there is a reversal of roles in Anse and Addie. Anse is feminine, characterized by the "profound inertia that Faulkner usually associates with woman," and Addie is "another example of Faulkner's masculinized women" (p. 148).

³In an interview with Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: An Interview," *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), Faulkner names Lena and Anse as characters who "pretty well coped" with their fate (p. 80). In the same interview, it is interesting to note Faulkner's whimsical desire to be reincarnated as a buzzard: "You know that if I were reincarnated, I'd want to come back a buzzard. Nothing hates him or envies him or wants him or needs him. He is never bothered or in danger, and he can eat anything" (p. 72). When the toothless Anse finally arrives in Jefferson and simultaneously acquires a new wife and a new set of choppers, he becomes the king of carrion eaters, a man able to turn a profit from death itself.

sign of her own victimization, invariably elicits a sympathetic response just as Anse, with his humped back, deformed feet, and toothless gums, is a figure pregnant with his own misfortune, demanding sympathy for the hard life which is man's lot on this earth: "It's a hard country on man" (Anse, p. 104).

When Cora interprets Addie's death as a "judgment on Anse Bundren" (Tull, p. 69), Tull disagrees:

If it's a judgment, it aint right. Because the Lord's got more to do than that. He's bound to have. Because the only burden Anse Bundren's ever had is himself. And when folks talks him low, I think to myself he aint that less of a man or he couldn't a bore himself this long. (Tull, p. 70.)

Anse endures. Like the maimed Donald Mahon of *Soldier's Pay*, who has his own refuge, "the personal Garden of Eden to which he would find his way back,"⁴ Anse retreats to his own hilltop. Peabody informs us that "Anse has not been in town in twelve years" (Peabody, p. 41), yet it is through his desire for isolation that Faulkner communicates the intensity of Anse's attachment to the land and to Addie. If Jewel is not his father's natural son, he is at least Anse's spiritual descendant. Jewel's passionate desire to cut himself off from the outside world to enjoy exclusive possession of his mother is a desire his father has tried to enact:

It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less and *we could be quiet.* (Jewel, p. 15, italics mine.)

⁴Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 78.

"We could be quiet." It is a wish that gives voice to Anse's own wistful desire for a static existence in which man is rooted in the earth "like a tree or a stand of corn" (Anse, p. 35). The same essential quality of motionless being is characteristic of Anse: his supreme inertia becomes a way of isolating himself in time corresponding to his desire for spatial isolation on a remote hilltop. For Faulkner, "life is motion" and

the aim of every artist is to *arrest motion*, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life. Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move."⁵ (Italics mine.)

Like the artist, Anse seeks to "arrest motion," achieving a paradoxical kind of immortality by forsaking the motion that is life. Anse's ultimate desire for an existence rooted in the earth is equivalent to Jewel's wish for eternal and exclusive possession of his mother; for, in Faulkner's world, the earth is female, the land a powerful and unpredictable mother inexorably shaping the lives of her children.

As I Lay Dying is at once a tribute to the power of a woman, Addie Bundren, and an attempt to expose her as a woman vulnerable, mortal and, like Eula Varner, "not even damned" so far removed is she from the society of men.⁶ Thus Anse prevails over Addie while, at the

⁵Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶In her article, "Masculinity and Menfolk in *The Hamlet*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 22 (Summer, 1969, 181-189, Panthea Reid Broughton notes the novel's emphasis on a distinctively male society--the men who gather in front of Varner's store.

same time, he remains an abject tiller of the land, the earth's slave and woman's thrall. Anse cannot live without a woman, replacing Addie as soon as she has been decently buried, while his power lies in the fact that, for Anse, any woman will do.

The themes of love and bondage are insistently repeated in *The Hamlet*, most notably in the figures of Houston, Labove, and Mink Snopes. Love takes on the quality of sexual thralldom, an obsessive madness which is more truly an emotional dependency or addiction:

What [Houston] did not comprehend was that until now he had not known what true slavery was--that single *despotic undeviating will* of the *enslaved* not only for possession, *complete assimilation*, but to coerce and reshape the *enslaver* into the *seemliness of his victimization*. (TH, pp. 206-207, italics mine.)

The roles of "enslaved" and "enslaver" are curiously reversed, much as they are in the tortured sequence where Labove examines his own madness:

He was mad. He knew it. There would be times now when he did not even want to make love to [Eula] but wanted to hurt her, see blood spring and run . . . to leave some indelible mark of himself Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him, whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate before that face He would be as a child before that knowledge. He would be like a young girl, a maiden. (TH, p. 119.)

It is not difficult to recognize Addie as one of those enslaved women who nevertheless inflict their "despotic undeviating will" on those they love. Addie it is who wishes to "shape and coerce the terrible blood" (Addie, p. 167) and who ends by shaping Anse into the "seemliness of his victimization." Addie's power is that of a mother, a power which comes, in the course of the novel, to be equivalent to that of the earth, the original mother of men.

In *The Hamlet* the final image is of Armstid digging himself

back into "that earth which had produced him to be its born and fated thrall forever until he died" (TH, p. 359). Armstid digs himself back into the earth, vanishing into it so that he seems to have been "cut in two at the hips, the dead torso, not even knowing it was dead, laboring on in measured stoop and recover like a metronome" (TH, p. 359), much as Houston's body vanishes into the trunk of an old dead tree and Darl's life vanishes with his mother's coffin as if he had been buried in the box alongside her, his image translated to another kind of box, a "cage in Jackson" (Darl, p. 244). These are images of the "complete assimilation" that Faulkner attributes to the enslaved woman, that paradoxical power she has to possess her enslaver so that man is almost incorporated into the body of the woman--returned to the womb, the earth from whence he came.⁷

⁷The image of Armstid "cut in two at the hips" by the earth is strikingly repeated in *As I Lay Dying*:

"Jewel and Vernon are in the river again. From here they do not appear to violate the surface at all; it is as though it had severed them both at a single blow, the two torsos moving with infinitesimal and ludicrous care upon the surface. It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time. As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the *myriad original motion*, and seeing and hearing in themselves blind and deaf; fury in itself quiet with stagnation. Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the *horizons and valleys of the earth*" (Darl, p. 156, italics mine).

The yellow surface of the muddy river takes on the solidity of the earth, the "myriad original motion" which is the river ultimately giving way to the image of Dewey Dell, her breasts shaping "the horizons and valleys of the earth." Individual consciousness is obliterated, swallowed up by the eternal river, the immensity of the land.

In *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), John T. Irwin points out that the image of Caddy's muddy drawers in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is associated with the death of Damuddy, noting that "Quentin's obsessive linking of these two images (his sexual desire for his sister

Appropriately enough, Armstid becomes childlike in his final madness ("Then he got up, onto his hands and knees first as small children do" [TH, p. 366]), just as Labove imagines himself to be "a child before [Eula's] knowledge" (TH, p. 119), and Mink Snopes sees himself "not only as a child but as a child of another race and species" (TH, p. 237) when confronted with his wife and her collection of "cuckolding shades" (TH, p. 221). It is even more appropriate, then, that the archetypal romance in *The Hamlet* is the love affair between Ike and his cow (just as the love between Jewel and his horse becomes the symbolic center of *As I Lay Dying*).

The idiot and cow move "in womb-dimension, the unavoidable first and the inescapable last" (TH, p. 185), through a landscape wet with rain which descends "like gauzy umbilical loops from the bellied cumulae, the sun-bellied ewes of summer grazing up the wind from the southwest" (TH, p. 184). The milk the cow produces suggest the original tie between mother and infant and, indeed, milk becomes one of the recurring images in *The Hamlet*: Eula's body is "as fluid and muscleless as a miraculous intact milk: (TH, p. 121) and Ab Snopes is constantly described as "curdled" or "soured" (TH, p. 19). When Mink Snopes gazes at his wife, he thinks, "It's like drink. It's like dope to me" (TH, p. 221).

and death) involves the repetition, in each case, of the same word--'muddy'--in Candace's 'muddy drawers' and 'Damuddy's' funeral." According to Irwin, sex is associated with death because it is threatening, "for the threat that sexual union poses to the bright, narcissistic ego is, in Quentin's mind, associated with the image of mud--soft, dark, corrupting, enveloping--the image of being swallowed up by the earth" (pp. 44-45).

Love is an addiction, a nearly physical dependency established in childhood against which Faulkner's men fight. If, in *As I Lay Dying*, the maternal image finds direct expression in Addie Bundren, in *The Hamlet* Faulkner works with even greater subtlety to evoke the mother through symbol and image only. Even so, the two works are connected by the symbol of the land. When Labove tries to imagine Eula's future husband, he ends by speaking a metaphorical language in which Eula is equated with the land, the great earth mother:

[Eula's husband] would not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, baubles, as he might own, not a picture, statue: a field, say. He saw it: the fine land *rich and fecund and foul* and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it, oblivious, drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of *living seed* its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the *harvest* he could ever hope to gather and save. (TH, pp. 118-119, italics mine.)

Labove's vision of the land, "rich and fecund and foul," signals an ambivalence characteristic of Faulkner's treatment of women, an ambivalence which lives at the heart of both novels. It is interesting to note that Eula, with all her supposed fertility (a fertility thwarted in the course of the novel by her marriage to the impotent Flem), creates but one child. The real "harvest" belongs to old Will Varner, whose "living seed" has produced a large number of children, and to Flem, whose remarkable ability to repopulate Frenchmen's Bend with Snopeses suggests more precisely the lower organism's ability to replicate itself. Varner, who invokes the silvery rays of the moon in order to assure his procreative success, is like Flem, who acquires the woman with the hair of gold as part of a commercial transaction. Both become male analogues to Eula, their combined financial success

equivalent to her romantic conquests: the rich fertility of the land is readily translated into terms of material wealth.⁸ The mercantile spirit which taints Labove's language is realized in the money theme which plays such an important role in *The Hamlet*.

Darl, with "his eyes full of the land," (Anse, p. 35) becomes (like Labove) a man maddened by his own vision of the land, a tragic figure enslaved by his own obsession. If Eula is Labove's downfall, Addie is Darl's; if Labove wrestles with Eula in half-erotic combat, Darl wrestles with the land, struggling against the waters of the flood and forces of nature in a combat as doomed as Labove's. Labove's attack on Eula is simultaneously the result of lust and rage, a rage that conceals, as Labove himself discovers, an underlying terror:

[Labove] knew now that it was not on the school steps but *in his mind* that she had constantly been for two years now, that it had not been rage at all but terror, and that the vision of that gate which he had held up to himself as a goal was not a goal but just a point to reach, as the man fleeing a holocaust runs not for a prize but to escape destruction. (TH, pp. 116-117, italics mine.)

Labove doesn't want Eula "as a wife," he wants her "one time as a man with a gangrened hand or foot thirsts after the axe-stroke which will leave him comparatively whole again" (TH, p. 118). He wants Eula in the flesh only in the hope of killing the Eula which dwells in his mind" (in the same way that Ike is forced to eat his beloved cow in

⁸Many recent articles attest to the identification of Eula with the land. In one, Paul Levine, "Love and Money in the Snopes Trilogy," *College English*, 23 (December, 1961), 196-199, suggests that the evolution of values within *The Hamlet* proceeds from a metaphorical vision of the land to Flem's literal vision: "For Varner the gold buried in the land is metaphorical: it describes the richness of the earth. For Flem, on the other hand, the meaning is literal: the land's richness is its literal cash value" (p. 197).

the hope that he will then forget her). When Darl sets fire to Addie's coffin, it is an act almost identical to Labove's attack on Eula, an act of possession and exorcism at once, an act which represents a desperate attempt at a cure.

Ironically, it is not so much the women themselves who defeat Darl and Labove but the power of their own obsessions that makes the worth of a woman greater than the worth of a man:

But [Labove] would have paid even this price [marriage to Eula] to be free of his obsession, only he knew that this could never be, not only because her father would never agree to it, but because of her, that quality in her which absolutely abrogated the *exchange value* of any single life's promise or capacity for devotion, the *puny asking-price* of any one man's reserve of so-called love. (TH, p. 118, italics mine.)

That quality in Eula which sets at nought the "exchange value" of any man's life is her femininity, that unique quality which enables a woman to produce "a thousandfold the harvest" that any man could "ever hope to gather and save" (TH, p. 118). It is for this reason that Addie's destruction is symbolically expressed as the destruction of a barn.

In *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's "puny asking-price" is set against the worth of a barn, a barn "a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into" (Cash, p. 228). The box Addie lies in is repeated in the structure of the barn, womb and tomb identified, the death-bearing coffin fused with the barn that holds the fruit of man's labors.

Motherhood becomes, in Faulkner's hands, the original metaphor for creation. Faulkner describes the effort of the idiot, Ike, to think as "almost physical, like childbirth" (TH, p. 178). In evaluating the worth of his own efforts as a novelist, Faulkner casts himself in a maternal role:

Since none of my work has met my own standards, I must judge it on the basis of that one which caused me the most grief and anguish, as the mother loves the child who became the thief or murderer more than the one who became the priest.⁹

The immortality sought by the writer, the impulse to say "Kilroy was here,"¹⁰ is realized in Addie Bundren. The story of her death is in actuality the story of her life beyond the grave, Addie as she continues to exist as "an element in the blood of her children."¹¹ Faulkner's women are, like Addie, powerful maternal figures who do not inspire love so much as they provoke a more ambiguous response:

There would be times now when [Labove] did not even want to make love to [Eula] but wanted to hurt her, see blood spring and run, watch that serene face warp to the indelible mark of terror and agony beneath his own; *to leave some indelible mark of himself on it* and then watch it even cease to be a face. Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him, whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate before that face which, even though but fourteen years old, postulated a weary knowledge which he would never attain, a surfeit, a glut of all perverse experience. He would be as a child before that knowledge. He would be like a young girl, a maiden He would grovel in the dust before it, panting; *"Show me what to do. Tell me. I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know."* (TH, p. 119, italics mine.)

To Ratliff, too, Eula represents "the rosy virginal mother of barricades for no man to conquer scot-free or even conquer at all, but on the contrary to be hurled back and down, leaving no scar, no mark of himself" (TH, p. 159). Women become the medium through which a man

⁹Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹¹Olga W. Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness: As I Lay Dying," *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 52.

makes his "indelible mark," a mark which will presumably outlast the man who made it, affording its own kind of immortality. The same impulse to mark the lives of those around her is attributed to Addie where it assumes, again, connotations of pain and violence:¹²

When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (Addie, p. 162, italics mine.)

The pain inflicted here by Addie, so that her life might be joined to those of the children she teaches, ultimately becomes the pain of childbirth:

I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights. (Addie, p. 164, italics mine.)

Anse has the words; one is love. But Addie transcends the words; she and her child do not need to speak of love ("Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him" [Addie, p. 164]) but exist together in an intimate circle of being where the boundaries between personalities no longer hold. Even after Addie gives birth to Cash and the physical bond which joined them together has been parted, their blood continues to "flow as one stream." They think and feel as one: "[Addie's] aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle" (Addie, p. 164).

¹²Labove is not the only one to fuse love and pain. See Chapter 2, pp. 38-39.

The sense of complete identification between mother and child, those who inflict pain and their "marked" victims, is apparent when Addie whips her pupils: "When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran." It is also apparent in Labove's fantasies involving Eula, where it takes the form of a reversal of roles:

Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him, whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate before that face which, even though but fourteen years old, *postulated a weary knowledge* which he would *never attain* He would be as a child before that knowledge. He would be like a young girl, a maiden. (TH, p. 119, italics mine.)

Labove ends by becoming the young girl he would seduce, on whom he wishes "to leave some indelible mark of himself." The image of mother and child briefly reappears here as well, the middle term in the equation that transforms the male Labove into a nameless young maiden.

Labove calls these fantasies mad, but they are mad only insofar as they represent the part of his personality that he does not wish to acknowledge. Labove's obsession with Eula is an element of this same madness, yet it is a madness he shares with nearly every other male in Frenchman's Bend. What distinguishes Labove from all of the other men who lust after Eula is that he struggles to resist it. That he calls it mad is only a part of the larger battle against himself:¹³

¹³Panthea Reid Broughton views Labove's "self-flagellation" as the "result of transference, from Eula to himself, of his destructive compulsion for conquest," via Labove himself representing the "obverse side of the principle of masculine conquest epitomized in most of the other men of the hamlet (Broughton, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187). While focusing on

A thousand years ago [Labove's face] would have been a monk's, a militant fanatic who would have turned his uncompromising back upon the world with actual joy and gone to a desert and passed the rest of his days and nights calmly and without an instant's self-doubt battling, not to save humanity about which he would have cared nothing, for whose sufferings he would have nothing but contempt, but with his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites. (TH, p. 105.)

Labove's final attack on Eula has not been prompted by love or desire only, it represents as well the final battle between Labove and his feminine alter ego. For the schoolteacher, Eula as a fourteen-year-old girl somehow "postulate[s] a weary knowledge" which he will "never attain." Transformed into a young girl, Labove begs, "Show me what to do. Tell me. I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know."¹⁴ This could only have been said by Labove,

the "pernicious notions of masculinity" (ibid., p. 183) which haunt the novel, Ms Broughton has nothing to say about some of the equally pernicious notions of femininity.

Labove's desire "to leave some indelible mark of himself" on Eula is essentially the desire of the artist, Eula the virgin page on which Labove would scrawl his name. When Labove takes Eula's place, himself becoming a young girl, the reversal of roles signals an identification that exists between the artist and his own creation--Irwin's notion of the work of art as "the embodiment of the feminine aspect of the artist's masculine self" (Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 161). Irwin notes the same doubling of the artist's self in William Faulkner's *Mosquitos*.

"There are the brother and sister, Josh and Pat Robyn, whose relationship not only has incestuous overtones but also explicit elements of twinning and masculine-feminine reversal: 'He raised his face, suspending his knife blade. They were twins: just as there was something masculine about her jaw, so there was something feminine about his.' As an emblem of this reversibility, brother and sister call each other by the same nickname, Gus. The sculptor Gordon, one of Faulkner's surrogates in the novel, is in love with Pat But Gordon realizes that his love for Patricia is hopeless--that the artist's fated substitute for the real sexual possession of the virgin must be the possession of her in the virgin purity of the work of art" (ibid., p. 160).

¹⁴Women are often treated in Faulkner's fiction as though they possessed a special knowledge which sets them apart from men. In William

whose entire life has been a relentless pursuit of knowledge, whose final distinction--the title of professor he enjoys as master of his own schoolhouse--is a "woman's distinction, functioning actually in a woman's world like the title of reverend" (TH, p. 111). For Labove, the pursuit of knowledge is an article of faith: "[Labove] still had his hill-man's purely emotional and foundationless faith in education, the white magic of Latin degrees, which was an actual counterpart of the old monk's faith in his wooden cross" (TH, p. 117). Yet, compared to Eula's "weary knowledge," the wisdom of the ages is as nothing:

[The school] would have but one point, like a swarm of bees, and [Eula] would be that point, that center, swarmed over and importuned yet serene and intact and apparently even oblivious, tranquilly abrogating the whole long sum of human thinking and suffering which is called knowledge, education, wisdom, *at once supremely unchaste and inviolable: the queen, the matrix.* (TH, p. 115, italics mine.)

As noted, Labove's reaction to Eula is terrifically ambivalent. He sees her as "at once supremely unchaste and inviolable" because he

Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932; rpt. New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1972), when Hightower asks Lena to let Byron go, he does so because Lena is already far older in experience than Byron ever will be.

"[Hightower] looks at her; she does not look away. 'Let him go. Send him away from you.' They look at one another. 'Send him away, daughter. You are probably not much more than half his age. But you have already *outlived him twice over.* He will never overtake you, catch up with you, because he has wasted too much time. And that too, his nothing, is as irremediable as your all" (p. 389, italics mine).

Hightower reduces Byron to the level of a child compared to Lena, who has "outlived him twice over." It could as well be Byron thinking as Vardaman thinks when Addie dies, "And now she is getting so far ahead I cannot catch her" (Vardaman, p. 52). Similarly, in William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1931), Horace Benbow gazes on the face of Little Belle, "Look[ing] at the familiar image with a kind of quiet horror and despair, at a face suddenly older in sin than he would ever be, a face more blurred than sweet, at eyes more secret than soft" (p. 163).

is a prisoner of Oedipal conflicts. Eula combines the figures of virgin and whore, the mother who is "at once . . . inviolable" (because she is taboo) and "at once supremely unchaste" (because she is a mother who can have borne children only through participating in the forbidden act):

[Eula] postulated [for Labove] that ungirdled quality of the very goddesses in his Homer and Thucydides: of being at once corrupt and immaculate, at once virgins and the mothers of warriors and grown men. (TH, p. 113.)

Because of his Oedipal desires, Labove can only perceive Eula as threatening:

Danger: he thought, cried. Danger? Not to her: to me. I am afraid of what I might do, not because of her because there is nothing I or any man could do to her that would hurt her. It's because of what it will do to me. (TH, pp. 119-120.)

This is a perception shared by Ratliff:

[Ratliff] looked at [Eula's] face again. It had not been tragic, and now it was not even damned, since from behind it there looked out only another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race. And beautiful: but then, so did the highwayman's daggers and pistols make a pretty shine on him. (TH, p. 149.)

The terror that seizes Labove when confronted with Eula is not unique; rather, it is typical of most of Faulkner's male characters and it derives from the same Oedipal source in each case. Faulkner is certainly not unaware of the Freudian themes implicit in many of his characters' actions: when Houston flees from Lucy Pate he is "merely being consistent in escaping from one woman by violating the skirts of another, as with his mother and the Negro girl of his adolescence" (TH, p. 211) although he does not realize the underlying consistency of his actions.

Houston's mother was the woman who taught him to write his

name, and who only gave up trying to "compel his father to send [Houston] to the school" when she died (TH, p. 205). Houston finally does go to school, where the job of educating him is immediately taken up by Lucy Pate:

The two of them [Lucy and Houston] chained irrevocably . . . not by love but by implacable constancy and invincible repudiation-- on the one hand, that steadfast and undismayable *will to alter and improve and remake*; on the other, that *furious resistance*. (TH, p. 206, italics mine.)

Houston is not far from wrong when he characterizes the relationship between himself and Lucy as a kind of slavery. It is evident that the patterns which shape his life have not been consciously chosen. When Houston finally goes to school, it is almost a forced return to childhood: far older than the rest of the children, "bulging in Lilliput" (TH, p. 206), Houston must again submit to his mother's "will to alter and improve and remake" him.

There is the mother's will to shape and influence the life she has borne opposed to the son's "furious resistance," his terrified flight from that force which threatens to overwhelm him, reduce him to the status of a child. Often enough, however, this resistance takes the form of an identification with the mother (an identification which represents a possible solution to the Oedipal problem). Labove's quest for knowledge is an attempt to claim for himself some of Eula's power. Ratliff, determined never to be caught by a woman, drives a cart painted with women's faces which smile at him in "fixed and sightless invitation" (TH, p. 72). Ratliff sells sewing machines to the women of the country and he himself sews the shirts he wears. Mink Snopes, one man in his wife's harem of "nameless and numberless men" (TH, p. 221) imagines he has possessed those men through her: "it was not garments

intervening but the cuckolding shades which had become a part of his past too, as if he and not she had been their prone recipient" (TH, p. 221). The idiot, Ike Snopes, who exists barely at the level of a child and will never progress further, is a strangely feminine creature with his "incredible female thighs" (TH, p. 86), the "thick thighs about to burst from the overalls" (TH, p. 81) suggesting the same physical opulence and excess characteristic of Eula who is always on the point of coming out of her clothes.

The relationship that commonly exists between men and women can only be described as war, a mutual antagonism that finds its natural culmination in the trial scenes in the final book of *The Hamlet*. During the trial, Mrs. Tull wears

an expression of grim and seething outrage . . . which curiously and almost at once began to give the impression of being directed not at any Snopes or at any other man in particular but at all men, all males, and of which Tull himself was not at all the victim but the subject. (TH, p. 323.)

Eula, although beautiful, can hardly be seen as a goddess of love when Ratliff terms her "another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race," just "gal meat" (TH, p. 149) after all. The pure and intimate relationship that exists between Ike and the cow (one that follows on the heels of Ike's intellectual birth) is an ideal never realized between any of Faulkner's other male characters and the female heifers that roam the pages of *The Hamlet*, just as the violence which is the masculine equivalent of love supplants the more conventional romantic theme.

Because women are often perceived as threatening, the theme of male friendship and betrayal becomes the focus of the novel. When Labove is thwarted by Eula, he anticipates punishment at her brother's hands with some satisfaction:

That would be something, anyway. It would not be penetration, true enough, but it would be the same flesh, the same warm living flesh in which the same blood ran, under impact at least--a paroxysm, an orgasm of sorts, a katharsis [sic], anyway--something. (TH, p. 122.)

Similarly, the violent confrontation between Mink Snopes and Houston leaves them "wedded and twinned forever" (TH, p. 217). The violent game of football ("I hear it aint much different from actual fighting" [TH, p. 107]) is another variation on the more civilized game of trade where pleasure lies in the battle of the wits:

[Stamper] played horses against horses as a gambler plays cards against cards, for the pleasure of beating a worthy opponent as much as for gain, assisted by a Negro hostler who was an *artist* as a sculptor is an artist, who could take any piece of horseflesh which still had life in it and retire to whatever closed building or shed was empty and handy and then, with a quality of actual legerdemain, reappear with something which the beast's own dam *would not recognise*, let alone its recent owner; the two of them, Stamper and the Negro, working in a kind of *outrageous rapport* like a single intelligence possessing the terrific advantage over common mortals of being able to be in two places at once and directing two separate sets of hands and fingers at the same time. (TH, p. 30, italics mine.)

Here is a consummation not unlike Addie's, the "outrageous rapport" that unites Stamper and the Negro, a relationship as intimate as the relationship between mother and child--two identified as one. Within the relationship, the Negro is the "artist." He has the ability to remake a living creature into something its own mother "would not recognise," an ability rivalling that of a mother. The ideal presented here is later realized in the relationship between Flem Snopes and Will Varner who form a team resembling Stamper's.

In *As I Lay Dying*, the same kind of relationship exists between Cash and his brother, Darl. The tie between them is certified by the same wordless communication that exists between Cash and his mother: "Cash did not

need to say it to me nor I to him" [Addie, p. 164]). When Jewel is sick, Cash and Darl are the only two members of the family who dare to seek the truth beneath the "quiet and monotonous," the safe, "bland" surface of deceit (Darl, p. 127). The exchange between Cash and Darl happens in words, but they are words which merely voice a common thought: "I told Cash, and Cash and I looked at one another. / "Rutting," Cash said. / "Yes," I said. "But why the lantern?" (Darl, p. 124).

When words fail Cash, Darl can complete them:

[Cash] looked at me, his eyes fumbling, the words fumbling at what he was trying to say. "It aint always the safe things in this world that a fellow . . ."

"You mean, the safe things are not always the best things?"

"Ay; best," he said, fumbling again. "It aint the best things, the things that are good for him . . . *A young boy*. A fellow kind of hates to see . . . wallowing in somebody else's mire . . ." That's what he was trying to say. When something is new and hard and bright, there ought to be something a little better for it than just being safe, since the safe things are just the things that folks have been doing so long they have worn the edges off and there's nothing to the doing of them that leaves a man to say, That was not done before and it cannot be done again. (Darl, p. 125, italics mine.)

The two of them talk about Jewel as "a young boy"; they already know what it is he is going through and they protect him from Anse by agreeing not to tell their brother's secret. In a sense, Cash and Darl act as Jewel's parents, a position that Addie and Anse cannot fill, estranged as they are.

After Addie is dead, the two older sons continue to look after her favorite as if he were their own, sharing in the process an intimacy so close as to be virtual identification one with another. When the family must cross a swollen river, Cash and Darl ride together on the wagon:

Cash and I sit on the wagon; Jewel sits the horse at the off rear wheel. The horse is trembling, its eye rolling wild and baby-blue in its long pink face, its breathing stertorous like groaning. . . . Cash's face is also gravely composed; he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame. (Darl, p. 135.)

Later, Cash seems to read Darl's thoughts:

"[Jewel] can swim," I say. "If he'll just give the horse time, anyhow . . ." When he was born, he had a bad time of it. Ma would sit in the lamp-light, holding him on a pillow on her lap. We would wake and find her so. There would be no sound from them.

"That pillow was longer than him," Cash says. He is leaning a little forward. "I ought to come down last week and sighted. I ought to done it."

"That's right," I say. "Neither his feet nor his head would reach the end of it. You couldn't have known," I say. (Darl, p. 137.)

Within an ordinary narrative context it would be inexplicable that Cash should know what Darl is thinking, but he does. Equally inexplicable is the shared image of Jewel as a baby which unites Cash and Darl in their thoughts. Yet what could be clearer than the fact that the image evoked is one of ideal maternal tenderness (Addie watching over Jewel), an ideal that Cash and Darl have adopted as their own? Cash and Darl ride the treacherous wagon through the current. Jewel is not allowed to although Cash and Darl are careful to permit him to help with the crossing in a way what will be less dangerous. That Cash knows Darl's thoughts betrays the presence of the maternal ideal--Addie's insistence on an understanding that transcends the spoken word.

It should be remembered that *As I Lay Dying* is no ordinary narrative. It insists on presenting the inner life of each character in a way that invests it with a degree of reality equal to that of the

outside world. It is a subjective universe. To enter into another's "secret and selfish life" (Addie, p. 162) becomes, in this context, the greatest good. Cash and Darl achieve, for a time, a sympathetic union of souls, but it is a union doomed to failure. The rejection Darl experiences at his mother's hands is repeated at the end of the novel¹⁵ when Darl turns to Cash for the affirmation that stands between him and Jackson: he asks his brother, "Do you want me to go [to Jackson]?" When Cash responds, "It'll be better for you" (Cash, p. 228), he locks Darl into the isolated cage of his own being as effectively as if he had been one of the guards at Jackson.

¹⁵Vickery, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Chapter 2

"IT'S THEM DURN WOMEN"

Faulkner says of women that their "feminine reserve of unflagging suspicion of all people's actions which seems at first to be mere affinity for evil . . . is in reality practical wisdom,"¹ but there are no women in Faulkner's work who are untainted by the original perception of evil; there are no good women, only women like Addie, ruthless in their practicality: "I told Addie it want any luck living on a road when it come by here, and she said, for the world like a woman, 'Get up and move then'" (Anse, p. 34). Addie isn't just being practical, she isn't just being like Jewel who can make a window into a door by walking through it; she's not just a woman who disregards the form and shape of things and the reason for which they were made (the word, which "attempts to impose an order and a significance on experience");² although she is that, too; here she is being evil as well.

Anse blames the road for Addie's dying and he blames it for Darl's queerness:

He was all right at first, with his *eyes full of the land*, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn't till that ere road come and *switched* the land *around longways* and his eyes still full of the land, that they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law. (Anse, pp. 35-36, italics mine.)

¹William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1931), p. 194.

²Olga W. Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness: *As I Lay*

It is the road which has violated Anse's home way on top of the hill, the road which has come between Anse and Addie. The road brought Whitfield and took away Addie; it brought the law which threatens to take one of his children as well as Addie's law which has deprived him of one already (i.e., Jewel): "I just refused, just as I refused my breast to Cash and Darl after their time was up" (Addie, p. 167).

In speaking of the road Anse is talking about Addie's adultery, for Addie *is* the land for Darl and Anse, both of them with their "eyes full of the land," seeking security and only being betrayed, refused, rejected.³ Anse wants people to stay put, not to be "restless and wanting to get up and go somewheres else when [the Lord] aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn" (Anse, p. 35). The land is as important for him as it is for Darl. In the first few sections we repeatedly see Anse "gazing out . . . across the land" (pp.

Dying," *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 53.

³It is interesting to look at John K. Simon's article, "The Scene and the Imagery of Metamorphosis in *As I Lay Dying*," *Criticism*, 7 (Winter, 1965), 1-22, in this light. Simon rather studiously avoids imposing any psychologically consistent reading on the novel, yet he is able to perceive that the "outside world" is decidedly "animate":

"In delineating the various ways in which this scene is heightened to mythic proportions, we should not lose sight of the interrelation between the human senses and the outside chaos. As in the other examples we have drawn from the novel, impressions which we might otherwise explain psychologically are attributed to the land as though it were an autonomous agent" (pp. 10-11).

He further notes that the waters of the flood are "constantly referred to as animated by a life of [their] own" (p. 11). Yet what could be clearer than that the land is Addie's body just as the river is her blood?: "I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land" (Addie, p. 166).

16, 17, 30, 31). Anse must know of Addie's infidelity: "I even held Anse refraining still Then I found that I had Jewel. When I waked to remember to discover it, he was two months gone" (Addie, p. 167). His knowledge of this betrayal is reflected in his new perception of the land as "switched . . . around longways."

Although Anse trusts "Old Marster [to] care for [him] as for ere a sparrow that falls" (Anse, p. 37), he is understandably preoccupied with his own losses: "It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the *Lord Himself* told him to put it" (Anse, p. 104), italics mine). Anse feels that the "Lord Himself" has placed him in ownership of the land, but that somehow all his plowing has been for nought. The land refuses to be tamed--Dewey Dell is a "wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (Dewey Dell, p. 61); she will germinate in her own season, not according to the laws of men or God Himself. Addie, too, withers and dies when she is ready. Just as Addie goes against God and robs Anse of his children, Dewey Dell thinks she will have her way in the end because she always has with Anse:

He'll do as I say. He always does. I can persuade him to anything. You know I can. Suppose I say Turn here. That was when I died that time. Suppose I do. We'll go to New Hope. We wont have to go to town. (Dewey Dell, p. 115.)

In town, however, Moseley refuses her and MacGowan uses her. The difference between the druggist in Mottson and the clerk in Jefferson is only one of degree. In entering either town, Dewey Dell has left behind the country where men are attached to the land, rely on it, even if they don't particularly know or care what it is they are attached to:

"It's them durn women," [Cash] says. "I made it to balance with her. I made it to her measure and weight."

If it takes wet boards for people to fall, it's fixing to be lots of falling before this spell is done.

"You couldn't have help it," I say.

I dont mind the folks falling. It's the cotton and corn I mind.

Neither does Peabody mind the folks falling. How bout it, Doc?

It's a fact. Washed clean outen the ground it will be. Seems like something is always happening to it.

Course it does. That's why it's worth anything. If nothing didn't happen and everybody made a big crop, do you reckon it would be worth the raising?

Well, I be durn if I like to see my work washed outen the ground, work I sweat over.

It's a fact. A fellow wouldn't mind seeing it washed up if he could just turn on the rain himself.

"Who is that man can do that? Where is the color of his eyes?

Ay. The Lord made it to grow. It's Hisn to wash up if He sees it fitten so.

"You couldn't have help it," I say.

"It's them durn women," [Cash] says. (Tull, p. 85.)

The equation between land and women is plain. These farmers have come to expect trouble from either one and they are, if not sympathetic to their women, at least resigned to them. Land and women are valuable to them, worth anything, simply because they are trouble, requiring men to invest a certain amount of their own precious sweat, sweat which is the equivalent of seminal fluid. Notice how Dewey Dell gets pregnant. She and Lafe are picking cotton together. Lafe starts adding the cotton he has picked to Dewey Dell's sack so that when she gets to the woods she has to lie with him:

And we picked on toward the secret shade and our eyes would drown together touching on his hands and my hands and I didn't say anything. I said "What are you doing?" and he said "I am picking into your sack." And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it. (Dewey Dell, p. 26.)

Dewey Dell's pregnancy begins, appropriately, with a sack swollen as the result of Lafe's labors. The scene recalls Cash's

loving labor in the making of his mother's coffin⁴ and Jewel's work clearing land in order to obtain the object of his affection, his horse. It is interesting, with respect to Jewel's nightly labors, that Cash and Darl originally suppose that he is going to a woman. When Darl remarks that a married woman would be safer," Cash replies, "It aint the best things, the things that are good for him . . . A young boy. A fellow kind of hates to see . . . wallowing in somebody else's mire" (Darl, p. 125).

When Faulkner uses the land in a metaphorical way to signify women, the comparison is often derogatory: "Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth" (Darl, p. 156). When Dewey Dell (herself a perambulating piece of landscape, as her name indicates)⁵ ventures into the two cities, Mottson and Jefferson, Faulkner presents us with attitudes toward women that are downright hostile. In Mottson, Moseley is a man who still bears some

⁴Joseph W. Reed, Jr., *Faulkner's Narrative* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973) notes the sexual overtones of Cash's labor:

". . . . Cash as he works is seen by both Tull and Darl as craftsmanlike . . . but Darl finally settles upon a repeated image with distinct sexual implications of an automatic machine 'going up and down above the saw, at the bleeding plank'" (p. 96).

In this connection, Anse's disinclination for labor of any sort and his morbid fear of sweating are revealing.

⁵Dewey Dell's name does not merely indicate her identification with nature. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Rev. ed. New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1966) remarks, "[the names of Faulkner's women] tend toward allegory, 'Dewey Dell,' for instance, suggesting both a natural setting and a woman's sex, her sex as a fact of nature" (p. 321).

of the farmer's humility before the laws of God and Nature: "The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you if it's His will to do so" (Moseley, p. 192). He is also a man who will sell "female dope" (Moseley, p. 189) to Dewey Dell, thinking, "It's a shame the way they poison themselves with it. But a man's got to stock it or go out of business in this country" (Moseley, p. 191), just as MacGowan literally hands Dewey Dell some liquid to drink which could kill her for all he knows, thinking, "a man that would keep poison setting around in a unlabelled bottle ought to be in jail, anyway" (MacGowan, p. 236). While Moseley thinks in terms of his own economic survival, MacGowan is proud of his ability to exploit this country girl and believes himself superior to her and all her kind: "Them country people. Half the time they dont know what they want, and the balance of the time they cant tell it to you" (MacGowan, p. 233). In Jefferson, women are a dime a dozen: Anse finds a replacement for Addie as easily as he buys spare parts for himself--his new teeth.

In *As I Lay Dying*, women are synonymous with the land and the kind of life people lead is determined by their relationship to both. Peabody says,

That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violant; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image. (Peabody, pp. 43-44.)

Addie is the land; she is the created universe. She is the fish, the flood, the horse, the fire. She lies in her bed dying, it taking her ten days, and Cash mimics her, his saw making the sound of her snoring,

her long sleep because she is tired at last, her life has finally balanced out and is even like Cash tries to make her coffin, making it balance. When Addie dies and the weather turns foul, it echoes the corruption of her corpse, the stinking body which must be given to the earth again before the world can be right. The power of a woman lies in giving birth in a sense which goes beyond the purely physical. Her image as a mother is a primary one; it sets the pattern for all others. When Cash looks up from making his mother's coffin, he sees Addie's "gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child" (Darl, p. 47). Addie takes too long to die.

Addie's death is, in reality, her salvation. Anse who, perhaps, knows his wife better than has been realized, regularly repeats that Addie has "her mind . . . set" on dying (Tull, p. 31). When Cash finally says, "She's gone," Anse amends this to, "She taken and left us" (Darl, p. 49). Anse predicted that as soon as Peabody had arrived and examined Addie, she would die: "It's that durn doctor, liable to come at any time. . . . If he was to come tomorrow and tell her the time was nigh, she wouldn't wait. I know her" (Darl, p. 18). And so she does. Addie says that she has laid down her life: "Even though I have laid down my life, [Jewel] will save me" (Cora, p. 160). Addie has cleaned her house and is ready to die:

I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready tō die. (Addie, p. 168.)

Addie's salvation through Jewel can only be enacted after her

death and Addie hastens to it. When Addie raises herself up and calls out to Cash, her voice is "harsh, strong, and unimpaired" (Darl, p. 47), and she herself insists that she is "not sick" (Anse, p. 36). Addie goes to her reward in her son's arms; she is laid out in her coffin in her wedding dress.

When, driving home after Addie's funeral, Cora tirelessly sings, "I am bounding toward my God and my reward," (Tull, p. 86), the effect is an ironic commentary on Addie's longed-for consummation with her son. We are also invited to see a similarity between Addie and Cora through the absurd vanity that leads both women to be certain of their individual salvation as well as the rather terrifying single-mindedness with which they pursue that goal. Tull's vision of Cora pushing her way into heaven "like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else" (Tull, p. 67) is appropriate to Addie, too, who goes to her reward whatever the cost may be to the children she leaves behind in Anse's care.

The significance of Addie's death does not end here. With her decision to die, Addie admits that she was wrong and her father right, that the "reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (Addie, p. 161):

Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong. (Addie, pp. 164-165.)

Addie looks toward death as a consummation. Her wish to kill Anse and her wish to be buried with her father in Jefferson come together to produce an interesting fantasy in which Addie lies by her husband's corpse:

[Anse] did not know he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. (Addie, p. 165.)

And then [Anse] died. He did not know he was dead. I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of *God's love and His beauty and His sin*; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds. (Addie, p. 166, italics mine.)

It is this night vision, full of death and a dark sexuality, that later finds its full realization in Addie's affair with the preacher, Whitfield, whom she takes as her lover precisely because he is a man of God. Addie's infidelity is an expression of her strange obsession with "God's love and His beauty and His sin." Addie thinks of Whitfield and herself as "dressed in sin," Whitfield the "more beautiful because the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified" (Addie, pp. 166-167). If Addie loves at all, she loves the sin and not the man who is the "instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin he had created" (Addie, p. 166).

In her fantasies, Addie has substituted God the Father for her real father; the sin that is so attractive to her is the sin of incest.⁶ When Addie dies and is taken to Jefferson to be buried, it is her final revenge on Anse to replace him with her father. For Addie, Anse is just a word belonging to the class of words that are not deeds, words "that are just the gaps in peoples' lacks . . . fumbling at the

⁶Cleanth Brooks, "Odyssey of the Bundrens," *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963) notes that Addie's salvation is "not that of some wordy prayer that was to bring her before a heavenly Father but the actual placing of her now foul body beside the bones of her literal earthly father" (p. 150).

deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother" (Addie, p. 166). All experience is attached to the words father and mother and all emptiness to the word orphan. Her family dead, faced with the emptiness of her own life, Addie becomes a mother, seeking God's love in order to have the child who will ultimately be her salvation.

Addie's search for some kind of value for her life is desperately passionate, haunted as she is by her father's conviction of its essential meaninglessness. Her very life is a rebellion against the meaninglessness predicted by her father; her death is that which reunites them. Addie seems, initially, to find in motherhood the value she seeks: "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle" (Addie, p. 164); yet, when she discovers that she is with child a second time, Addie decides her father was right:

Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew my father had been right

"Nonsense," Anse said; "you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two." (Addie, pp. 164-165.)

Addie has discovered that her children are to be her sole salvation and that it will not be enough to go through the tortures of childbirth once, but that it must happen again and again, that the price of life is pain: "When [Cash] was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (Addie, p. 163). Addie's fascination with the blows of the switch comes out of her

perception that her life is to be the punishment and death the reward. With her third child, Jewel, Addie knows at last what her father meant, even "that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward" (Addie, pp. 167-168). Addie cleans her house and is ready to die.

It is interesting that we first see Addie through Cora's eyes; Cora's section is infused with the trivial vitality of life. In it, we hear Cora's incessant chatter about her chickens and the extra eggs she has managed to save in order to bake some cakes and make a little money to get ahead. She puts forth considerable effort: "So I baked yesterday, more careful than ever I baked in my life" (Cora, p. 7). It turns out that the woman who was going to buy the cakes decides not to: "But those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks cant" (Cora, p. 7). Within the context of Cora's everyday scheming, we see Addie lying on her deathbed:

"I reckon she never had any use for [the cakes]," I say. They turned out real well, too.

The quilt is drawn up to her chin, hot as it is, with only her two hands and her face outside. . . . Her face is wasted away so that the bones draw just under the skin in white lines. Her eyes are like two candles when you watch them gutter down into the sockets of iron candle-sticks. But the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her.

"They turned out real nice," I say. "But not like the cakes Addie used to bake. . . . There's not a woman in this section could ever bake with Addie Bundren." (Cora, p. 8.)

Addie's death is a momentous incident. The vision of Addie dying makes Cora's activities seem all the more meaningless and trivial, yet Cora's preoccupation with her cakes makes sense in a way that undercuts the significance of Addie's death.

Much of Cora's interest in the Bundrens and in Addie's death is because Cora has had no sons:

Cora said, "I have bore you what the Lord God sent me. I faced it without fear nor terror because my faith was strong in the Lord, a-bolstering and sustaining me. If you have no son, it's because the Lord has decreed otherwise in His wisdom'" (Tull, p. 70.)

In this, she is inferior to Addie who has four. In Cora's eyes, Addie is like those "rich town ladies" who can afford to change their minds. Indeed, Addie has done just that. With all the blessings she has, Addie has decided that she has no use for life. Cora and Kate, in their dispute about the fate of Cora's cake, provide an insistent commentary on Addie's death:

"She ought to taken those cakes when she same as gave you her word," Kate says

"I reckon she never had any use for them," I say. They turned out real well, too. (Cora, p. 8.).

This is the reason we get our first glimpse of Addie here.

Like Addie's death, the Bundrens' final journey to Jefferson testifies to the strength of Addie's will. Her death and the journey are linked by Anse's reiterated, "Her mind is set on it" (Anse, p. 109). Anse, as obedient to Addie's will as to the will of God, is nevertheless defeated even before the journey begins:

Pa stands over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. He raises his hand to his head, scouring his hair, listening to the saw. He comes nearer and rubs his hand, palm and back, on his thigh and lays it on her face and then on the hump of quilt where her hands are. He touches the quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe [sic] it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe [sic] it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity, so that at last he desists, his hand falling to his side and stroking itself again, palm and back, on his thigh. The sound of the saw snores steadily into the room. Pa breathes with a quiet, rasping sound, mouthing the snuff against his gums. "God's will be done," he says. "Now I can get them teeth." (Darl, p. 51.)

Although he would smooth the quilt, there is no way that he can,

being Anse. It is as if Addie refuses to take the final offices Anse would perform for her, as she had earlier refused to take from him the meaningless word: "Love, he called it" (Addie, p. 164). Like Darl, Anse stands rejected for all time. The journey to Jefferson measures for him only the vast, untraversable distance that has ever existed between him and his wife. In this, Anse is not unlike every other man in the novel, all of them are doomed never to understand the powerful forces which shape their lives, the powerful and willful women to whom they are married. When Addie dies she conforms to a pattern long familiar to country folk although, for all its familiarity, the event remains mysterious and inexplicable like everything in female nature. Tull's "mammy" is a case in point. After working hard all her life, one day she just quits:

"It's a hard life on women, for a fact. Some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy and more. Worked every day, rain or shine; never sick a day since her last chap was born until one day she kind of looked around her and then she went and taken that lace-trimmed night gown she had had forty-five years and never wore out of the chest and put it on and laid down on the bed and pulled the covers up and shut her eyes. "You all will have to look out for pa the best you can," she said. "I'm tired." (Tull, p. 29.)

Speaking of Addie, Tull says, "She kept him at work for thirty-odd years. I reckon she is tired" (Tull, p. 32). When she dies, Peabody says that Anse "has wore her out at last" (Peabody, p. 40). The very hands Anse touches when he tries to smooth her quilt seem to be "guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last" as if they "doubted even yet the actuality of rest" (Darl, p. 50). It is beyond Anse's power to smooth the quilt as it is beyond his power to keep Addie alive when she wants to die. To Anse, it is Addie's will--to be accepted without question.

Addie's death looms on the horizon as inevitable as the rain which Anse can see "*same as second sight . . . shutting down betwixt us, a-coming up that road like a durn man, like it went ere a other house to rain on in all the living land*" (Anse, p. 36, italics mine). Although Anse is talking about the rain coming between him and his given promise (making it impossible for Darl and Jewel to get back in time), in his familiar complaint against the road we see his concern with Addie's infidelity, the rain coming up the road "like a durn man," separating him from his wife as surely as her approaching death. Without understanding why, Anse remains a luckless man:

I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. . . . I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls. But it seems hard that a man in his need could be so flouted by a road. (Anse, p. 37.)

When the rain finally comes, after Addie's death, Anse accepts it with an "expression of dumb and brooding outrage and yet of vindication, as though he had expected no less" (Darl, p. 73). Anse knows that Addie has "her mind . . . set" on dying (Tull, p. 31). He can see the rain coming "same as second sight," but he can do nothing. He is a man helpless before the "implacable and brooding" land (Peabody, p. 44), helpless before his wife's grimly determined will.

When the neighbors come together at Addie's funeral, the rain becomes the subject of their lament. The men's voices blend together, "sad, comforting," (Tull, p. 86), like the songs the women sing:

Well, I be durn if I like to see my work washed outen the ground, work I sweat over.

It's a fact. A fellow wouldn't mind seeing it washed up if he could just turn on the rain himself.

Who is that man can do that? Where is the color of his eyes?

Ay. The Lord made it to grow. It's Hisn to wash up if He sees it fitten so.

"You couldn't have help it," I say.

"It's them durn women," [Cash] says. (Tull, p. 85.)

They are men resigned to their losses, powerless before the capricious weather, powerless before the incomprehensible women who form a part of their lives.

As the Bundrens proceed on their way to Jefferson, they leave behind them a trail of consternation. The awful smell they carry with them provokes feminine outrage and masculine bewilderment:

So I left them squatting there. I reckon after four days they was used to [the smell]. But Rachel wasn't.

"It's a outrage," she says. "A outrage."

"What could he a done?" I says. "He give her his promised word."

"Who's talking about him?" she says. "Who cares about him?" she says, crying. "I just wish that you and him and all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country--"

"Now, now," I says. "You're upset."

"Dont you touch me!" she says. "Dont you touch me!"

A man cant tell nothing about them. I lived with the same one fifteen years and I be durn if I can. And I imagined a lot of things coming up between us, but I be durn if I ever thought it would be a body four days dead and that a woman. But they make life hard on them, not taking it as it comes up, like a man does. (Samson, p. 111.)

"It's a outrage," [Lula] said. "He should be lawed for treating her so."

"He's getting her into the ground the best he can," I said. (Armstid, p. 178.)

Masculine bewilderment and exasperation reach their height with Tull:

When I told Cora how Darl jumped out of the wagon and left Cash sitting there trying to save it and the wagon turning over . . . she says, "And you're one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that aint bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon. I notice Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall."

"He couldn't a done no good, if he'd been there," I said. "They was going about it right and they would have made it if it hadn't been for that log."

"Log, fiddlesticks," Cora said. "It was the hand of God."

"Then how can you say it was foolish?" I said. "Nobody can guard against the hand of God. It would be sacrilege to try to."

"They why dare?" Cora says. "Tell me that."

"Anse didn't," I said. "That's just what you faulted him for."

"His place was there," Cora said. "If he had been a man, he would a been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn't."

"I dont know what you want, then," I said. "One breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next breath you jump on Anse because he wasn't with them." (Tull, pp. 145-146.)

Yet it is Tull who gives us the clearest statement of a woman's worth:

When I looked back at my mule . . . I could look at him standing there and see all the broad land and my house sweated outen it like it was the *more the sweat, the broader the land*; the more the sweat, the tighter the house because it would take a tight house for Cora, to hold Cora like a jar of milk in the spring: you've got to have a tight jar or you'll need a powerful spring, so if you have a big spring, why then you have the incentive to have tight, wellmade jars, because it is your milk, sour or not, because you would rather have milk that will sour than to have milk that wont, because you are a man.⁷ (Tull, p. 132, italics mine.)

Women, like the land, are worth something because they are

⁷In a similar fantasy, Addie later imagines Anse's name as a vessel containing the man within it:

"I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and could watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless" (Addie, p. 165).

The sexual overtones become apparent when Addie compares the shape of her body where she "used to be a virgin" (Addie, p. 165) to the shape of the jar. The imagery affirms the feminization of Anse's character. Like the women in the novel, Anse is trouble, his neighbors continuing to help him because they already have so much invested: "Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I cant quit now" (Tull, p. 32).

trouble, because they can go sour on man. There is a real value attached to hardship because it is the test of a man, the only way that he can prove his strength. Life isn't meant to be easy; it would not be worth anything if it were: *"If nothing didn't happen and everybody made a big crop, do you reckon it would be worth the raising?"* (Tull, p. 85)--the very life of a man worth no more than he makes it worth with the sweat of his brow, "the more the sweat, the broader the land."

Pain and hardship actually become tokens of love. Anse maintains, "I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He dont take some curious ways to show it, seems like" (Anse, p. 105). Addie, like the Lord Himself, certainly takes some curious ways to show her love. As a teacher, the only way she can join her life to those of the children she instructs is through the blows of a switch. As a mother, Addie's preference for Jewel is evident when she "always whipped him and petted him more" than her other children (Darl, p. 17). Jewel is his mother's favorite, not only because he is Whitfield's child but because he is the one who cost her the most pain:

I always said [Darl] was the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection. Not that Jewel, the one she labored so to bear and coddled and petted so and him flinging into tantrums or sulking spells, inventing devilment to devil her until I would have frailed him time and time. (Cora, p. 20.)

The harrowing journey to Jefferson becomes another sign of Addie's love. With each incident along the way, with each day that the buzzards gain in number and the smell of the corpse becomes more horrible, we can imagine Addie thinking as she did with each "blow of the switch"

(Addie, p. 164): "Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your *secret and selfish life*, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever" (Addie, p. 162, italics mine). Cash and Jewel, the sons Addie says belong to her and not to Anse, *are* marked by the end of the journey: Cash has a black foot and Jewel has a black, burned back.¹⁸ They are Addie's chosen.

Just as, by the end of the funeral journey, the signs of Addie's love become visible, so too is her "secret . . . selfish life" revealed in death as it never was when she was alive. Before Addie dies, she makes Peabody leave the room:

She watches me: I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them. I have seen it before in women. Seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again. (Peabody, pp. 44-45.)

A proud and private woman when alive, Addie is naked in death, vulnerable and exposed. *As I Lay Dying* is not a simple story of bereavement; it is complicated by many of the same elements Faulkner brings up in speaking of an earlier novel, *The Sound and the Fury*:

¹⁸Vardaman says that Cash's foot "looks like a nigger's foot" (Vardaman, p. 214). One can only wonder whether Faulkner's obsession with black blood, all his Charles Bonses, Christmases, Popeyes, trace back to some such illusory taint in the blood, a taint more female than black. Noting Christmas's extreme antifeminism, Cleanth Brooks, *op. cit.*, recalls the episode in William Faulkner's *Light in August* when Christmas, "hearing the 'fecundmello' voices of Negro women, feels that he and 'all other manshaped life about him' had been returned to the 'lightless hot wet primogenitive Female'" (p. 100) and "runs from the scene in a kind of panic" (p. 65). John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), notes as well the feminization of the "dark double" (p. 91).

I saw that [the] peaceful glinting of that branch was to become the *dark, harsh flowing of time* sweeping her to where she could not return to comfort him, but that just separation, division would not be enough, not far enough. It must sweep her into *dishonor and shame* too.⁹

Addie dies and is swept away by the "dark, harsh flowing of time," her coffin nearly vanishing in the muddy waters of the flooded river. Here again separation is not enough. Addie's corpse is tinged with the same "dishonor and shame" symbolized in *The Sound and the Fury* by Caddy's muddy drawers:

For an instant [the coffin] resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a *soiled garment* that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks or as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it in a passionate reversal that flouts its own desire and need. (Darl, pp. 91-92, italics mine.)

It is a shame inherent in the flesh itself. When Dilsey scrubs away at Caddy's "naked backside" with those same muddy drawers, she tries "to cleanse with the sorry byblow of its soiling that body, flesh, whose shame [the drawers] symbolised and prophesied"¹⁰ Addie's "soiled garment" is, in its symbolism, not unlike Caddy's muddy drawers. The soiled garment which makes its appearance here suggests another, the garment of sin, Addie's infidelity with Whitfield:

I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the world's face, of the circumspection necessary because he was he and I was I; . . . While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin.

⁹Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography, I* (New York: N.Y.: Random House, 1974), p. 568.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

I would think of him as thinking of me as dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air. (Addie, pp. 166-167.)

The steadily worsening stench of Addie's decomposing body is a symbolic representation of her sin. Below the circling buzzards, Darl makes his own insinuations: "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?" (Darl, p. 202).

The Bundrens' trip to Jefferson is prefaced by Whitfield's journey of atonement and confession. Addie's journey takes on some of the qualities of Whitfield's:¹¹ Darl, who has his mother's gift for inflicting pain and his mother's motivation behind it; Darl, who is indeed something in his brothers' and sister's secret lives, and can only remind them of it with cruelty; Darl, is the one bent on exposing Addie's sin and revealing her "secret . . . selfish life" (Addie, p. 162) for what it was. Addie "cant get away from a shoddy job" (Cash, p. 227) any more than can Darl. As much as Cash tries to make her coffin balance, it never will: "It wasn't on a balance. I told them if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to" (Cash, p. 157).

Darl is not merely the critic of the action,¹² he is Addie's

¹¹William J. Handy, "As I Lay Dying: Faulkner's Inner Reporter," *Kenyon Review*, 21 (Summer, 1959), 437-451, suggests that the first part of Addie's monologue resembles "the beginning of a confession" (p. 448).

¹²Brooks, *op. cit.*, credits Darl with having the "supreme lucidity of the mad" (p. 143). He hints at the similarity between Darl and Addie:

"With regard to the burial journey, Darl, the lunatic, is

fiercest critic as well. Darl seeks to destroy his mother so that he may take her place, a place he is uniquely suited to fill because he is so much like her. The ambivalence toward women in the novel is nowhere so apparent as in Darl--who hates his mother and would destroy her only to replace her with himself. Yet Darl loves and identifies with his mother. He is the son whose eyes are "full of the land" (Anse, p. 35), but he has been betrayed by the land he loves.¹³

Cora says that Darl is the only one of Addie's children to have his "mother's nature" (Cora, p. 20), the truth of this observation apparent not only in his singular capacity to see into the secret lives of nearly everyone around him but in his ability to speak without words almost as if he were the land itself, the dark land that Addie hears "talking the voiceless speech" (Addie, p. 167):

And so it was because I could not help it. It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said "Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?" without words I said it and he said "Why?" without the words. And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows. (Dewey Dell, p. 26.)

indeed the only one of the three older brothers who is thoroughly 'sane,' and in general he is the only one who knows the truth--about Dewey Dell's secret thoughts, about his mother's special attachment to Jewel, and about the various secret motivations of the members of the family. But Darl's truth is corrosive and antiheroic, and in its logic perhaps finally inhuman. Does he really grieve for his mother at all? It would be hard to say. In a sense, he knows too much about her and too much about the absurdity of reality to have any emotional commitment" (p. 145).

¹³See Handy, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-451, for a discussion of Addie's rejection of Darl.

Darl's special understanding of women leads Cora to suppose that he, rather than Jewel, is Addie's favorite child: "it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was" (Cora, p. 23). It also leads Cash to suppose that Dewey Dell prefers Darl:

But the curious~~est~~ thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me. I see all the while how folks could say he was queer, but that was the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal And then I always kind of had a idea that him and Dewey Dell kind of knowed things betwixt them. If I'd a said it was ere a one of us she liked better than ere a other, I'd a said it was Darl. (Cash, pp. 226-227.)

Unlike Labove, Darl does not need to grovel in the dust at a woman's feet seeking to learn her secrets: "'Show me what to do. Tell me. I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know'" (TH, p. 119). Darl knows women, knows the power they have:

[Dewey Dell] sets the basket into the wagon and climbs in, her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that level which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life. (Carl, pp. 97-98.)

It is Darl who would take Addie's place, acting the part of a mother. The close relationship Darl has with his brother, Cash, betrays the maternal ideal Darl has adopted as his own. It is a relationship characterized by an understanding that has no need of speech as in Addie's insistence on an intimacy so close that no words are needed: "Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him" (Addie, p. 164).¹⁴ Darl is the one who takes care of Cash, to think of Cash and his suffering even if Cash himself won't; Darl is the one to speak to Vardaman in his own language; Darl is the one to restrain

¹⁴For more discussion on Darl's relationship to Cash, see Chapter 1, pp. 18-21.

the impulsive Jewel when he tries to get himself killed, succeeds in restraining Jewel without allowing him to lose face:

"I know," I say. "He never meant anything. He'll take it back."

"Let him take it back, then."

"Put up your knife, and he will."

The man looks at me. He looks at Jewel. Jewel is quiet now.

"Put up your knife," I say.

The man shuts the knife.

"Fore God," pa says. "Fore God."

"Tell him you didn't mean anything, Jewel," I say.

"I thought he said something," Jewel says. "Just because he's--"

"Hush," I say. "Tell him you didn't mean it."

"I didn't mean it," Jewel says.

"He better not," the may says. "Calling me a--"

"Do you think he's afraid to call you that?" I say.

The man looks at me. "I never said that," he said.

"Don't think it neither," Jewel says. (Darl, pp. 220-221.)

Darl plays the role of a mother, replacing Addie. Even more, he is clearly in control of his reason, getting Jewel out of his scrape with the utmost skill and diplomacy. Darl does not share Vardaman's delusion, as Vickery suggests; he simply speaks the language of a child to a child. When he burns Addie's coffin it is not because "the world of fantasy has become as real as the concrete facts which we call reality,"¹⁵ but in order to spare the living any further suffering, in order to end the suffering Addie has caused.¹⁶ In burning

¹⁵Vickery, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁶Reed, *op. cit.*, sees Darl as "our moral center and our center of consciousness" in *As I Lay Dying* (p. 90); he interprets the barn burning incident as Darl's attempt to

". . . cut through the looping strings of time--cut short the suffering. Compelled by Addie's patterns, pursued along by the remainder of Addie in the buzzards and the remains of Addie which generate their atmosphere, the air the Bundrens must breathe, Darl dreams of ending it all at once, of sending it straight up, like words in a thin line, but better than words leaving only the ash behind, free of the smell, the buzzards, the road, the pursuit, the suffering" (p. 106).

the coffin, Darl does something that Cash has wished to do himself:

But I thought more than once . . . 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. (Cash, p. 223.)

It is Cash who comes closest to understanding his brother, yet he cannot accept the destruction of a barn; he can send Darl off to Jackson even though he isn't "so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint" just because he can't accept the destruction of something "a man has built with his sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into" (Cash, p. 228). Addie and the barn are one and the same;¹⁷ as much as Darl tries to replace her, he will never be able to, his life not worth so much.

Darl's laughter is the sign and acknowledgment of his defeat; it is exaggerated, slightly hysterical, but it is not mad. It is the same laughter later realized in the humorous detachment of V. K. Ratliff and in Varner's "fierce risibility" (TH, p. 308)--a laughter that has as its object the doomed and willful folly of all mankind.¹⁸

¹⁷See Chapter 1, p. 9.

¹⁸William Rossky, "As I Lay Dying: The Insane World," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (Spring, 1962), 87-95, asserts that it is the power of their own blind illusions which sustains the rest of the Bundrens while Darl, seeing the grim reality, must die. In *The Hamlet*, Ratliff combines Darl's recognition of the absurdity of existence with an ability to cope:

". . . . But it is really not until . . . we encounter Ratliff, the sensitive and the sane man, who sees the 'maniacal Risibility' but whose humanity and sympathy are created in and by the world and who faces it with humor and integrity, that vision and ability to 'cope' with vision exist in the single character" (p. 95).

As I Lay Dying ends on a comic note: Anse, after having robbed nearly every one of his children in order to get himself some teeth and a new wife, presents her to his wagonload of hurt and crippled children who sit with their mouths open in astonishment, half-eaten bananas in their hands. With his new teeth, Anse looks "a foot taller, kind of holding his head up, hangdog and proud too" while the woman behind him glares out of her "hard-looking pop eyes like she was daring ere a man to say nothing" (Cash, p. 249). It is easy to see that Anse's momentary return to toothful virility won't last long. The woman with whom he has replaced Addie will prove to be as tough and willful as Addie ever was. Anse rushes headlong to his destruction in the form of a "duck-shaped woman" who looks like she dared "ere a man" (Cash, p. 249)--Anse probably not the first man, either.

When Dewey Dell betrays her brother, Darl, she does so for no apparent reason. It is enough that he knows her secret. When Jewel turns on him, he does it with a single-minded fury born of his wish to keep his mother's image intact and unsullied by the truth. Dewey Dell and Jewel would deny the reality that threatens them. In destroying Darl, they seek to avoid exposure. Like Addie, they try to hide the abject nakedness that belongs to the human race by birthright:

The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pinpoints. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail. (Dewey Dell, p. 115.)

Darl is no more mad than Jewel is sick earlier in the novel. If Darl sometimes acts in an incomprehensible manner, so does Jewel.

In each case, sickness (mental or physical) is used as a protective covering, one that ultimately protects not the one who is sick but those who do not understand, those who fear to confront that which mystifies and confounds them, those who fear to confront the naked truth:

It was as though, so long as the deceit ran along quiet and monotonous, all of us let ourselves be deceived, abetting it unawares or maybe through cowardice, since all people are cowards and naturally prefer any kind of treachery because it has a *bland outside*. But now it was like we had all--and by a *kind of telepathic agreement* of admitted fear--flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying "Now is truth. [Jewel] hasn't come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him." (Darl, p. 127, italics mine.)

The treachery perpetrated by Dewey Dell and assisted by Jewel does have a "bland outside." Everyone knows Darl is queer; it means nothing, then, to have him sent away to Jackson. Yet behind the convenient legend of Darl's craziness lies Dewey Dell's hatred, Jewel's revenge, and Cash's fear of being sued by Gillespie. Putting Darl away conceals a host of motivations just as the funeral journey becomes a pretext, disguising the real needs and desires of those who make the trip (Anse's teeth, Dewey Dell's abortion, bananas, and a toy train), just as Whitfield brings his mission of truth to a close with the cowardly words, "God's grace upon this house" (Whitfield, p. 171).

The Bundrens are condemned by their own cowardice to "use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching" (Addie, p. 164). It is only the moment of truth which enables one to touch, that moment when "a kind of telepathic agreement" is born, bringing into being a family

where there were only isolated individuals before. It is thus only with Addie's death that she paradoxically comes to life because only in death does the truth threaten to come out about her love with Whitfield and Jewel, her child--a truth Addie never tried to hide, hating deceit, the empty words that trick and conceal.

It is appropriate that Darl should be betrayed by a word, as Addie is betrayed by the word love: "It was as though [Anse] had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it" (Addie, p. 164). Darl is not mad. The queerness that sets him apart from other folks is a sign of his special knowledge:¹⁹

[Darl] is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. (Tull, p. 119.)

When Darl first discovers the truth about Addie and Jewel, it is because Addie has been making Jewel "special things to eat" and hiding them:

And that may have been when I first found it out, that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. And at times when I went in to go to bed she would be sitting in the dark

¹⁹Darl's ability to communicate with Vardaman on his own level, taken by some as evidence of Darl's increasing loss of contact with reality, can be interpreted as another sign of his special knowledge:

". . . . Because a fellow can see ever now and then that children have more sense than him. But he dont like to admit it to them until they have beards. After they have a beard, they are too busy because they dont know if they'll ever make it back to where they were in sense before they was haired, so you dont mind admitting then to folks that are worrying about the same thing that aint worth the worry that you are yourself" (Tull, pp. 132-133).

by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to *act the deceit*. (Darl, p. 123, italics mine.)

Darl refuses to "act the deceit." He remains true to the values he learned from his mother even though she herself was forced to abandon them. When Jewel resolutely refuses to see the buzzards, refuses to acknowledge the smell, it is Darl who insists that he see that he smell because it is truth and not deceit, because Darl, too, loves and hates at the same time, hating the truth because it hurts him as much as Jewel, hating Jewel too but loving him and protecting him too. Just like he had to love his mother in spite of her deceit, because of it, in spite because of all the pain and the hardship she gave him. When Darl is sent to Jackson, it is because there is no room for truth in the world: "This world is not his world; this life his life" (Cash, p. 240). Darl follows his mother into the grave.

Chapter 3

"AN IDIOT REITERATION"

The Hamlet represents, perhaps, Faulkner's supreme effort to order the fictional world he would create; ironically, it is a novel most often regarded as a collection of brilliantly told anecdotes loosely structured around a few key themes.¹ It is true that there is a curiously static quality about *The Hamlet*: the wealth of pattern and detail slows the pace of the action, the action itself more often subtle than dramatic. Life in *The Hamlet* is seen not as any kind of progression but as an endless repetition. When Miz Snopes finally gets her milk separator (after her husband, Ab, has proven once again that he is a "fool about a horse" [TH, p. 31]), she is left without a cow to produce the milk to run through it. This does not stop her from using it, however. She simply runs the gallon she has through the machine as often as she likes:

So as soon as Old Man Anse had finished cussing, [Ratliff and Ab] come on back and set on the fence. And sho enough, we could hear the separator start up again. It sounded strong as ever, like it could make the milk fly, like it *didnt give a whoop* whether that milk had been separated once or a hundred times. 'There it goes again,' Ab says. 'Dont forget that other gallon tomorrow.'

¹Cleanth Brooks, "Faulkner's Savage Arcadia; Frenchman's Bend (*The Hamlet*)," *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), suggests that the brilliance of Faulkner's story-telling technique "might be held to aggravate rather than mitigate the sense of episodic looseness" which plagues the novel (p. 175).

"'No sir,' I says. We listened to it. Because he wasnt *curdled* then.

"'It looks like she is fixing to get a heap of *pleasure and satisfaction* outen it,' he says.' (TH, pp. 46-47, italics mine.)

Ratliff's amazement, although seemingly directed toward the machine only, reveals his feelings toward Miz Snopes and her determined effort to get as much "pleasure and satisfaction" out of her new machine as she can.² Miz Snopes, like her mindless machine, doesn't "give a whoop" whether the milk has already been separated or not; she continues to run it through the separator time after time. The story about Miz Snopes and her separator is a fitting close to the longer one about Ab and his habitual horse trading: in the end Ab will be "curdled," as if it were he and not the milk that had been run through the separator once too often.

At the conclusion of *The Hamlet*, when Armstid digs himself back into the earth, his motions are mechanical, suggesting the same endless and mindless repetition that characterizes Miz Snopes's earlier action:

²The compulsion to repeat is characteristic of life and death instincts, an expression of their essential conservatism, because "they both seek through repetition to restore an earlier state which has been lost--in the case of the sexual instincts, to return living matter to a state prior to the division of the sexes" (John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* [Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975], p. 88). Both instincts are joined when,

". . . in doubling, the ego takes the embodiment of its own death as its object of sexual desire, and the murder of the double becomes a suicidal *liebestod*, an annihilating union in which the sexual instinct and the death instinct (both of which seek to restore an earlier state) fuse in the ultimate regressive act--the suicidal return to the womb, the sexual reentry into Mother Death" (pp. 90-91).

Thus, in the simple anecdote about Miz Snopes and her milk separator, Faulkner gives us the first sense of life as a mindless and appalling mechanism, a futile attempt to escape its own beginnings. In Miz Snopes's repetitive action, we are asked to recognize as well the cycle of recurring, insatiable desire characteristic of the sexual drive.

[Ratliff] could now see Armstid waist-deep in the ground as if he had been cut in two at the hips, the dead torso, not even knowing it was dead, laboring on in measured stoop and recover like a metronome as Armstid dug himself back into that earth which had produced him to be its born and fated thrall forever until he died. (TH, p. 359.)

It is this very repetition that constitutes Armstid's slavery, that thralldom which necessitates his final return to the earth that first produced him. Like Joe Christmas, Armstid never escapes the pattern of his own life, a pattern that brings him full circle, to end where he began.³ Neither does Mink Snopes ever reach the sea, seeking in it "that iodinic proffer of space and oblivion" which contains a "repudiation of the land, the earth" (TH, p. 235);⁴ instead, even as he is almost at the sea's edge, Mink Snopes sees the woman who will be his wife:

³For Joe Christmas and Gail Hightower, their return to the beginning marks their deaths (William Faulkner, *Light in August* [1932; rpt. New York, N.Y.: Vintage-Random House, 1972]):

". . . . And yet [Christmas] is still inside the circle. 'And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years,' he thinks. 'But I have never got outside the circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,' he thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves" (p. 321).

". . . . [Hightower thinks] . . . 'It's no wonder that I had no father and that I already died one night twenty years before I saw light. And that my only salvation must be to return to the place to die where my life had already ceased before it began'" (p. 452).

⁴Viola Hopkins, "William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*: A Study in Meaning and Form," *Accent*, 15 (Spring, 1955), 125-144, notices that, like women, the "land itself is a shackle which neither Houston nor Mink can free themselves from. Both flee, but both must return" (p. 133). The "pattern of escape and return and of the land and women as life-giving and domesticating forces" is said to represent "the eternal struggle of the flesh against the spirit and the free will against fate" (p. 133).

he saw a light and approached it and heard the loud voices and saw her framed in the open door, *immobile*, upright and *unlistening*, while those harsh loud manshouts and cries seemed to *rise toward her like a roaring incense*. He went no further. (TH, p. 236, italics mine.)

At the moment that Mink enters her bed, the experience makes "a monogomist of him forever, as opium and homicide do of those they once accept" (TH, p. 238). Mink is enslaved as surely as Armstid or Houston⁵--the woman who becomes his destiny framed here in an open doorway, made "immobile" and "unlistening" as if she had annihilated all sound and motion. Like Addie's face, seen framed in a window at twilight, the woman becomes "a composite picture of all time" (Darl, p. 47) for Mink. There is no further progression, no release now from the woman, the earth, the land which hold him enthralled. Mink is hers forever and that eternity is reflected in his vision of her, a vision which invests the woman with all the formal, rigid, dead qualities of art while insisting on her immortality. The frame makes a picture of Addie's face in the same way the open door frames Mink's future wife, effortlessly transferring her to the realm of art.⁶

In Faulkner's work, immobility is a distinctly female trait, epitomized by Eula who, as a child and young woman, must be carried

⁵See Chapter 1, pp. 4-7.

⁶In Faulkner's second novel, *Mosquitoes*, the heroine is identified with a piece of sculpture (Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 168). In an early short story by William Faulkner, "Episode," *Jealousy and Episode: Two Stories by William Faulkner* (Minneapolis, Minn. Meyers Printing Company, 1955), the sketch of an old woman turns out to have "exactly the same expression as the Mona Lisa." Looking at it, the narrator apostrophizes, "Ah, women who have but one eternal age! And that is no age" (p. 9).

any place she goes. The same immobility is suggested in an early passage describing the two Snopes girls:

When [Jody] passed beyond the house he saw it--the narrow high frame like an epicene *gallows*, two big absolutely static young women beside it, who even in that first glance postulated that immobile dreamy solidarity of statuary. (TH, p. 19, italics mine.)

One of the girls is like "a figure in a charade, a carved piece symbolising some terrific physical effort which had died with its inception (TH, p. 19). Here the frame of the picture is like a "gallows" signaling the death of motion itself, a death as necessary to art as motion is to life,⁷ "the aim of every artist [being] to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed."⁸ For Faulkner, women inhabit a world apart from the real world. Mink's woman stands in the lighted doorway "unlistening" while the cries of the men around her "rise toward her like a roaring incense"--a thunderous noise she does not hear. When Eula appears in the window on the wild and tragic night of the horse sale, she remains completely untouched by the turbulent happenings of the real world:

⁷Irwin, *op. cit.*, suggests that art involved, for Faulkner, a kind of self-destruction in which "through the use of the phallic pen on the 'pure space' of the virgin page or the chisel on virgin marble, the self is continually spent and wasted" (p. 163). The resulting work of art represents the artist's feminine self:

". . . . Faulkner understood that a writer's relation to his material and to the work of art is always a loss, a separation, a cutting off, a self-castration that transforms the masculine artist into the feminine-masculine vase of the work" (p. 171).

⁸Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: An Interview," *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 80.

She was in a white garment; the heavy braided club of her hair looked almost black against it. *She did not lean out*, she merely stood there, full in the moon, apparently blank-eyed or certainly not looking downward at them--the heavy gold hair, the mask not tragic and perhaps not even doomed; just damned, the strong faint life of breasts beneath marblelike fall of the garment; to those below what Brunhilde, what Rhinemaiden on what spurious river-rock of papier-mâché, what Helen returned to what topless and shoddy Argos, waiting for no one. (TH, p. 306, italics mine.)

Illuminated by the moon, like Mink's blonde wife in the bright doorway, Eula presents her "beautiful masklike face" (TH, p. 147) to the men who gather beneath her window. Motion is taken from her ("She did not lean out"), her white dress like marble, herself eternal and immovable contrasting with the "spurious," transitory world. Positioned *above* the men (like Mink's wife surrounded by men whose cries must *rise* to reach her unlistening ears), she is oblivious to them, existing utterly apart in a world of literature, of art.

Even Mrs. Armstid, an abject figure in comparison with Eula, is granted the same impressive quality of permanence. She, too, is upright and intact although borne upon a flood, a stubborn and unmoving vertical poised above a rushing horizontal flux:

[Mrs. Armstid] descended the steps, though as soon as she reached the level earth and began to retreat, the gray folds of the garment once more lost all inference and intimation of locomotion, so that she seemed to progress without motion like a figure on a retreating float; a *gray and blasted tree trunk* moving, somehow intact and upright, upon an unhurried flood. (TH, p. 317.)

This description of Mrs. Armstid is not only consistent with Faulkner's other female characters. The image of the tree, upright on a flood of water, forcefully recalls the moment in *As I Lay Dying* when the Bundren wagon is overturned by a log: "[the log] *surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ*" (Darl, p. 141). Although the log, said

to be bearded, is explicitly compared to Christ, it carries a more subtle symbolic message. Even given Faulkner's usual tendency to identify women with trees,⁹ it is striking that Faulkner should describe Mrs. Armstid in a way that directly echoes an event in an earlier novel. Adding to this the fact that Addie is encased in wood, her coffin similar to a hollow log, it is difficult not to identify Addie with the wooden Christ that rises above the water and sweeps the Bundren wagon into the current as if it were "the hand of God" (Tull, p. 145). Yet it is not God who punishes here, but Addie who would take up her switch again, plunging her children once more into the "red bitter flood" (Addie, p. 166) so that their blood will run with hers, their lives tied to hers even in death. In *As I Lay Dying* as in *The Hamlet*, the worlds of the living and dead interpenetrate: Addie, although dead, lives on in her sons at the same time that she drags them along with her into the afterworld; Houston's death leaves him "wedded and twinned forever" (TH, p. 217) with his killer:

[Houston looked] up out of the red roar, into the face which with his own was wedded and twinned forever now by the explosion of that ten-gauge shell--the dead who would carry the living into the ground with him; the living who must bear about the repudiating earth with him forever, the deathless slain. (TH, p. 217.)

It is interesting that the image of the "gray and blasted

⁹In William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*, not only do we have an image of Caddy climbing "a blooming pear tree" (Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 171), but she is constantly associated with the smell of trees. It is significant that Addie is symbolically represented as an old dead tree trunk while in *The Hamlet* Eula is associated with another blossoming pear tree. Eula and the tree share the same whiteness and immobility: the branches of the tree are compared to the "separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman" (TH, p. 277).

tree trunk," used to describe Mrs. Armstid, functions again on the level of plot as it did in *As I Lay Dying* in the story of Houston's death, for it is an old hollow oak which becomes Houston's coffin, Mink choosing for the concealment of Houston's body the "topless shell of [a] blasted oak" (TH, p. 252). Houston's fate is similar to that which overtakes Armstid. We see Houston's body drop down into the tree in the same way that, later, we see Armstid swallowed up by the earth.

While Faulkner obviously associates women with the earth, it is perhaps less easy to see the link that exists between the tree trunk that engulfs Houston and the woman later said to be like a "gray and blasted tree trunk." The association is significant only to the extent that the tree trunk is every bit as female, in Faulkner's world, as the female earth. Consistent with the emphasis on repetition, death is seen not as the end of life but as a return to the beginning, Faulkner identifying womb and tomb, woman and fatal destiny.

For the murderer, Mink Snopes, to look upon the woman that will be his wife is to foresee his own fate:¹⁰

Yet [Mink] not only saw that he must compete for mere notice with men among whom he saw himself not only as a child but as a child

¹⁰Mink's wife is his fate in another way, of course. It is she who is ultimately responsible for setting the law on his trail: ". . . . And even that might have been all right if she hadn't started in telling everybody that would listen that you never done it. Just a horse with a empty saddle; no body and no blood neither found yet, and here she is trying to help you by telling everybody she meets that you never done something that nobody knows for sure has even been done yet'" (TH, p. 233).

of another race and species, but that when he did approach her at last he would have to tear aside not garments alone but the ghostly embraces of thirty or forty men; and this not only once but each time and hence (he foresaw even then his fate) forever. (TH, p. 237).

Although Mink is not annihilated when he is finally summoned to her bed, the rest of the world is:

Afterward it seemed to him that that afternoon's bedding had been the signal for the entire *furios edifice* of ravished acres and shotgun houses and toiling men and mules which had been erected overnight and founded on nothing, to collapse overnight into nothing, back into the refuse . . . of its own murdering. (TH, p. 238, italics mine.)

Houses, men, and mules are founded on nothing only to fall back into nothingness. Even as the whole "furios edifice" of development returns to its original state, Mink is thrown back in time, seeing himself as a child.

The stunted and starved Mink feels a kinship with his own children, the three of them sharing

that same quality which [Mink] himself possessed: not abject but just still, with an old tired wisdom, acceptance of the immitigable discrepancy between will and capability due to that handicap of physical size in which none of the three of them had had any choice. (TH, p. 222.)

Even when Mink is imprisoned for the murder of Jack Houston, he is more pathetic by virtue of his fragile, childlike quality than sinister:

Ratliff, passing to and fro between his home and the Square, would see the two small grimed hands, immobile and clasping loosely the bars of the jail window at a height not a great deal above that at which a child would have held them. (Th, p. 259.)

Mink's life is one of deprivation, a systematic dispossession, not only of property but of his very manhood. His relationship with his wife is typical of Mink's other relationships, all of which seem to work together to "outrage his rights as a man" (TH, p. 218),

reducing him to the status of a child. Not only must Mink compete with other men for mere notice from her, but he must conquer the ghosts of all his wife's former lovers each and every time he embraces her, a struggle recurring endlessly, a pattern repeated forever. Mink's struggle against Houston for the possession of his wandering cow represents the same conflict transferred from the world of love to the world of trade. Mink's wife is never entirely his, as the roof over his head has never belonged to him and never will:

[Mink] emerged from the bottom and looked up the slope of his meagre and sorry corn and saw it--the paintless two-room cabin with an open hallway between and a lean-to kitchen, which was not his, on which he paid rent but not taxes . . . and which was just like the one he had been born in which had not belonged to his father either, and just like the one he would die in if he died indoors . . . and it was just like the more than six others he had lived in since his marriage and like the twice that many more he knew he would live in before he did die. (TH, p. 219.)

When Mink's wife sells herself for ten dollars in order to help him, she adds another ghost to the number Mink must already battle in order to make her his. If Mink's life takes on the quality of a recurring nightmare, it is a quality his wife seems to recognize and make use of in her fantasy of Mink's hanging:

"--God damn you! God damn you! If they would just let me do the hanging!" She shook [Mink], her face bent to his, her hard, hot, panting breath on his face. "Not for killing him, but for doing it when you had no money to get away on if you ran, and nothing to eat if you stayed. If they'd just let me do it: hang you just enough to take you down and bring you to and hang you again just enough to cut you down and bring you to--" (TH, p. 240.)

Mink's search for the sea with its promise of oblivion ends with a woman who will always take him to the edge of death only to cut him down and bring him to, who will always deny him the ultimate consummation of death itself. Yet the consummation Mink finally seeks

with Houston fails miserably; it is not Mink who dies but Houston and, although Houston's death leaves the two men "wedded and twinned forever" (TH, p. 217), it represents not the solution to a problem but the beginning of a new one:

What [Mink] would have liked to do would be to leave a printed placard on the breast itself: This is what happens *to the men who impound Mink Snopes's cattle*, with his name signed to it. But he could not, and here again, for the third time since he had pulled the trigger, was that conspiracy to frustrate and outrage his rights as a man and his feelings as a sentient creature. He must rise and quit the thicket and do what he had next to do, not to finish it but merely to complete the first step of what he had started, put into motion, who realised now that he had known already . . . that he had pulled the trigger on an enemy but had only slain a corpse to be hidden. (TH, pp. 218-219.)

In such a world there is no progress, no solution which does not create, in turn, a new problem in the same way that Flem Snopes ends by becoming a bigger threat than the one he was originally hired to forestall. Not only is Flem a bigger threat than Ab, but he becomes the source of a seemingly endless parade of additional Snopeses. The difficulties surrounding Houston's murder begin with his death and end when Mink is in jail, defeated not by Houston but by his corpse:

"I was all right," [Mink] said, "until it started coming to pieces. I could have handled that dog." He held his throat, his voice harsh and dry and croaking. "But the son of a bitch started coming to pieces on me." (TH, p. 258.)

While living, Houston was the focal point for all Mink's pent-up rage and frustration. The bizarre detail of the body's disintegration gives the impression that there is no longer one problem but many.¹¹

¹¹There is another reason that the disintegration of Houston's body haunts Mink, intent on upholding his "rights as a man" (TH, p. 218). When Houston's body starts "coming to pieces" (TH, p. 258), it activates not only the fear of death but the analogous fear of castration:

Mink would attempt to repudiate the land; he would fight against the pattern which shapes his life, binding him ever closer in its womblike web. The two-room shack Mink was born in and the one precisely like it in which he will die are separated from each other by an endless series of shacks equally indistinguishable one from the other. If there is an element of horror in this vision of life, there is also a stark beauty. During the interval between Houston's murder and Mink's arrest, Mink lives a life that has been almost reduced to ritual: the events of each successive day and night are virtually unchanging. It is a pattern that calls attention to itself because it reverses the normal state of affairs, Mink going out to hunt Houston's hound every night and sleeping during the day.¹² Lyrical passages, reminiscent of those attending Ike's excursion with the cow also appear:

". . . the son's renunciation of the phallus amounts to a kind of amputation in which a part is given up to save the whole; but that amputation, whereby the life of the body is temporarily preserved through sacrificing a part of the body, shatters once and for all the sense of bodily and psychic integrity, and as such is a partial foreshadowing of that ultimate dissolution of bodily and psychic integrity that is death. It is as if one kept oneself from being devoured by an animal by feeding the animal a finger, only to realize in that very act that the body can come apart and thus it ultimately will come apart" (Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 89).

¹²The same reversal of night-day patterns occurs when Ratliff and company are digging out at the Old Frenchman place:

"They dug through that brief summer night as through the previous one while the familiar stars wheeled overhead . . . they prevailed upon [Armstid] to stop at dawn and returned to the house and ate--the canned salmon, the sidemeat cold in its own congealed grease, the cold cooked bread--and slept again among the tumbled quilts while noon came" (TH, p. 358).

and again [Mink] watched the night emerge from the bottom and mount through the *bitten corn*, taking the house itself at last and, still rising, become as two up-opening palms releasing the westward-flying ultimate bird of evening. Below him, beyond the corn, the fireflies winked and drifted against the breast of darkness; beyond, within, in the steady booming of the frogs was the steady pulse and beat of the dark heart of night, so that at last when the unvarying moment came--that moment as unvarying from one dusk to the next as the afternoon's instant when he would awake--the beat of the heart seemed to fall still too, emptying silence for the first deep cry of strong and invincible grief. He reached his hand backward and took up the gun. (TH, p. 229, italics mine.)

It is only with the story of Ike and the cow that the beauty suggested in this passage emerges from darkness into daylight. Ike's sojourn with the cow is characterized by the same unvarying repetition of events: the simple acts of waking, eating, and sleeping become charged with the significance of ritual. Ike and the cow pace the sun, seeming to follow a celestial pathway:

from now until evening they will advance only as the day itself advances, no faster. They have the same destination: sunset. They pursue it as the sun itself does and within the compass of one *single immutable horizon*. (TH, p. 183, italics mine.)

Ike does not fight the orderly rhythm of life, does not protest against the limitations imposed by that "one single immutable horizon." The reversal of night and day patterns becomes a corollary of Mink's furious repudiation of the earth, which--as Ike discovers--itself breathes forth the "upward-seeking" light (TH, p. 181).

Ike and Mink are set up as polar extremes. Both refuse to take money: Mink, because it would bind him to his wife, declare his dependence on her; Ike, because it would separate him from his love. Ike exists in a state of harmony with the animal he loves and with the whole natural world. Mink walks through his stands of "bitten corn" (TH, p. 229), his unproductive fields, to face the unthinking malevolence

of the hound and the refusal of the natural world to aid and abet him. Through his capitulation to his need for the cow, Ike becomes a victor not only over the object of his love but over the earth: "his the victor's drowsing rapport with all the anonymous faceless female flesh capable of love walking the female earth" (TH, p. 181). Mink, while acknowledging his dependence on a woman ("It's like drink. It's like dope to me" [TH, p. 221]), fights against it and himself.¹³

Each morning and evening Ike visits the spring, there confronting his own image mirrored by the water: "Again [Ike's] head interrupts, then replaces as once more he breaks with drinking the reversed drinking of his drowned and fading image" (TH, p. 186). To this image of himself, Ike is "wedded and annealed" (TH, p. 183) in much the same way that Mink and Houston are joined, "wedded and twinned forever" (TH, p. 217), at the moment of Houston's death. The spring contains all time:

It is the well of days, the still and insatiable aperture of earth. It holds in tranquil paradox of suspended precipitation dawn, noon, and sunset; yesterday, today, and tomorrow--star-spawn and hieroglyph, the fierce white dying rose Then ebb's afternoon, until at last the morning, noon, and afternoon flow back, drain the sky and creep leaf by voiceless leaf and twig and branch and trunk descending . . . until at last the complete all of light gathers about that still and tender mouth in one last expiring inhalation. (TH, p. 186.)

Evenings, when Ike and the cow "nest[le] back into the nest-form of sleep" (TH, p. 186), the sleep they enter is a small death, but

¹³Mink is not merely "utterly ashamed of human interdependence" (Panthea Reid Broughton, "Masculinity and Menfolk in *The Hamlet*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 22 [Summer, 1969], p. 185). As the author suggests, the dependence Mink fights against is so extreme that it threatens to overwhelm him.

one which contains within itself renewal and rebirth. The cycle of days will repeat itself forever, continuing the process of birth, death, and regeneration.

In the life of the idiot, Isaac Snopes, we are given that moment which is the beginning and the end of time, where first and last come together. The idiot's world is one of unvarying repetition, knowing no time. In describing Benjy Compson, Faulkner says,

[I saw that] Benjy must never grow beyond this moment; that for him all knowing must begin and end with that fierce, panting, paused and stooping wet figure which smelled like trees. That he must never grow up to where the grief of bereavement could be leavened with understanding.¹⁴

The figure of Ike Snopes, holding on his lap a wooden substitute for his beloved cow is, like Benjy, another bereaved child who is doomed to live and relive that moment of his bereavement forever because he will never have the capacity to understand it. The essence of the idiot's experience is repetition: each time Ike falls down the stairs, each time he treats the surface of the water as something solid enough to be walked on, "forgetting again that it will give under his weight, crying once again" (TH, p. 175), it is almost as though it were the first time, no memory, no remembered past experience intervening:

It is not that [Ike] must return to work. There is no work, no travail, no muscular and spiritual reluctance to overcome, constantly war against; yesterday was not, tomorrow is not, today is merely a placid and virginal astonishment at the creeping ridge of dust and trash in front of the broom, at sheets coming smooth and taut at certain remembered motions of the hands--a routine grooved, irkloss. (TH, p. 166.)

¹⁴Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, I (New York, N.Y.: 1974), p. 568.

It is significant that the idiot becomes endowed with an uncanny intelligence almost from the moment he drops Houston's coin and goes to steal the cow, as if all knowing literally begins with his love for the cow:

[Ike] made no false motion with the hand which held the coin, he had made no motion of any kind, he was standing perfectly still at the moment, yet suddenly his palm was empty. The coin rang dully once on the dusty planks and perhaps glinted once, then vanished, though who to know what motion, infinitesimal and convulsive, of supreme repudiation there might have been, its impulse gone, vanished with the movement, because he even ceased to moan as he stood looking at his empty palm with quiet amazement Then-- it was an effort almost physical, like childbirth--he connected two ideas, he progressed backward into time and recaptured an image by logical retrogression and fumbled into the shirt pocket again From then on he made no sound at all. He squatted for a time, pulling at the weeds, and now even the paradoxical dexterity was missing from his movements, even the dexterity which caused his hands to function at other times as though in spite of him; watching him you would have said he did not want to find the coin. And then you would have said, known, that he did not intend to find it; when after a time a wagon came up the road . . . and the driver spoke to him, when he raised his face it was not even empty, it was unfathomable and profoundly quiet; when the man spoke his name, he did not even reply with the one sound which he knew, or at least was ever known to make, and that infallibly when anyone spoke to him. (TH, pp. 177-178.)

Ike's love for the cow teaches him to dissemble; he is no longer an innocent, obedient child. It is a knowing that seems to corrupt just as Adam's eating of the tree of knowledge precipitated his fall into sin and mortality:

[Ike] takes [the feed basket] away from her, drags it from beneath the swinging muzzle which continues to chew out of the center of surprise, and hangs it over a limb, who is learning fast now, who has learned success and then precaution and secrecy and how to steal and even providence; who has only lust and greed and blood-thirst and a moral conscience to keep him awake at night, yet to acquire. (TH, p. 183.)

The knowledge Ike acquires is potentially disastrous even while it seems to lead him into paradise, making it possible for him to live an idyllic existence:

Now [Ike] slacks the rope; from now until evening they will advance only as the day itself advances, no faster. They have the same destination: sunset. They pursue it as the sun itself does and within the compass of one single immutable horizon. They pace the ardent and unheeding sun, themselves unheeding and without ardor among the shadows of the soaring trunks which are sun-gear'd ratchet-spokes which wheel the axled earth, powerful and without haste. (TH, p. 183.)

Ike and his heifer are at one with nature. They are indistinguishable one from the other: as they walk, they are "joined by the golden skein of the wet grass rope" (TH, p. 185); mornings and evenings they "eat from the basket together" (TH, p. 182); at night "they lie down together" (TH, p. 186). When Ike looks into the eyes of his beloved, it is himself he sees mirrored there:

She stands as he left her, tethered, chewing. Within the mind enoromus [sic] moist and pupilless globes he sees himself in twin miniature mirrored by the inscrutable abstraction; one with that which Juno might have looked out with, he watches himself contemplating what those who looked at Juno saw. (TH, p. 182.)¹⁵

Like Benjy Compson, Ike Snopes will never age, but will remain a child forever, the only love he will ever know the wordless milkwarm love of a mother for her child. This is Faulkner's paradise: mother and child bound together in a timeless intimacy, moving together through the "*womb-dimension*, the unavoidable first and inescapable

¹⁵This seems to be an instance of the doubling Irwin has noted: the cow Ike's feminine shadow self. Yet Ike has another double, one he sees morning and evening at the spring where he "breaks with drinking the reversed drinking of his *drowned and fading image*" (TH, p. 186, italics mine). Ike's sexual instincts find expression in his regressive relationship with the maternal cow. The differences between them are obliterated so that Ike and the cow are indeed one. Ike's death instincts are represented by the double in the spring, his own "drowned and fading image." Sex and death, womb and tomb, are again joined in the consummation of all desire. The eternal, timeless realm Ike occupies is the realm of art itself, Faulkner's overblown prose breaking from the page "as if of its own rich over-fertile weight," itself like a renewing downpour of rain, procreating prose (TH, p. 184).

last" (TH, p. 185, italics mine). It is indeed the "womb-dimension" realized in the relationship between Ike and the cow, a miniature Ike appearing doubled in the cow's eyes. Not only is Ike contained within the body of the cow, but he takes on some of her attributes and becomes identified with her. Like the cow, Ike is "herbivorous" (TH, p. 182).

A creature of bovine stupidity, Ike bears a decided resemblance to Eula as to other dumb animals. Yet, as already noted, Ike's relationship to the cow is linked to his acquisition of knowledge. Just as Labove earlier imagines himself transformed into a maiden, begging Eula to teach him everything she knows ("I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know" [TH, p. 119]), so Ike, too, becomes the image of the thing he loves, even succeeding where Labove failed. The knowledge Ike attains gives him mastery not only over the object of his affections but over the earth:

So [Ike] leaves the crib, pausing for a moment in the door before descending as though he were listening, breathing in the reek, the odor of cows and mares as the successful lover does that of a room of women, his the victor's drowsing rapport with all the anonymous faceless female flesh capable of love walking the female earth. (TH, p. 181.)

Ike's love for the cow is invested with the poetry of nature and depicted as being in "absolute rapport with nature"¹⁶ because the earth is female, the original mother of men. When Ike milks the cow it is not just milk that flows from her teats, it is the "strong inexhaustible life ichor itself, inherently, of itself, renewing" (TH, p. 186). The rain which seeds the earth, the sky "breaking as if

¹⁶Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

of its own rich over-fertile weight" (TH, p. 184), is nature's equivalent of the life-giving milk. Milk and rain are indistinguishable, the afternoon shower and the evening downpour of milk the same, although Faulkner manages to give the rain sexual connotations as well as associating it with birth, the fertilized earth suddenly populated by the sky's get, "[the] murmurous runnels, releasing in mirrored repetition the sky which, glint by glint of fallen gold and blue, the falling drops had prisoned" (TH, p. 185).

Ike, a child, will forever be in love with his mother, that ultimate earth for which the cow is a mere substitute. Ike's eternal love is balanced by Ratliff's determined renunciation of all women.¹⁷ Yet Ratliff, for all his "hearty celibacy" (TH, p. 42), is nearly as childlike as the idiot he befriends. Ratliff's little goatlike ponies lead us back into an asexual world of childhood, a world of "ungendered peace" (TH, p. 195) somewhat naively believed to be characteristic of youth or age. The strength and rigidity of Ratliff's resistance to women betrays the presence of the obsession it has been designed to counteract: Ratliff's wagon, painted with the faces of women who smile at him in "fixed and sightless invitation" (TH, p. 72) is pulled by a couple of ponies, harmless little "rabbits" (TH, p. 50) substituted for the big stallions of "bitless masculinity" (TH, p. 214).

It is Ratliff's close identification with Ike ("it was as though it were [Ratliff] . . . looking out of the blasted tongueless

¹⁷Ratliff's character is nearly burlesqued in Houston whose "savage fixation about females" has led him to "abjure" all "physical contact with the female world" (TH, p. 187)--to the point he can't even milk his own cow!

face at the row of faces watching him who had been given the wordless passions but not the specious words" [TH, p. 196]) that prompts him to nail the board back in place, thereby renouncing once more his own desires along with Ike's. Ratliff realizes that there is no justification for his action by any objective standard, but that he deprives Ike of his love for reasons that originate within himself. When Ratliff peers through the fence and recognizes himself, the scene looks forward to the end of the novel when Ratliff stands self-betrayed.

Ostensibly the victim of his own greed, Ratliff is finally--ironically--seduced by the treasure planted in the earth. When Uncle Dick feels "four bloods lust-running" (TH, p. 346) at the Old Frenchman place, Ratliff is one of them. Although he has been able to resist Eula (and all other two- or four-legged female creatures), Ratliff is finally caught by the female earth with its alluring promise of wealth and abundance. Although Ratliff, like Houston, has fought long and hard against his fate, it claims him in the end.

This kind of endless struggle against the repeated onslaught of some ineradicable force is imaged again and again throughout *The Hamlet*, in the background the steady whirr of Miz Snopes's separator. The conclusion of the spotted horses episode is known in advance: it will be a repeat performance, Ab Snopes doing his "fool about a horse" (TH, p. 31) routine one more time, his image multiplied, repeated in all the other men gathered about the corral. Faulkner's rendering of the scene where the men discuss the coming sale is impressionistic and powerfully associative:

"Willow aint a tree," Freeman said. "It's a weed."

"Well, I dont know what it is," the fourth said. "But it aint no weed. Because you can grub up a weed and you are done with it. I been grubbing up a clump of willows outen my spring pasture for fifteen years. They are the same size every year. Only difference is, it's just two or three more trees every time."

"And if I was you," Ratliff said, "that's just exactly where I would be come sunup tomorrow. Which of course you aint going to do. I reckon there aint nothing under the sun or in Frenchman's Bend neither that can keep you folks from giving Flem Snopes and that Texas man your money." (TH, p. 278.)

The discussion is appropriately punctuated by the mockingbird's "idiot reiteration" (TH, p. 279). The willows which return in greater numbers every year are symbolic not only of the whole Snopes clan¹⁸ but of that relentless force which patterns the lives of Faulkner's doomed and fated characters, bringing them full circle each time. Ratliff's growing disillusionment is in part brought on by his realization of the unchanging pattern of life:

"Snopes can come and Snopes can go, but Will Varner looks like he is fixing to snopes forever. Or Varner will Snopes forever-- take your pick. What is it the fellow says: off with the old and on with the new; the old job at the old stand, maybe a new fellow doing the jobbing but it's the same old stern getting reamed out?" (TH, p. 162.)

The faces and costumes may be different, but it's the same old story each time. This realization ultimately invites the reader to acknowledge the underlying associative structure that gives an impressive unity to the work as a whole. Faulkner clearly invites us to recognize the process of substitution for what it is. When Labove fails in his attack on Eula, he welcomes the expected fight with her brother as providing an "orgasm of sorts" (TH, p. 122). Later, Eula's would-be suitors fight among themselves:

¹⁸Joseph W. Reed, Jr., *Faulkner's Narrative* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 238.

They would depart in a body, seething and decorous, to mount the patient mules and horses and ride in furious wordless amity to the creek ford a half mile away and dismount and hitch the horses and mules and with bare fists fight silently and savagely and wash the blood off in the water and mount again and ride their separate ways, with their skinned knuckles and split lips and black eyes and for the time freed even of rage and frustration and desire, beneath the cold moon, across the *planted land*. (TH, p. 131, italics mine.)

The violence is played out against a backdrop of sexuality, Eula always in the background, the "planted land" under their feet. But Faulkner makes the connection explicit, inviting comparison with Labove:

Like the teacher Labove, [the suitors] would have welcomed [physical violence], they would have accepted that with actual joy. As with Labove, it would at least have been the same living flesh warm under furious impact, bruising, scoriating, springing blood, which, like Labove, was what they actually desired now whether they knew it or not. (TH, pp. 136-137.)

McCarron's final victory over Eula is the inevitable culmination of the savage battle which immediately precedes it; McCarron's character as Eula's lover (a man who grew up with a Negro as his "sole companion," whom he conquered "with his fists" and whom he thereafter paid "out of his pocket money . . . for the privilege of whipping . . . not severely, with a miniature riding crop" (TH, p. 135) is equally appropriate.¹⁹ Violence is substituted for sex, serving the same needs, satisfying the same desires, the same old game in a different guise.

Less obviously, the world of trade provides another arena for expression of the same impulses. Not only does Faulkner give us the odd spectacle of Will and Flem's financial courtship (Will and Flem

¹⁹Brooks, *op. cit.*, comments on Eula's affair with McCarron with devastating understatement: "It is perhaps not love" (p. 180).

riding together on the seat of a horse-drawn lovemobile so gaudy that the Texas man, when asked to drive it, complains "Only I ought to have a powder puff or at least a mandolin to ride it with" [TH, p. 298]), but he also presents us with the idea of the trader who engages in business for the pure pleasure of it. Pat Stamper plays "horses against horses as a gambler plays cards against cards, for the pleasure of beating a worthy opponent as much as for gain" (TH, p. 30) in the same way that Ratliff looks forward to returning to his usual round of business, not because he needs the money but for the satisfaction of dealing itself:

[Ratliff] was looking forward to his visit not only for the pleasure of the *shrewd dealing* which far transcended mere gross profit, but with the sheer happiness of being out of bed and moving once more at free will, even though a little weakly, in the sun and air which men drank and moved in and talked and dealt with one another. (TH, pp. 67-68, italics mine.)

It is the society of men which is ultimately desirable, where physical violence has long ago been elaborated into a code with its own laws and rituals. As Labove learns when he takes up football, there are "rules for violence" (TH, p. 108), the battle of the wits which lies at the heart of "shrewd dealing" no less a form of sublimated violence, concealing in turn a fundamental eroticism.

Will Varner dominates the world of trade in the same way that his daughter, Eula, dominates the world of love. Both are mysterious figures, Eula with her "beautiful masklike face" (TH, p. 147), Will inscrutable, "shrewd secret and merry" (TH, p. 5). Although Ratliff scrupulously avoids any involvement in the dangerous game of romance, he nevertheless competes with Flem for Will Varner's approval. The

novel is about the "usurpation of an heirship" (TH, p. 88), those two eternal bachelors, Jody and Ratliff (the first, Varner's actual son; the second, his "son in spirit and intellect" [TH, p. 158]), losing out to Flem Snopes in Will Varner's affections. It is Flem who sits beside Varner in the wagon with the lace-trimmed top (later occupied by Eula and her lover), Flem who becomes Varner's partner in trade. When Mink Snopes finally realizes that he has been betrayed by his own kin, that Flem never did intend to save him, his outraged cry voices as well the disillusionment of Jody and Ratliff at the hands of their inscrutable father.

Ratliff gradually realizes that his faith in Will Varner has been misplaced. Originally convinced that Will's partnership with Flem has been dictated by necessity (undertaken as a kind of insurance), Ratliff patiently awaits the time when Varner will cast Flem aside. Upon hearing that Varner has given Flem his daughter and the deed to the Old Frenchman Place, Ratliff immediately supposes that he did it in order to "get that patented necktie out of his store and out of his house" (TH, p. 157). Ratliff is doubly deceived at this point, not only about the value of the Frenchman property but about Will and his relationship to Flem. When Ratliff meets Varner he sits "like a caller in a house of death" (TH, p. 157), ready to extend his sympathy to the older man, assuming too easily Varner's own complicity in his own efforts to defeat Flem:

"You must have been desperate," Ratliff said quietly. He meant no insult. He was not even thinking of Varner's daughter's shame or of his daughter at all. He meant the land, the Old Frenchman place. He had never for one moment believed that it had

no value. He might have believed this if someone else had owned it. But the very fact that Varner had ever come into possession of it and still kept it, apparently making no effort to sell it or do anything else with it, was proof enough for him. He declined to believe that Varner ever had been or ever would be stuck with anything; that if he acquired it, he got it cheaper than anyone else could have, and if he kept it, it was too valuable to sell. In the case of the Old Frenchman place he could not see why this was so, but the fact that Varner had bought it and still had it was sufficient. So when Varner finally did let it go, Ratliff believed that the price had been necessity and not cash.

Varner knew Ratliff was thinking it. He sat the old horse and looked down at Ratliff, the little hard eyes beneath their bushy rust-colored brows glinting at the man who was a good deal nearer his son in spirit and intellect and physical appearance too than any of his own get. "So you think pure liver aint going to choke that cat," he said.

"Maybe with that ere little piece of knotted-up string in it?" Ratliff said.

"What little piece of knotted-up string?"

"I dont know," Ratliff said. (TH, pp. 157-158.)

It is interesting that Eula and the land form a kind of package deal and that Ratliff, while denying any thought for Eula whatsoever, nevertheless expresses not two pages later his sense of "outrage at the waste, the useless squandering" which Eula's marriage to the "cold and froglike" Flem represents (TH, p. 159). Like Labove, Ratliff identifies Eula with the land ("why should not that body at the last have been the unscalable sierra" [TH, p. 159]), casting her marriage to Flem in terms of the natural world: "as though the gods themselves had funnelled all the concentrated bright wet-slanted unparadised June onto a dung-heap, breeding pismires" (TH, pp. 159-160).

We know that this kind of romantic inflation of the worth of Eula or Sutpen's land is entirely foreign to Varner's character. When we first see him, enthroned "against his background of fallen baronial splendor" at the Old Frenchman place (TH, p. 6), Varner explains,

"I like to sit here. I'm trying to find out what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this" -he did not move, he did not so much as indicate with his head the rise of old brick and tangled walks topped by the columned ruin behind him--"Just to eat and sleep in." (TH, p. 6.)

Varner's strength lies ultimately in that, like Flem, he doesn't need the land or Eula; he is remarkably free of that obsession that undoes Labove, Armstid, Houston, and Ratliff, too. When the devil tells his lackey to offer Flem "the gratifications," the lackey replies, "'He has them. He says that for a man that only chews, any spitton will do'" (TH, p. 151). Varner's attitude is similar: for a man who only eats and sleeps, any house will do. Neither Flem nor Varner needs the ruined splendor of the Sutpen mansion, the ruined but splendid woman that is Eula.

Like Stamper and his Negro, Will and Flem work together in some kind of "outrageous rapport" (TH, p. 30) as if together they make one person not two. When Ratliff voices his disillusionment, he runs the two names together to make one: "Varner will Snopes" (TH, p. 162). The financial affairs of the two men are similarly enmeshed so that it is difficult for anyone to say what belongs to Flem and what to Will:

"Maybe [the cattle were] in the bank vault all the time," Ratliff said weakly. "Who did Will say they belonged to?"
 "He said they was Snopes's," Tull said. "He said, 'Ask that son-of-a-gun of Jody's.'"
 "And did you?" Ratliff said.
 "Bookwright did. And Snopes said, 'They're in Varner's pasture.' And Bookwright said, 'But Will says they are yourn.' And Snopes turned his head and spit and says, 'They're in Varner's pasture. (TH, pp. 61-62.)"

The team of Flem and Varner is every bit as accomplished as Stamper's when it comes to sleight-of-hand, the magic of keeping people guessing. Flem is, like Stamper's Negro, the darker of the two: Flem

is the butt of all Ratliff's righteous indignation while Varner retains a great deal of Ratliff's faith ("He declined to believe that Varner ever had been or ever would be stuck with anything [TH, p. 157]),--a faith that, in the end, leads him to become Flem's final victim.

With the same fluidity of association that leads us to identify Eula ("mammalian female meat" [TH, p. 100]) with the cow ("maiden meditant" [TH, p. 175]), Varner becomes identified with Flem. When Ratliff asserts his simple faith in Will Varner and buys the Old Frenchman place, it is only to discover that it is Flem Snopes with whom he has made the deal not Varner; that the rich country he thought he inherited from Varner is nothing but a barren field bequeathed him by the impotent Flem; that his vision of the good, infallible father presiding over a bountiful earth must be replaced by a darker one. In the end, Ratliff is self-betrayed: his desire for wealth (particularly that wealth which had been Varner's, that land which had belonged to his spiritual father) defeats him; his fantasies (the process of self-delusion which led him to believe he was Varner's only real son) defeat him.

It is to some extent this realization of Ratliff's own culpability which takes much of the onus of villainy off of Flem Snopes and Will Varner. While Varner, with his "fierce risibility" (TH, p. 308), seems often to embody a malignant force, that same "maniacal risibility" (TH, p. 188) which victimizes Houston, twisting his life into something he will never understand ("'I dont understand it,' [Houston] would say. 'I dont know why. I wont ever know why. But You cant beat me. I am strong as You are. You cant beat me!'" [TH, pp. 216-

217]), transforming life itself into a "useless and elaborate practical joke" (TH, p. 188), he also represents a positive ideal. Ratliff's respect for Varner's consummate gamesmanship, like the grudging admiration which colors Ratliff's estimation of his arch rival, Flem,²⁰ accords Varner the same nearly legendary status enjoyed by Pat Stamper.

If Varner is not entirely the kindly, benevolent god Ratliff thought, it is perhaps significant that Ratliff must fall from the pinnacle of virtue, discovering within himself the same desire for wealth he condemned so forcefully in Flem. It is not until Ratliff shares in the folly of the rest of mankind that he becomes fully human. When all the Quicks and Armstids and Snopeses gather around Mrs. Littlejohn's corral, irresistibly drawn by the whirl of gaudy-colored horses, it is to prove not only that--like Ab--they are all fools for horses but that--unlike Ab--they are not "curdled" (TH, p. 47) yet. They still can hope and dream that *this* time they will come out ahead: "Anse McCallum made a good team outen them two of hisn," the first man said. "They was a little light. That was all" (TH, p. 279). According to Varner, they do come out ahead, or at least even:

"They are going to come out even on them things, after all, Varner said. "They'll get the money back in exercise and relaxation. You take a man that aint got no other relaxation all year except dodging mule-dung up and down a field furrow. And a night like this one, when a man aint old enough yet to lay still and sleep, and yet aint young enough anymore to be tomcatting in and out of other folks' back windows, something like this is good for

²⁰Brooks, *ibid.*, and Hopkins, *op. cit.*, both see an element of admiration of Ratliff's appraisal of Flem.

him. It'll make him sleep tomorrow night anyhow, provided he gets back home by then." (TH, p. 308.)

The horses are a grand escape from the grim and unchanging routine that makes up the most of life. The wild adventure they provide is the greater because it is tinged with pain and danger. It is an adventure doomed from the beginning to failure, just as every man born is bound to die, breathing a "sight-draft dated yesterday" (TH, p. 308). Life can only be judged like art: both are doomed--art to fail, life to cease. The only way to measure either is by how great the effort.

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