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# Dionysus Torn to Pieces: An Examination of The Sound and the Fury in Light of the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

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# Dionysus Torn to Pieces: An Examination of *The Sound and the Fury* in Light of the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

## **Abstract**

Over the course of this thesis the author considers the problem of truth in life as manifested in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* by means of the Nietzschean conception of the Dionysian. The examination unfolds in a sequential analysis of the novel's four sections, an analysis framed by Nietzsche's four theses on "Reason' in Philosophy:" the author considers the first section (Ben) symbolic of man's subversion to what is directly before his eyes, and yet discovers in Ben's idiocy a refutation of that same apparent reality in a presently-realized past, personified in Ben's sister, Caddy; the bounds and liberties of perspective realized, the author considers how in the second section (Quentin) the limits and illusions of perspective defy rationality, and turn cultural truths into the heralds of their own apparent destruction yet aesthetic apotheosis; in the third section (Jason), the author discovers the hollow core of Jason's morality, and ultimately recognizes in the final brother's illusions and rationalities a meaningless martyrdom of a present believed by Jason to be denied him by the past; the author ultimately discovers what meaning the three brothers' perspectives signify—namely, Pandora's solace—in the novel's blacks—specifically, Dilsey—before confronting the nihilistic implications of Ben's recurring agony and bliss in the novel's torturous final scene. The author concludes that the ultimate depravity of the novel, when considered the effect of the artist's journey through the brothers' purely perspectival realities, renders both truth and appearance moot in the fruitfulness, agony, and destruction of life. This allows the author not to deprive *The Sound and the Fury* of its depths of experience, but actually celebrate those depths as the necessary effect of life within a culture hostile to life.

## **Keywords**

Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Nietzsche, Dionysian, literature

## **Disciplines**

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## **Comments**

English Honors Thesis

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An examination of *The Sound and the Fury* in light of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

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The climax of the long nineteenth century, the catastrophe of the First World War, catalyzed a broad reevaluation of values; the myths of the Enlightenment, the promises of rationality, were shattered before mechanized horror; the fruit of science, of objective knowledge, proved only the power to kill both man and his gods, as its truth only revealed that value does not objectively exist. Here is the great question the aesthetic reaction to this catastrophe generalized as modernism presents to man, a new Sphinx with a final riddle: “What matters truth?” What value does reality have? If we cannot know truth, then what does the persistent grasping for the idea of it matter? How can the inescapable truth of suffering, the terrible sound and fury of life, be justified in an unjustifiable world? To grapple with these questions the modern artist calls on the boldest of techniques, defying conventional strictures of narrative and perspective, in a shameless, desperate attempt to realize truth, to fix and objectify the unfixable world of experience by his metaphorical artistic power.

The truth that concerns William Faulkner, possibly the prime example of American Modernism, is the South. The economic and moral devastation following World War One effected incredible change to a region which seemed frozen in time after a collective catastrophe: “there were profound tensions, deep inner divisions of loyalties, new ambitions set against old pieties, new opportunities, new despairs, new moral problems, or rather, old problems which have never been articulated and confronted—all the things that stir a man, or a society, to utterance” (Warren, 244). In what is widely considered his greatest work, *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner articulates and confronts the old problems of the South in an examination of what the critic Richard King calls, “the Southern family romance...the values, attitudes, and beliefs that white Southerners expressed in their attitudes toward the region itself, the family, the relationship between the races and the sexes, and between the elite and the masses” (King, 249).

As the tale of the last generations of the Compson family, *The Sound and the Fury* presents a world pushed to the limits of endurance; the truths of Southern value, the myths of race and the sanctity of white womanhood, collapse in bitterness and despair. But the substance of the Compson family's tale cannot be understood outside of its form: the novel is divided in four sections: April Seventh, 1928; June Second, 1910; April Sixth, 1928; and April Eighth, 1928; Benjamin (Ben), Quentin, and Jason Compson narrate the first three chapters respectively, while the fourth is presented by an omniscient narrator. As Faulkner explores the contours of the three Compson brothers' souls he confronts the limits and illusions of man's existential perspective, before a final aesthetic synthesis of the novel's action on Easter Sunday, 1928.

The existential implications of such a search for truth are necessarily troubling, and over the course of this essay I shall be addressing the problem of nihilism in *The Sound and the Fury* in light of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and specifically his conception of the Dionysian. The prophet of modernity and proclaimer of God's death provides an incredibly compelling lens through which to not only understand what Faulkner accomplishes in his novel, but what challenge and example that accomplishment presents to the reader. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche poses four theses on "reason" in philosophy; these provide a neat framework to recognize the Nietzschean concerns of *The Sound and the Fury*:

*First proposition.* The reasons for which "this" world has been characterized as "apparent" are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable.

*Second proposition.* The criteria which have been bestowed on the "true being" of things are the criteria of not-being, of *naught*; the "true world" has been constructed out of contradiction to the actual world: indeed an apparent world, insofar as it is merely a moral-optical illusion.

*Third proposition.* To invent fables about a world "other" than this one has no meaning at all, unless an instinct of slander, detraction, and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in that case, we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of "another," a "better" life.

*Fourth proposition.* Any distinction between a "true" world and an "apparent" world... is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the *decline of life*. That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For "appearance" in this case means reality *once more*, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction.

The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible—he is *Dionysian*. (*Portable Nietzsche*, 484)

In light of these theses the various perspectives of Faulkner's world take on existential significance; the Sphinx rises from the page and an abyss peaks from her mouth. Dionysus, the twice born Greek god of wine, in Nietzsche's thought signifies the will to life; in the intoxication of the reveling and maddening god his disciples experience an overwhelming feeling of unity with existence, an irrepressible urge for the constant flux and recurrence of eternity in an absolute affirmation of life. To be Dionysian is to accept and affirm life in its entirety, and it is from the Dionysian perspective that the sound and fury of the Compson family does not simply signify nothing; to unabashedly stare at a world founded in suffering and unreality belies an awesome (in the original sense of the word) strength, a will to power that, as it genuflects before beauty and howls before terror, embraces life.

April Seventh, 1928. Benjamin Compson.

*First proposition.* The reasons for which “this” world has been characterized as “apparent” are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable.

As Sartre begins in his essay “On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner,” “The first thing that strikes one in reading *The Sound and the Fury* is its technical oddity. Why has Faulkner broken up the time of his story and scrambled the pieces? Why is the first window that opens out on this fictional world the consciousness of an idiot?” (Sartre, 265). While the answers Sartre provides to his questions are highly problematic, the “technical oddity” of Faulkner’s work does demand attention. The first section, April Seventh, 1928, is narrated by Benjamin (Ben) Compson, and begins simply enough: “Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting” (Faulkner, 3). The initial object of observation is first founded in a distance, “through the fence,” then framed within defined borders, “between the curling flower spaces,” and it is not until the narrator expresses a sensual power, “I could see,” that the object itself is revealed, “them hitting.” More than that, the object itself becomes hidden, as the subtle imagery of the framing juxtaposes with the men reduced to a nondescript pronoun—“them” confining individuals’ plurality within a singularity— and then further reduces that approximation to the simplest description of their immediate action, “hitting.” From this opening sentence the central concern of Faulkner’s novel is unleashed: the nature of the relationship between subject and object within the confines of one’s individual perception of existence; put more simply, man’s existential boundaries.

But what makes Ben’s section puzzling is precisely that which makes it profound: in Ben’s perception of existence the relationship between subject and object is overtly lacking—lacking not in the sense that the relationship does not exist, but that the relationship itself is ill-

defined, somehow deficiently expressed. Once Ben settles his perception on the hitting men there is no temporal transition as the first sentence is followed by, "They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree (3)," as the first paragraph devolves into a series of concurrent, yet almost isolated images. This imagistic sense of existence belies a simplistic expressive capability, even as the inevitable progression of images makes clear the immediate, inescapable totality of single moments; statements of undeniable fact stand self-sustaining and it is only the sequential expression of the moment that necessitates the narrative's progression.

While the limits of Ben's expressive capability begin to be revealed in the first paragraph's internal monologue, it is not until ill defined others are made concrete through dialogue that the heart of Ben's perceptual deficiency is made plain. Ben's tone is essentially constant, and the initial speech of the golfers, "Here, caddie," seems to have no special significance as the statement is again subordinated to a progression of images: "He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away" (3). Yet the seeming truth in the simplicity of Ben's unadorned expression is immediately undercut by the novel's first named person: "'Listen at you, now.' Luster said. 'Aint you something, thirty three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning. Aint you going to help me find that quarter so I can go to the show tonight'" (3). Luster's rebuke clarifies the narrator's cognitive disabilities, but it also signifies Ben's deficient self-consciousness; his moans do not exist within his comprehended world, so it is only by the narrative power of other perspectives that the larger truths of Faulkner's world assert themselves. However, while Ben may have severe mental deficiencies, he is a savant of memory. Luster ends his rebuke, and



We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shadows were. My shadow was higher than Luster's on the fence. We came to the broken place and went through it.

"Wait a minute." Luster said. "You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail."

*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said.*

Ben and Luster's movement along the fence signifies temporal progression, exact moments lost in the steady pace of an unparticular time, until they arrive at something particular, defined beyond its immediate surface, the garden fence and then the broken place. Once Ben arrives there and his movement is arrested by a nail the ordered chronology of his narrative collapses, as the past viscerally consumes and supplants the present.

Having begun to understand just how Faulkner crafts his technique, the "conceptual opposites which [Nietzsche has] introduced into aesthetics, Apollonian and Dionysian" illuminate the implications of Ben's reality. The Apollonian and Dionysian are the two natural artistic impulses of man, both conceived as types of frenzy: the Apollonian frenzy, inspired by the god of prophecy, truth, lyric poetry, and the Sun, excites the eye above all—it is man's impulse to create images, to fix a part of existence in place and objectify its self-contained perfection—and from which derives man's sense of individuality or ego, the *principium individuationis*; the Dionysian frenzy, however, saturates and muddies the Apollonian image under the liberal brush of the god of wine, his disciples' intoxication belying a feeling of existential unity in both joy and terror, an inescapable hunger for the constant flux of eternity that defies any objectifying power, nature unbound.<sup>1</sup> Language is inherently Apollonian in that every word is an imagistic metaphor, yet the metaphor itself may be understood as a mask for fundamentally Dionysian impulses, in that language derives from the relationship of things to

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<sup>1</sup> Largely from *Birth of Tragedy*, but also informed by later writings on Dionysus, particularly *Twilight of the Idols*.

man: “The ‘thing in itself’...is quite incomprehensible to the creators of language... One designates only the relation of things to man, and to express them one calls on the boldest metaphors. A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor” (*Nietzsche Reader*, 46). Beginning with an idiot seems to emphasize this Dionysian conception of language: objectivity is obscured in generalizations, vagaries, and reductions stemming from the inadequate metaphorical power of man. Yet, it seems that Ben’s obscured objectivity actually creates a hardened expressive objectiveness, in that the simplicity of his metaphorical power belies the truth of his perspective, his inability *not* to react to the world around him—the present is constantly translated to an immediately past and wholly realized moment.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Apollonian concentration of the apparent world into words masks the Dionysian forces beneath, the will to power that drives the constantly new imagistic creation of one’s existence. Nietzsche’s commentary on the dialogue of Greek tragedy, then, points to the significance of Faulkner’s stream of consciousness:

Everything that comes to the surface in the Apollonian part of Greek tragedy, in the dialogue, looks simple, transparent, and beautiful. In this sense, the dialogue is an image of the Hellene whose nature is revealed in the dance because...the greatest strength remains potential but betrays itself in the suppleness and wealth of movement. Thus the language of Sophocles’ heroes amazes us by its Apollonian precision and lucidity, so we immediately have the feeling that *we are looking into the innermost ground of their being, with some astonishment that the way to this ground should be so short.*” (*Basic Writings*, 67, emphasis added)

The subtlety of Faulkner’s technique, its simplifying and obfuscating precision and lucidity, its narrative freedom of expression, defies any expected convention in a desperate, shameless attempt to hint at the depths of life, to behold man as he is; the foundations of the three brothers’ souls are laid bare by the artist’s demand of their immediate linguistic expression.

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<sup>2</sup> “In the Dionysian state...the essential feature here remains the ease of metamorphosis, the inability *not* to react.” (*Portable Nietzsche*, 519)

Discovering the object of the technique's revelation—the soul, an objectified individual perspective—allows us to examine its substance, the thematic implications of Faulkner's tale. With Ben we have begun to see an obscured yet authoritative objectivity: he seems to lack the ability to comprehend either himself or his circumstances, yet he is simultaneously able to clearly see the world; he may only have the power to comprehend the golfers as “them hitting,” but he also implicitly understands that his will creates the objective image, which itself is bound within the confines of nature, the apparent world of his vision.

But what breaks the absoluteness of Ben's vision, what signifies his want of consciousness? “Here, caddie,” and Luster's response, reveal the absence in Ben's life; the literal loss of his sister, Caddy, and his inability to articulate the pain of that loss. However, while Ben cannot understand his loss, he still feels it because of the powerful place of Caddy in his memory. The profundity of Ben's relationship to his sister may be best understood by reexamining his first temporal transition from a theological, or more specifically, Christian, perspective. From such a vantage the garden fence Ben and Luster come to begins to signify the Garden of Eden, man pushing against the boundaries of an entrusted and harmoniously sustaining nature.<sup>3</sup> Then Ben's simplistic rendering of “the broken place” takes on the biblical resonance of the place of skulls, and the nail that arrests his movement transforms into the suffering of the world as encapsulated in the crucifixion, the toll of the sin which broached the walls of paradise—until Memory swoops in as a saving angel, and Ben's freedom becomes existentially bound to the image of his savior, Caddy. Here is idolatry realized, the image of a saving God actualized in an immediate vision of the past.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Quentin's relationship with Caddy and Dalton Ames, pp. 21-23.

While Faulkner may present various Christian tropes throughout the novel, they do not at all imply a Christian sentiment. The place of the church within *The Sound and the Fury* is deeply complex, but if we recognize this first impulse to salvation, to meaning as true or as resonant as the word of God, we begin to see the church's foundation, because the Christian perspective described above, even as it effectively creates the image of an idol, denies the truth of the actual image. Caddy's "salvation" of Ben is immediately clarified by Caddy herself as being (indirectly) in the service of the type of behavior which would later lead to her own familial and societal condemnation, their Uncle Maury's secret illicit relationship with one of the Compson's neighbors.

But here one must check oneself; Ben does not seem to have the ability to comprehend such symbolism—it is widely accepted that Ben, while providing a faithful image of the world around him, does not himself possess the ability to understand such significance; in a 1958 interview Faulkner himself said, "The only emotion I can have for Benjy is grief and pity for all mankind. You can't feel anything for Benjy because he doesn't feel anything...[He] wasn't rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal" (*Heuvel Interview*, 233).<sup>4</sup> Michael Millgate, in the essay "*The Sound and the Fury*: [Story and Novel]," nicely summarizes the general critical understanding of Ben:

Benjy is a first person narrator, as are Quentin and Jason, but his observations do not pass through an intelligence which is capable of ordering, and hence distorting, them; he reports the events of which he is a spectator, and even those in which he is himself a participator, with camera-like fidelity. His view of Caddy, it is true, is highly personal, but we infer this view from the scenes which his camera-mind records; Benjy does not

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the rest of his life Faulkner regularly returned to *The Sound and the Fury*, most notably in the Appendix, first published in 1946 and added to the beginning or end of the novel from 1946 until Noel Polk's corrected edition in 1984, which gives a seemingly authoritative history of the Compson family, but also in various lectures, interviews, and two remarkable (and later disavowed) unpublished introductions. These later interpretations, in many instances, provide compelling perspectives on the work, but they are also occasionally contradictory to or unsupported by the actual text. Stacy Burton addresses many of the problems of Faulkner's authority as "first reader" in her essay "Rereading Faulkner: Authority, Criticism, and *The Sound and the Fury*."

himself interpret this or other situations and events; still less does he attempt to impose a distorted interpretation upon the reader, as, in effect, do Quentin and Jason. (Millgate, 301)<sup>5</sup>

This authorially sanctioned meaning certainly seems compelling; it has already been observed that, even within the confines of his idiocy, Ben's imagism expresses a certain hardened objectivity, an unadulterated perspective into reality. However, to believe that Ben is incapable of "ordering" these images is to deny the text. Consider the passages following his first complete lapse into memory: just as the memory turns to Caddy trying to keep Ben's hands warm for Christmas he is transported to a memory of his mother, Caroline, trying to keep him inside, bemoaning her troubles as their servant Versh puts Ben's hands in his pockets, just as Caddy does in the prior memory, and leads Ben outside to meet Caddy on her way home from school. Ben cannot help but to join the memory of Caddy protecting his hands in the cold with the mother absent in her self-loathed presence, and the memory returns him again to the saving image: "'Did you come to meet Caddy.' She said, rubbing my hands. 'What is it. What are you trying to tell Caddy.' Caddy smelled like trees and like when she says we were asleep" (Faulkner, 5). Or consider the memory which leads to Ben's castration, the attempted rape of a neighbor's daughter:

They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright, whirling shapes. (34)

The whole passage hinges on Ben's attempt to put into words the emotions he feels, and, while he cannot do that, he signifies that the emotions are there. Hence we have the terrible repetition of "trying to say," trying to articulate inarticulable emotions, interspersed with the sound and

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<sup>5</sup> See also: Wesley Morris, "A Writing Lesson;" Donald Kartiganer, "The Meaning of Form;" *et al.*

fury of an unknowingly attempted rape translated into starting and stopping “bright shapes,” and Ben’s inability to articulate his desire finally takes on the characteristics of suffocation as he chokes on his own cries. Now we can see that Ben does not “attempt to impose a distorted interpretation upon the reader,” he cannot not impose a distortion. The flow of images, confused as it is, is not random; it is simply not understood. The moments which Ben instinctually grants existential power are not of arbitrary significance. Ben’s deficiency, his lack of rationality, simply prevents him from articulating his conception of the world, but Ben still lives in the world and to live, in Faulkner's conception of man, is to constantly create the present from the past, to conceptualize one’s individual history within one’s consciousness.

This centrality of memory in the lives of Faulkner's narrators is consistent with Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian state:

For the rapture of the Dionysian state with its annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence contains, while it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences of the past become immersed. This chasm of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday reality and of Dionysian reality. But as soon as this everyday reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such, with nausea; an ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states. (*Basic Writings*, 60)

Here is Ben’s “objectivity;” an inescapable, incomprehensible (for Ben) domination of the past in the present as Ben literally recreates the past again and again, unable to not fall into the web of memory because it is only in relation to things in the past that his present may have any sort of meaning. Now we see one of Faulkner’s most brilliant insights into his object, the soul, because the thing that most fundamentally moves man is himself, the present moment in relation to any and every other moment in his past, a pervasive existential egoism. Thus the past, the infinite dead realities whose ghosts haunt the present, becomes man’s waking dreams, and his present reality transforms into a vast array of signifiers to a muddled and unjustifiable sense of individuality, a oneness which transcends time—an Apollonian realization of Dionysian

impulses. The problem with such a dream world is that ““every culture lives inside its own dream,’ . . . and the Southern family romance was the South’s dream,” and, clichéd as it may be, Faulkner’s South is a nightmare (King, 249). Ben’s tragedy, then, is the absolute suffering he endures while being unable to articulate it—he is trapped in complete individuation that can only assert its apparent reality.

The tragic Dionysian dimensions of Ben’s narrative are brought to a head in its closing passages. After several passages centered around Ben’s name change from Maury after the discovery of his mental handicap—his conceptual separation from his own family—another saving image of Caddy, “Dont you want Caddy to feed you (Faulkner, 45),” catalyzes several short bursts of remembered streams of consciousness, born between two distinct rivers of memory: the present, immediately transcribed into a past, and Ben’s earliest memories, the night of his grandmother Damuddy’s funeral. The present has moved to the symbolic center of Southern culture, the family, as Jason, Caddy’s bastard daughter Quentin, the mother Caroline, and Ben eat dinner, served by Dilsey and Luster. The sympathetic memory of Caddy is juxtaposed with the malice of her daughter: “*Has he got to keep that old dirty slipper on the table, Quentin said...It’s like eating with a pig*” (45). As before the mother walked Ben by the pig trough after a slaughter, sympathizing even with the “*grunting and snuffing*” pigs because “*I expect they’re sorry because one of them got killed today,*” now the daughter cannot even stand to break bread with an uncle because he is animal-like (3). But again, Ben denies the present in an affirmation of the past, going back to the memory of Caddy feeding him as an actual toddler, as the memory of the children’s first encounter with human death (their grandmother’s) punctuates the present familial discord. While Jason and Miss Quentin have their final fight, Ben

conjures the memory of his father setting the long funeral day to right. After the present battles have calmed between bursts of the past, Ben is brought to bed and the present:

*I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone. You keep on like this, and we aint going to have you no more birthday. He put my gown on. I hushed, and then Luster stopped, his head toward the window. Then he went to the window and looked out. He came back and took my arm. Here she come, he said. Be quiet, now. We went to the window and looked out. It came out of Quentin's window and climbed across into the tree. We watched the tree shaking. The shaking went down the tree, then it came out and we watched it go away across the grass. Then we couldn't see it. Come on, Luster said. There now. Hear them horns. You get in that bed while my foot behaves. (47)*

This penultimate passage, the last in the “present” of April Seventh, 1928, begins as an intrusion of Ben’s “everyday reality” in his Dionysian reality, and he experiences this intrusion “with nausea,” crying over the result of his castration, the futility of his cries emphasized by Luster’s rebukes. Once this wound is covered from sight, another object comes into the foreground. Ben cannot comprehend that the thing moving out of Miss Quentin’s window is Miss Quentin, she becomes “it,” robbed of her personhood even as she asserts her will to power by appropriating her stolen inheritance. The present thus ends with an apocalyptic threat, “*Hear them horns,*” before an immediate warning of physical force by the young black man kept in servitude to an idiot, “*You get in that bed while my foot behaves.*”

But, while the foreboding threat is the last moment seen of April seventh, Luster’s impatience precipitates the final episode and drives Ben back to the past, when the Compson children are put to bed the night of Ben’s first memories. Ben’s narrative ends as their father says goodnight:

Father went to the door and looked at us again. Then the dark came back, and he stood black in the door, and then the door turned black again. Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep (48).



The passage begins in communion; Ben recognizes his Father's individuation and then has the natural comprehension that not only he, but "us," his siblings, were the objects of his Father's vision. Ben then sees the shadowed image of his father cast by a blinding, unseen light, before being surrounded and consumed by the darkness and multitude of life around him, enraptured by the sound of his brothers and sister, hearing the darkness, and smelling some unidentifiable thing. The images bring to mind the titular soliloquy of the novel: "Life's but a walking shadow...it is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing" (*Macbeth* Act V Scene V, MIT). But the walking shadows Ben sees do not signify nothing. Out of the darkness, Ben's eyes recover from the father's blinding light, and he sees the trees through the window, buzzing from unseen forces. Those shaking trees, the trees which gave the knowledge of death to Caddy (as she climbed up to the window of Damuddy's wake, and saw, "They're not doing anything in there...Just sitting in chairs and looking," Caddy's first, innocent disjunction from her culture's norms, specifically what she sees as an unfathomable grief for life [Faulkner, 29]) and the means for Miss Quentin's escape, belies a vitality, a strength of will which defies any deadening impulse to stagnation, and it is with that image that Ben falls into sleep, but here is Ben's momentous accomplishment. The darkness of the world of appearance begins to go in "smooth, bright shapes, *like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep.*" Ben unabashedly affirms the reality of his Dionysian perspective; he breaks the prison of memory as the idol, the object of his existential veneration, transcends the past tense and enters as a direct, *actively present* power. And, as his god becomes real, he denies any contradictory authority over his reality; he cannot comprehend that he "sleeps" because in his perspective he knows and asserts his own constant creative power. With Ben we may see that the world of man's experience is the only world that exists: "any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable.

June Second, 1910. Quentin Compson.

*Second proposition.* The criteria which have been bestowed on the “true being” of things are the criteria of not-being, of *naught*; the “true world” has been constructed out of contradiction to the actual world: indeed an apparent world, insofar as it is merely a moral-optical illusion.

So we have Ben’s reality: an inescapable, incontrovertible world of purely subjective appearance. But Ben lives in such a world because he has no other option. As Faulkner writes in an unpublished introduction to the novel in 1933,

I saw that Benjy must never grow beyond this moment [when Caddy falls in the creek and Benjy is three years old]; 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 and hence the alleviation of rage as in the case of Jason, and of oblivion as in the case of Quentin. (230)

Ben may only be able to comprehend the world of his experience, but his intuitively artistic sublimation of those experiences into a world of appearance which transcends time or place stems from a cognitive deficiency, a mental castration from reality. If Faulkner finds the most fundamental truths of man in Ben’s section, an instinctive Dionysian will which explodes itself in Apollonian image-creations, that discovery yet lacks an examination of the most overt symptom of man’s drive to justify his apparent reality, what Faulkner calls “understanding,” or, rather, reason. Reason, a rationalized conception of existence, submits the world of man’s subjective experience to the concept of an objective truth. With such an understanding of “understanding,” it seems inevitable that, after the subjectively-bound idiocy of Ben, the artist would create a mind obsessed with rationality.

Quentin’s narrative begins, as Ben’s ends, in bed with a memory of Mr. Compson:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather’s and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the *reducto absurdum* of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. I

give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools. (Faulkner, 49)

It has been observed that Faulkner's technique demands an immediate linguistic expression of the narrator's perspective, and thus signifies the truths of their existence, a glimpse into their souls. With the introduction of Quentin, Faulkner reveals an entirely different perspectival articulation than Ben's firm foundation within subjective objectivity. Quentin does not articulate that he sees the shadow of the sash, the shadow is a thing in itself, simply appearing. That a shadow is merely an illusory creation of obscured light emphasizes, thematically, that, even as Quentin might imbue his reality with a truth unto itself, the object of man's vision does not necessarily have any such substance. Thus the narrative begins with an Apollonian individuation, which allows the first rational expression of the novel; the equation of the shadow's individuation with an abstracted signifier—it, the whole reality of the moment, being between seven and eight o'clock. This imprecise measurement of time precipitates the expression of Quentin's selfhood, as the signifier to an existential order immediately translates to the narrator's entrapment in the world of such signification, time, actualized in the sound of his watch. Just as Ben's Dionysian impulses allow his past to consume his present, so too does Quentin have an intimate connection to the past, as the recognition of the watch unleashes the (comparatively) rationally conjured memory of its acquirement. It is significant that Quentin's reintroduction to time quickly hones in on the image of his father's bequest; the "essential figures [of the Southern family romance] were the father and the grandfather," and the watch symbolizes Quentin's inheritance from the patriarchs of his culture (King, 249).

But what is that inheritance? "The mausoleum of all hope and desire" suggests time to be the cavernous, yet confining tomb of a dead past, a concept within which infinite dead realities

are mourned and consecrated as having once truly existed. Understanding time to be nothing less than man's attempt to quantify, and, thus, conceptualize existence makes it clear that time is the absurd reduction of all human experience onto the arbitrary position of hands on a wheel. That the bequeather of this inheritance gives this "reducto absurdum" for the opposite of its supposed function, not to remember time but to forget it now and then, translates to the nature of Quentin's cultural inheritance. Neither the father nor grandfather, who was a Civil War general, were able to make effective use of this signifier to universal order, and so, rather than leave Quentin with a memento which speaks to the possibilities of ordering, and thus, conquering, life, his father only reveals ironic impossibility and futility before a meaningless existence—the nihilistic inheritance of a dead culture.

Quentin's sense of time provides the foundation of his relationship to the "true world," the concept of an objective reality bound within a culture's expectations of that objectivity. But, as the irony of his father's bequeathment of time already begins to suggest, that objectivity is absurd. The error of many critics is to suggest that it is the pessimism of his father which reveals to Quentin this absurdity. The ever-present memories of his father, far from providing the foundations of Quentin's nihilism, are merely a symptom of a more central catastrophe; in Quentin's own language, Mr. Compson "never had a sister."

For Quentin, like Ben, Caddy is an idol, or, synonymously for Nietzsche, an ideal. The process of idealizing is, fundamentally, an artistic drive, born, as are the Dionysian and Apollonian, from frenzy:

Out of this feeling [of frenzy] one lends to things, one forces them to accept from us, one violates them — this process is called idealizing. Let us get rid of a prejudice here: idealizing does not consist, as is commonly held, in subtracting or discounting the petty and inconsequential. What is decisive is rather a tremendous drive to bring out the main features so that the others disappear in the process. (*Portable Nietzsche*, 518)

Given Quentin's obsessive relationship with his cultural expectations, it is not surprising that the main features his idealization of Caddy brings forth are those relating to her place within those cultural expectations, specifically the guardianship of white womanhood in asexuality. Caddy's visceral sexuality, then, is at the heart of Quentin's catastrophe. Consider Quentin's memory of his accusing questions to his sister, shortly after he first discovers her promiscuity: "*Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy? Why must you do like nigger women do in the pastures the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods*" (Faulkner, 59). As the woman of her generation of Compsons, Quentin expects his sister and her lover to fulfill the elaborate courtship ritual proscribed for the "safety" of, not Caddy, but Southern society, a necessity for maintaining the supposed purity of the races.<sup>6</sup> Thus Quentin's racism gets to the heart of what the white south sees as the worst possible comparison, the white woman equated with "*nigger women*," what *is* becomes what it *should not be*; "the criteria which have been bestowed on the "true being" of things are the criteria of not-being, of *naught*."

But is not Caddy's rejection of her societal expectations, her disregard of the cultural power and strictures of the home in favor of a return to nature and a furious sexuality, *Dionysian*?

...Apollo wants to grant repose to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them and by again and again calling these to mind as the most sacred laws of the world...Lest this Apollonian tendency congeal the form to Egyptian coldness, lest the effort to prescribe the individual wave its path and realm might annul the motion of the whole lake, the high tide of the Dionysian destroyed from time to time all those little circles in which the one-sidedly Apollonian "will" had sought to confine the Hellenic spirit. (*Basic Writings*, 72)

In the face of a stultifying culture—as Faulkner so succinctly puts it, an "old since dead" culture—Caddy's humanity, her will to power, wrecks the ruins of an impotent Apollonian order

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. King, 253-255.

in an affirmation of life. Nowhere is this more clear than after Quentin's first abortive attempt to confront Caddy's lover, Dalton Ames:

do you love him Caddy  
do I what  
she looked at me then everything emptied out of her eyes and they looked like the eyes in  
statues blank and unseeing and serene  
put your hands against my throat  
she took my hands and held it flat against her throat  
now say his name  
Dalton Ames  
I felt the first surge of blood there it surged in strong accelerating beats  
say it again  
her face looked off into the trees where the sun slanted and where the bird  
say it again  
Dalton Ames  
her blood surged steadily beating and beating against my hand. (Faulkner, 104)

Here there is no blushing maiden, no poised Southern belle fluttering from a stolen kiss; here there is a vital Apollonian realization of Dionysian impulses. Caddy takes on the poise of a "statue," but beneath that cold serenity a maenadic fervor resounds, her blood literally rises at the appellation of her god, Dionysus personified in Dalton Ames.

But how does one battle a god? Quentin's memory of the aforementioned devotion is precipitated by the memory of his impotence before the power of Dalton Ames:

I saw him leaning on the rail...I came onto the bridge and stopped he had a piece of bark  
in his hands breaking pieces from it and dropping them over the rail in the water  
I came to tell you to leave town...  
did she send you to me  
I say you must go not my father not anybody I say it  
listen save this for a while I want to know if she's all right...  
then I heard myself saying Ill give you until sundown to leave town...  
what will you do if I dont leave  
Ill kill you just because I look like a kid to you

...listen no good taking it so hard its not your fault kid it would have been some other  
 fellow  
 did you ever have a sister did you  
 no but theyre all bitches  
 I hit him my open hand beat the impulse to shut it to his face his hand moved as fast as  
 mine...he held both my wrists in the same hand his other hand flicked to his armpit under  
 his coat behind him the sun slanted and a bird singing somewhere beyond the sun...  
 he turned my hands loose  
 look here  
 he took the bark from the rail and dropped it in the water...his hand lay on the rail  
 holding the pistol loosely we waited  
 you cant hit it now  
 no  
 it floated on...the pistol came up he didnt aim at all the bark disappeared then pieces of it  
 floated up spreading he hit two more of them pieces of bark no bigger than silver dollars  
 ...he reloaded the three chambers shut the cylinder he handed it to me butt first  
 what for I wont try to beat that  
 you'll need it from what you said Im giving you this one because youve seen what itll do  
 to hell with your gun  
 I hit him I was still trying to hit him long after he was holding my wrists...  
 ...after a while I knew that he hadnt hit me...I had just passed out like a girl but even that  
 didnt matter anymore... (102-103)

Here we find the foundation and symbol of Quentin's "truths" before the power of  
 "appearance." Dalton Ames, the violator of Quentin's violating idealization, stands above the  
 flowing currents of time, almost superhuman in his natural ability to destroy the individuated  
 bark floating along the current of time, just as he destroys Quentin's conception of his sister's  
 culturally necessitated virtue, reducing the mythologized woman to a "bitch." Yet, even in that  
 reduction, there is an actualized affection for Caddy that is more personal and real than anything  
 Quentin experiences with his sister—"did she send you to me" denies Quentin's will as merely a  
 symptom of Caddy's Dionysian affectation, thus turning Caddy to a proselyte of Dalton Ames'  
 destructive power. So Quentin, unable to harness the power of Dionysian destruction in his  
 rejection of Ames' pistol, is defeated by the example of that power as he is unable even to hit the

man. He is reduced to what he sees as a fundamentally feminine weakness, as he passes out “like a girl.” Dalton Ames thus robs Quentin of his inheritance and obligation to masculinity, the societal expectation of the brother’s duty as a man to protect and enforce the boundaries of Southern cavalier order, simply by revealing to him his impotence before a power who disregards any such artificial restrictions in an affirmation of the vitality of sexuality.

Here we find the triumph of Dionysus and may begin to understand Quentin’s complete subjugation to this destructive god; now we may recognize the significance of that repetitive trinity which compels Quentin’s attempt to lie in the face of his reality: “*I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames* And when he put Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. When he put the pistol in my hand I didn’t. That’s why I didn’t. He would be there [in hell] and she would and I would. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames.” (51) Now we may understand that strangest of formulae with which Quentin understands the ineluctable transmutation of present experience into a consciously experienced past: “Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum” (110).<sup>7</sup> For, as Nietzsche understands the Oedipus myth, “we must immediately interpret this to mean where prophetic and magical powers have broken the spell of present and future, the rigid laws of individuation, and the real magic of nature, some enormously unnatural event—such as incest—must have occurred earlier as a cause. How else could one compel nature to surrender her secrets if not by triumphantly resisting her, that is, by means of something unnatural?” (*Basic Writings*, 69). The power of the Dionysian destruction of his society’s Apollonian structures, the trinitarian, and thus god-like, “Dalton Ames,” compels Quentin to justify that destruction as coming from something unnatural, and thus he may justify the wreckage as necessitated by an act that is wrong in itself, not imposed upon an act by external

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<sup>7</sup> “I was not. I am. I was. I am not.”



(ie. extra-cultural) forces. Quentin thus attempts to appropriate Dalton Ames' power for himself and his cultural expectations, and thereby protect Caddy's symbolic importance by conflating her natural flaws into an unnatural horror. So, Caddy becomes not merely a woman too incautious to fulfill her societal obligations, she becomes the symbol for the disintegration of the foundation of Southern culture, the family. Thus Quentin projects the internal forces which make him feel as if his world is destroyed, his love of his sister and his astonishment before her tremendous power and terrible joy, onto the external world by means of a lie: love turns incestuous and truths become false in the madness of Dionysian intoxication—"the 'true world' has been constructed out of contradiction to the actual world..."

Quentin seeks to realize this hijacking of truth by subverting the authority of his father in the Southern hierarchy of the family. Before the final Dionysian memory of this ultimate confrontation Quentin considers "the *reducto absurdum* of all human experience" which precipitates his narrative, and its consideration is framed in the hendiadys of the novel's title: the watch tells "its *furious* lie on the dark table" as Quentin's mind roars through essential memories of his past; and, later, the "three quarters began. The first note *sounded*, measured and tranquil, serenely peremptory..." (110-111, emphases added). The fury of the watch, the highest of man's ambitions bound within the smallest of cases, an ignorant yet self-sustaining will to power, belies Quentin's inability to escape the steady thrum of an ever changing existence, an inherent force that denies any arbitrary measurement of its power in the face of that power's own necessity. This entrapment in the Dionysian thus precipitates Quentin's drive for an Apollonian realization of that force, and he finds such a dramatic actualization in the cultural time of a conquering civilization. The ringing bells of Cambridge frame the final conflict of Quentin's section, "the

new opposition: the Dionysian versus the Socratic—and the art of Greek tragedy was wrecked on this" (*Basic Writings*, 82).

The maxims of Jason Compson, Sr. have had an inordinate influence on critical examinations of *The Sound and the Fury*, but that may be understood as nothing less than a natural shame before the surety of the contradicting nihilist: above all else, such a man is perfectly reasonable.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche found in reason, specifically Socratic reason, the death knell of tragedy: "Socrates...was that *second spectator* who did not esteem the Old Tragedy....Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential perversity and reprehensibility of what exists" (86-87). Having lived his life on a tragic stage, the field of unbridled passion and inexplicable motivation loaded with catastrophe, to finally appropriate his reality in favor of a dream "truth" Quentin must confront the cold logic of his father, the second spectator to the action of the Compson family's distress, and who witnesses that tragedy, if not apathetically, at the very least dispassionately. This juxtaposition begins their dialogue as Quentin's memory within the order of the bells brings to mind empathetic, Dionysian thoughts about his wish to change reality in a cleansing unity—"if people could only change one another forever...merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly along the cool eternal dark...instead of lying there trying not to think of...the beating of hot blood under wild unsecret flesh"—set against his father's practical argument against such depths of care: "we must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while its not always" (Faulkner, 111-112). The numbing effects of time are at the heart of Mr. Compson's relationship to eternity, but Quentin quickly retorts the unnecessary of indefinite pain, "and i it doesnt have to

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<sup>8</sup> Sartre finds the whole novel denied a future by Mr. Compson's metaphysics, while Warwick Wadlington finds, in his "Tragedy in *The Sound and the Fury*," the whole drama of the novel's reduction into Quentin's action. Both men take Quentin at his father's word, for that may provide the astute critic a compellingly rational, if profoundly pessimistic, reading of all perspectival existence.

be even that long for a man of courage," conjuring an ideal of the culture which he seeks to sublimate by its incestuous suicide, "courage" being the attempt to realize power within contrary circumstances, Quentin's "truth" set against the reality of appearance. His father responds by beginning his dialectic in force:

and he do you consider that courage and i yes sir dont you and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues whether or not you consider it courageous is of more importance than the act in itself...otherwise you could not be in earnest and i you dont believe im serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldn't have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you had committed incest otherwise and i i wasn't lying i wasn't lying and he you wanted to sublimate a natural piece of human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and i i was afraid to she might and then it wouldnt have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away

Mr. Compson first responds to Quentin's thesis, "(evil) doesnt have to be even that long for a man of courage," by questioning his definition of courage. After Quentin affirms his definition and challenges his father for agreement Mr. Compson sidesteps the accusation by granting the importance of every man's own conception of "virtue," the most essential Socratic moral tendency. He then continues the dialectic by laying out various further premises for Quentin's conception of "courage," by ironically submitting that Quentin's belief in an act is, for Quentin, more important than the truth, because only then could Quentin truly, or "earnestly," think himself to be a man of "courage." The irony of this further premise, the importance of Quentin's "earnestness" set against the obvious falseness of Quentin's claim, elicits from Quentin the defensive response that his father does not believe him to be "serious," which allows Jason to grasp hold of the unreasonable effects of Quentin's conception of courage: "you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm," minimizes Quentin's Dionysian affectation as excessively reactive, and thus his claim of incest may be called out for what a reasonable man would understand it to be, an "expedient" to subvert the pain of reality. The power of the dialectic over Quentin begins

to break down his grasp of what he wants his "truth" to be: as Socratic "stimulants...cool, paradoxical thoughts, replac[e] Apollonian contemplation—and fiery *affects* replac[e] Dionysian ecstasies," those affects most realized in Quentin's instinctive, weak attempt to enforce his Apollonian dream image—"i wasnt lying i wasnt lying" (*Basic Writings*, 83). At this sign of weakness Mr. Compson unleashes essentially the conclusions reached above, and, what's more, makes Quentin himself articulate the insanity of his idea, and by that final, pitiable answer, "if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away," Quentin's father makes Quentin lay bare how untrue his "truth" is.

How, then, can Quentin suffer the grief of bereavement? In his memory his father argues that Quentin is incapable of committing suicide because of his love for Caddy, and that he should accept his inheritance to "forget time:"

and he it is hard to believe that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which matures willynilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time no you will not (commit suicide) until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps and i i will never do that nobody knows what i know and he i think you'd better go on up to cambridge...watching pennies has healed more scars than jesus and i suppose i realise what you believe i will realise up there next week or next month and he then you will remember that for you to go to harvard has been your mothers dream since you were born and no compson has ever disappointed a lady and i temporary it will be better for me for all of us and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another mans wellbeing and i temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was

At the heart of Quentin's father's assertions is precisely what Nietzsche viewed as "the Problem of Socrates: Concerning life, the wisest men of all ages have judged alike: *it is no good*. Always and everywhere one has heard the same sound from their mouths—a sound full of doubt, full of melancholy, full of weariness of life, full of resistance to life" (473). Mr. Compson reasons that Quentin's attempts to justify an order over existence belies his inability to accept the unmeaning of the world, and because he cannot escape the meaning of his life he cannot end that life unless

he accepts that life is, in fact, meaningless; that even Caddy “was not quite worth despair.” The ravages of daily existence, the monotony of cause and effect, have “healed more scars than Jesus,” and Quentin will come to forget the pain, hence the near perfect inversion of the Socratic equation of reason, virtue, and happiness in despair, time, and was: rationalizing existence, transmuting the immensity of a moment into a comprehensible past allows the ordering of one’s existence, whether that be in the moral sense (virtue) or a more practical existential ordering (time). This rationalized human experience then necessitates either happiness, as the world is justified in one’s morality, or despair, as the power of an uncaring reality destroys man’s existential security.

Essential in Mr. Compson's pessimism is its refutation of Dionysian impulses. He recognizes precisely what Quentin experiences because he reads his actions with the keenest critical eye, and as such he articulates Quentin's deepest desires into rational words. But to look at madness rationally may only reveal absurdity and horror. So, how does the Dionysian man react to this light that reveals the abyss, the battle cry of reason? I believe the answer may be found in Nietzsche’s examination of Hamlet, another son too smart for the role he has to play:

In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint...Now no comfort avails any more; longing transcends a world after death...Conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence; now he understands what is symbolic in Ophelia’s fate; now he understands the wisdom of the sylvan god, Silenus: he is nauseated...Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity.

Comprehending his emotive reactions rationally reveals to Quentin his fundamental impotence before the power of causality, “that part of general truth the sequence of natural events and their

causes which shadows every man's brow even benjys." While Hamlet finds it ridiculous or humiliating that he must set right the time that is out of joint, Quentin finds it ridiculous and humiliating that he cannot set it right. Having witnessed this logicization of existence, the immutability of the past and the seeming fixity, and thus impossibility, of the future, Quentin suffers that knowledge with nausea: hence his entrapment in the remembered odor of honeysuckle, and, ultimately, the reduction of his ego in the final torrent of "and he" and "and i" which, as it literally robs the signifier to his self of its emphasis, also reveals the absurdity and horror of his hopes and machinations. "Now no comfort avails," now he sees what is symbolic in Caddy's muddy drawers, now he understands the pessimism of his father. It is here, "when the danger to his will is greatest," when all sense of purpose and meaning seems lost in Mr. Compson's causal equation of despair and time and experience, that the final paragraph forcefully begins, "The last note sounded. At last it stopped vibrating and the darkness was still again" (Faulkner, 113). The battle of the Dionysian and Socratic is bound within the ordered sound of the bells, and Quentin's Dionysian will turns the nauseous thoughts of that conflict to a final aesthetic purpose: the fury of the Dionysian which seeks a transcendent unity assumes the mask of Apollonian order as the bells of Cambridge, the intellectual capitol of the conquering northern aggressor, transforms from a practical signifier to an existential symbol: Quentin's death knell. His suicide, then, is not necessarily the "gamble" of nihilism his father claimed it would be (although it is impossible to completely disregard his father's prediction of Quentin's motivation—as previously seen the power of Mr. Compson's dialectic cannot be concretely refuted), but rather an affirmative nihilism. By throwing himself into a literal stream Quentin commits himself to spend every last breath he has trying to symbolically conquer time, to actualize the pain of his "true world" in reality, and thus not only deny his father's sense of

existence's unmeaning, but affirm that life's vastness and dread power are so terrible that it can compel one who viscerally feels that power to seek to escape it. With this artistic end as a swiftly approaching inevitability Quentin thus may tame the horrors of his existential impotence in the cool guise of the pure actor, taking the time, not to forget his father's inheritance, but to abandon it: "I carried the watch into Shreve's room and put it in his drawer" (113). And no longer is Quentin overwhelmed in the nausea of honeysuckle, now his purpose turns that disgust to the sardonic comedy of the man acting in spite of anyone else's condescension, hence the lightheartedness of Quentin thinking the other students would "think I was a Harvard Square student making like he was a senior."

Yet what triumph may be found in this joking suicide? What value can be found in a life that merely creates a will to its own destruction? Nietzsche's objection to Socratism provides a possible answer:

Judgements, judgements of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgements are stupidities. One must by all means stretch out one's fingers and make the attempt to grasp this amazing finesse, *that the value of life cannot be estimated*...For a philosopher to see a problem in the value of life is thus an objection to him...

The magnitude of Quentin's nauseous suffering defies the belittling logic of his father, as surely as it defies the judgmental eye of a critic, by its sheer stupidity; but the stupidity of Quentin's values does not at all come as an objection to the substantive value he finds in them. By committing his life to fulfilling the reality of his suffering, Quentin expends every last breath of his vitality in a desperate attempt to grasp the irreducible, overwhelming power of personal experience, and thus affirms the inestimable value of life. That that affirmation destroys his life is only the symptom of the fundamentally life-averse culture to which he pledges himself.

April Sixth, 1928. Jason Compson.

*Third proposition.* To invent fables about a world “other” than this one has no meaning at all, unless an instinct of slander, detraction, and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in that case, we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of “another,” a “better” life.

But “why should I play the Roman fool, and die/On mine own sword? whiles I see lives, the gashes/Do better upon them” (*Macbeth* Act V Scene VII, MIT). Of all *The Sound and the Fury*’s characters none embodies the tragic fatalism of the novel’s titular allusion more fully than Jason Compson, Jr. While Ben is trapped in the Compson family’s dissolution, he can neither comprehend the causality of that decay nor exert any potent will within it. Similarly, Quentin’s nearly spiritual understanding of the symbolic beginning of the Compson’s cultural decay, both in his sister as its symbol and his understanding of the idea of his sister, renders his power impotent as his will destroys itself. Jason, however, while he may suffer from the decline of his family and cultural structure, turns that suffering into a life-purpose—his will becomes fixed on wreaking vengeance upon what he sees as past and recurring wrongs. As such he becomes the clearest narrator of the three brother’s, but that clarity comes at the cost of his humanity: more than Ben’s idiocy and Quentin’s madness, Jason’s rage separates his consciousness from existence’s larger realities.

Jason begins his narrative in bitter succinctness: “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say” (Faulkner, 113). Here there is no pure awareness nor wandering thought: Jason’s perspective bursts upon the reader with an absolute judgment, qualified only as a thought he puts into words. And this first sentence provides more than a stark transition to the novel’s second half—it captures the essential elements of Jason’s perspective. By conflating the character of a single moment into a permanent stain Jason belies a morality founded in an unfounded condemnation of the present and future in its reductive expansion of past wrongs into an eternal, unchangeable



state of wrongness. That this first reduction refers to “a bitch” is unsurprising; while Jason may be referring specifically to the female Quentin, the judgment undoubtedly encompasses and is informed by Jason’s relationship to his sister. While Ben’s idealization of Caddy is essentially amoral as an Apollonian actualization of Dionysian impulses, and Quentin’s idealization of the power of Caddy and Dalton Ames as Dionysian symbols renders his suicide in the face of Socratic rationality extra-moral, Jason’s idealization of Caddy turns her into the image of the Antichrist, to the extent that Jason’s morality represents the nihilism Nietzsche finds indelible to Christian morality.

Nietzsche understood the “Christian morality hypothesis” as having three distinct advantages:

- 1) it conferred on man an absolute *value*, in contrast to his smallness and contingency in the flux of becoming and passing away
  - 2) it served the advocates of God to the extent that, despite suffering and evil, it let the world have the character of *perfection*—including “freedom”—and evil appeared full of *sense*
  - 3) it posited a *knowledge* of absolute values in man and thus gave him *adequate knowledge* of precisely the most important thing
- it prevented man from despising himself as man, from taking against life, from despairing of knowing: it was a *means of preservation*—in sum: morality was the great *antidote* against practical and theoretical nihilism. (*Nietzsche Reader*, 385)

Consider these benefits in light of Southern morality: the white man’s race and sex bestowed upon him an absolute value as the guardians of both; it served the proponents of the system because it gave the white power structure the character of perfection, to the extent that, despite the sufferings of a slave economy, the authority of the superior race rendered such evils sensible; it posited a knowledge of the absolute value of the white man, and thus gave the white man adequate knowledge of precisely the most important thing—his existence had an objective value by virtue of his race. This is the insane impulse and dream that drives Quentin to suicide, and so we may understand that a Dionysian will to power may be subverted by this morality of the

Crucified—though the world is damned, it might be redeemed through the titanic sufferings of the individual. Yet Jason's concern with the Christian morality of the South, while just as spiritually intimate, is not as intellectually comprehended as Quentin's. Jason's perspective is firmly grounded in action, and *April Sixth, 1928, Good Friday*, moves with the momentum of a passion play.

The drama begins with his mother, Caroline Compson, as she bemoans Miss Quentin's truancy. Throughout the two previous sections, Caroline has been built up as an absent mother, to the extent that she considers all her children a curse, except for Jason: "You are the only one of them that isn't a reproach to me." The self-pity that characterizes Caroline is the essential trait she and Jason share, and Jason, like his mother, blames others for their troubles. Jason responds to his mother's complaints: "'Sure,' I says. 'I never had time to be. I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground. I had to work'" (Faulkner, 114). Jason affirms his mother's reproach, and twists that affirmation into a negation—he was only irreproachable because he, unlike his brother or father, did not have "time." Obviously Jason's lack of time stands in marked contrast to Quentin and Mr. Compson's preoccupations with time, but what did that allow those two men to do? As we have seen in Quentin's section, being able to submit the world to an all encompassing totality of causality forces profound introspection, so much so that both Quentin and his father take refuge in different forms of suicide as they confront the idea of time's, and thus existence's, truth. So we may understand Jason's lack of time as an inability or unwillingness to confront the "true world" on its own terms, those of strictly rational causality. Jason has his "work."

But his work is not simply a job at the local hardware store. Consider Jason's thoughts when at his job, after being instructed to assist a woman:

Well, Jason likes work. I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim and at Sewanee they dont even teach you what water is... Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that's right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it's not that I have any objection to having it here; if it's any satisfaction to you I'll quit work and nurse it myself and let you and Dilsey keep the flour barrel full, or Ben. (123)

The withdrawal into the third person is telling, as if Jason is unable to look at himself, and can actually comprehend himself only by means of an objectified image, an impotence made more real by the self-deprecatingly conversationalist tone of the passage that allows Jason to distance himself from his own feelings. It is only once he has the power of his family in mind that he can express any selfhood, as "I says" allows Jason to affirm his present pain out of the wrongs of the past, and thus affirm his suffering as coming from outside of himself. So he lacked the "university advantages," not because of any incompetence on his part, but because his father and brother's university education resulted in Quentin's suicide, and thus waste of the family land, and Mr. Compson's alcoholism and presiding disintegration of his family's cultural value as symbolic of Socrates' hemlock and murder of tragedy. Yet at the same time he finds an ego in persecution, Jason robs the persecutors of their identities and creates instead personified images of specific wrongs, so, just as Jason understands Caddy and Miss Quentin through "once a bitch always a bitch," he understands Quentin as a wastefully suicidal weakling and his father as a worthless alcoholic, and in all cases he denies the agents their names, as Quentin and Mr. Compson are proscribed by their actions, and Caddy becomes simply "she." Miss Quentin is named as she becomes one of Jason's burdens, but, as Jason's thoughts delve into a past conversation with his mother, he reduces her to "it," turning her into the negative equivalent of the job promised him by Caddy's husband. This dissociation is how Jason separates his own will from reality—it is only by imbuing others with the power of sin that he may affirm his own impotence. So, with this understanding of how he came to be the sole deprived heir of the

Compson family fortune, Jason commits himself to his work, to salvage or preserve what remains of his sense of his family's decency. Thus he tells his mother he has no problem caring for Miss Quentin, but couches this acceptance in a biting sarcasm, because, while he may be able to justify the necessity of his work, he still actively despises that necessity, and thus despises himself for submitting to it.

The larger implications of this despising become plain in light of what Nietzsche considered to be the effects of the collapse of Christian morality:

Morality protected from nihilism *those who turned out badly* by granting *everyone* an infinite value, a metaphysical value, and placing them in an order which did not correspond to that of worldly power and hierarchy...*Provided that the belief in this morality collapses*, those who turned out badly would no longer have their consolation—and they would *perish*.

*This perishing* presents itself as a—*self-ruination*, as an instinctive selection of that which *must destroy*. *Symptoms* of this self-destruction by those who turned out badly: self-vivisection, poisoning, intoxication, romanticism, above all the instinctive need for actions which make *deadly enemies* of the powerful (—as if one were breeding one's own executioners); the *will to destruction* as the will of an even deeper instinct, the instinct of self-destruction, of the *will into nothingness*. (*Nietzsche Reader*, 388)

Jason's "understanding," like Quentin, is the realization that his cultural expectations are false. But while it may seem that Quentin's suicide stands as the more blatant example of one who "perishes," as we have seen his self-destruction is symptomatic, not of a "will into nothingness" but rather an affirmation of life's value. Jason's life thus stands in marked contrast to Quentin's death, because we may understand in Jason's clinging to Southern morality a far more perfidious nihilism than that of his namesake. By transforming the wrongs of others into permanent stains Jason may thus pledge himself to a world that he knows is a lie, the present he believes denied him by his family, and so seeks perpetual vengeance on their stains by ceaselessly trying to blot out what he insists cannot be blotted. This is Jason's "*self-ruination*" because as he yearns for power he thus empowers precisely those who refute his authority. So, as he seeks to be the

empowered white man who supports a family and blacks, he entraps himself in bitterness against a job unbecoming for a white man to support “six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they’ve got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them” (Faulkner, 113).

But perhaps the best example of this ruining is the passage of Jason’s flight after Miss Quentin and the man in a red tie, as Jason stops at a fork in the road, before searching for them in the woods:

I saw red. When I recognized that red tie, after all I had told her, I forgot about everything. I never thought about my head even until I came to the first forks and had to stop...Then I remembered it. It felt like somebody was inside with a hammer, beating on it. I says I’ve tried to keep you from being worried by her; I says far as I’m concerned, let her go to hell as fast as she pleases and the sooner the better... You don't know what goes on I says, you don't hear the talk that I hear and you can just bet I shut them up too. I says my people owned slaves here when you were all running little shirt tail country stores and farming land no nigger would look at...

These dam little slick haired squirts, thinking they are raising so much hell, I’ll show them hell I says, and you too. I’ll make him think that dam red tie is the latch string to hell, if he thinks he can run the woods with my niece...I still couldn’t believe she had the nerve to. I dont know why it is I cant seem to learn a woman’ll do anything. I kept thinking, Let’s forget for a while how I feel toward you and how you feel toward me: I just wouldn’t do you this way. I wouldn’t do you this way no matter what you had done to me. Because like I say blood is blood and you cant get around it. It’s not playing a joke that any eight year old boy could have thought of, it’s letting your uncle be laughed at by a man that would wear a red tie. (149, 152)

Certainly there are echoes of Quentin’s confrontation with Dalton Ames, as Jason throws himself upon that which destroys him. The drama begins in his rage, the instinctive drive to make deadly enemies of the powerful, in this case his niece and the boy in a red tie who wipe his mind of all other purposes or pains in the veil of red flashing from the matador’s tie; in this flourish we might see Dionysus returned, giving flight to and making war on the last vestiges of the Compson’s familial order, and thus cultural power. While Jason finally overcomes this bloodlust in the comforting prison of his self-hatred, he loses the guise of the blind actor, and becomes instead a self-flagellating crusader, but the exact transformation is fascinating. The physical pain of the truck’s fumes finally breaks past the purpose he finds in action, the polluting byproduct of

the chase beating inside his skull. He then turns immediately to a complete denial of will, objecting against his mother's cries that nothing can be done for Miss Quentin; she may as well be damned. But as he further considers Miss Quentin's reputation and his mother's ignorance, he thinks of his family's position in the general community, and "the talk that I hear" becomes a transition to action, and a petty, racist diatribe against the ancestry of the other whites who besmirch his family's name. Jason drives himself to consider the implications of his uncaring attitude towards his niece, and, inevitably coming to the rumors of the town, finds purpose and justification in the bastion of a gentrified race and class. Confronted with this attack on the foundation of his existential value, Jason cannot accept simply letting Miss Quentin go to hell, he himself must damn her and her lover, as he transforms the symbol of his rage into the symbol of that rage's fulfillment, the red tie as a "latch string to hell." But Jason never approaches as direct a confrontation with Dionysus as Quentin; the god confounds Jason, leaving him wandering in the weeds as he and his maenad literally take the air out of Jason's plots. Jason's solace is his utterly dejected regret, that, as it pitifully expresses a feeling of terrible hurt and betrayal, belies an even more profound hypocrisy, as the blood which Jason so regularly uses to damn Miss Quentin becomes the very object which he claims binds them together. In his expectations of Miss Quentin is an absolute denial of any sense of himself or his own actions: Jason believes himself to be perfect, and so the whole world that contradicts that must be wrong. Attempting to right that wrongness, however, only reveals the inadequacy of the belief and thus drives the affronted to despise whatever infringes upon his perfect freedom.

In that sense we may understand in Jason's delusions a Christ-like figure, asserting his belief through the pain of his passion. But such an understanding of April Sixth's liturgical

significance is resisted by the text, as, after the chase and a dinner in which Jason taunted Miss Quentin about what he did that day, she confronts him as Lucifer confronts his God:

“Why does he treat me like this, Grandmother?” she says. “I never hurt him.”  
 “I want you all to get along with one another,” Mother says. “You are all that’s left now, and I do want you all to get along better.”  
 “It’s his fault,” she says. “She jumped up. “He makes me do it. If he would just—“ she looked at us, her eyes cornered, kind of jerking her arms against her sides.  
 “If I would just do what?” I says.  
 “Whatever I do, it’s your fault,” she says. “If I’m bad, it’s because I had to be. you made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead.” Then she ran. We heard her run up the stairs. Then a door slammed.  
 “That’s the first sensible thing she’s ever said,” I says. (162)

The brief, childlike simplicity of Miss Quentin’s question and subsequent accusations calls to mind not only her mother’s confidence—“her eyes cornered, kind of jerking her arms against her sides” calling to mind Caddy’s quivering angry lip—but her namesake’s concerns with morality and fatality. With her true father apparently unknown, and treated as such, Miss Quentin has thus been distanced enough within her family that she may condemn its head and symbol as the progenitor of her “badness,” recognizing in Jason’s assumption of his cultural position in the familial structure a power so terrible that she would have them all destroyed. In that way she expresses her Dionysian heritage in a simple and sound Apollonian form, her fury muted but echoing through Jason’s spiteful apathy. Jason’s sardonic agreement to Miss Quentin wishing they were all dead casts his niece’s wish for cleansing destruction—in the manner Quentin fantasizes—against a comparatively cold and lifeless wish for the same, but rather than affirming the pain and change and unity of existence, Jason finds in his nihilism an escape from that suffering.

Here, then, we have the final conflict that shall carry us to the novel’s conclusion, the tension upon which Nietzsche considered the fate of modernity to be decided: “*Dionysus versus*

*the Crucified.*” The contrast between Jason and Miss Quentin lies in their will to destruction as two distinct forms of martyrdom:

...Dionysus versus “the Crucified One:” there you have the contrast. It is not martyrdom that constitutes the difference—only here it has two different senses. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, involves agony, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—“the Crucified One as the Innocent One”—is considered an objection to this life, as the formula of its condemnation. Clearly the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the first case, it is supposed to be the path to a sacred existence; in the second case, *existence is considered sacred enough* to justify even a tremendous amount of suffering. (*The Portable Nietzsche*, 459)

Both Miss Quentin and Jason yearn for destruction. While Miss Quentin might protest her innocence of harm against Jason, she does not claim herself to be innocent, but finds in the events of her own life the only ingredients necessary to demand its destruction, and in that way—like Quentin—seeks to justify the existential value of her pain and “badness.” Jason, however, seeks no justification in his agreement to death; rather, he considers death sensible, echoing the logic of his father, as he finds in the undiscovered country a nothingness that will consume all things. Death thus becomes his abysmal god, and his devotion manifests itself in the voice of self-vivisection following him along after his niece, and the permanence of the stain and slander in “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say.” Both are symptomatic of Jason’s hatred of life, and his drive to create a life full of powerful and deadly enemies, but nowhere are Jason’s delusions more crystallized than in his closing passage, as his thoughts wander as he hears Ben’s snores:

I could hear the Great American Gelding snoring away like a planing mill. I read somewhere they’d fix men that way to give them women’s voices. But maybe he didn’t know what they’d done to him. I don’t reckon he even knew what he had been trying to do...And if they’d just sent him on to Jackson while he was under the ether, he’d never have known the difference. But that would have been too simple for a Compson to think of. Not half complex enough. Having to wait to do it at all until he broke out and tried to run a little girl down on the street with her own father looking at him. Well, like I say they never started soon enough with their cutting, and they quit too quick. I know at least two more that needed something like that, and one of them not over a mile away, either.



But then I don't reckon that would do any good. Like I say once a bitch always a bitch. And just let me have twenty-four hours without any dam New York jew to advise me what it's going to do. I don't want to make a killing; save that to suck in the smart gamblers with. I just want an even chance to get my money back. And once I've done that they can bring all Beale street and bedlam in here and two of them can sleep in my bed and another one can have my place at the table too. (Faulkner, 165)

It begins with perhaps Jason's most sustained examination of another's life outside of his or her relationship to Jason. While the colors go in bright shapes for Ben, Jason recognizes in Ben's guttural gasps a denial of what was done to him, but considers the possibility of Ben's ignorance as the cause. But this near-empathy quickly translates to a vision of Ben in the state mental hospital, and Jason's consideration for his brother becomes the means to justify that brother's exile. Ignorance of a crime thus constitutes an ignorance of the punishment, but Jason would gladly punish more for his own sake. And, as Jason considers a present better than reality, he broadens his judgements to "two more that needed something like that," avenging himself on Miss Quentin and the man in the red tie by imagining their castration. This rush to cut others' passions off at the root is emblematic of Nietzsche's conception of Christianity, "The church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its "cure" is *castratism*" (*Portable Nietzsche*, 487). But Jason, weak and humiliated, cannot actualize his judgements, and so turns again to the sanctuary of his belief, the permanence of "once a bitch always a bitch." In that security he may create a world in which he struggles without the aid of mighty powers, fairly and honestly making a living, and occasionally a killing off those who would wrong him, at which point, Jason, in all his strength and security over his home and life, will let madness in the door, and be replaced by a trinity of insanity. Jason thus concludes his narrative with his most blatant illusion, but the sheer scope of the illusion's petty bitterness may only tend toward understanding that that illusion may only be understood to have "no meaning at all;" it is merely "an instinct of

slander, detraction, and suspicion against life,” that takes the form of a racist, life-defying lie, “a phantasmagoria of “another,” a “better” life.”

April Eighth, 1928. Easter Sunday.

*Fourth proposition.* Any distinction between a “true” world and an “apparent” world...is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the *decline of life*. That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For “appearance” in this case means reality *once more*, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction. The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible—he is *Dionysian*.

Having arrived thus far in our examination of the Compson family’s distress we may recognize in *The Sound and the Fury*’s first three sections a thematic and formal confrontation with the problem of truth in life: Ben, lost within while inexorably part of a world filled with incomprehensible suffering, finds solace and power, however illusory, in the idealized image of Caddy through Dionysian remembrance; Quentin expresses a similar Dionysian will against an instinct to truth, as he again and again wrestles with the understanding of his existential impotence, a battle realized and obviated in the memory of his father’s Socratic dialectic and his own suicide, respectively; and Jason, securely small in the ironic bastion of his Southern morality, only has the power of meaningless rage as he ceaselessly throws himself upon that which would destroy him. These three perspectives, confused and tortured as they are, compel the reader to confront three vitally realized views of existence, all of which, particularly in the aggregate, set forth an uncompromising denial of any objective value. Thus the challenge for the artist in the novel’s close is no mean feat: he is compelled to confront the Compson’s reality once more—but after any true value seems to have been pulverized beneath Ben’s idiocy, Quentin’s reason, and Jason’s noxious rage. After thus thoroughly compromising the essence of truth, the ultimate withdrawal to omniscience seems both profoundly ambitious or hubristic. What could the artist discover in an objectively realized perspective in a world devoid of objectivity?

I believe the answer lies in the relationship between the culture’s races as personified in the Gibson family. So here I must offer a brief apology: the expansive power and influence of

blacks in the first three sections has thus far been inadequately expressed in our investigation, subordinated, rather, to the first-person experiences of the Compson brothers. We have not considered the role of blacks in Ben's dream world as an ever present and ever actualizing serving force, whether in the form of Luster, in the present, or T.P. or Versh in the past, and Dilsey throughout, and that by means of this serving power Ben is able to have the experiences that invoke his Dionysian remembrance—that the whole narrative of April Seventh, 1928 is only possible because Luster brings Ben on a hunt for a missing quarter, symbolic of a lost power, and in truth acts merely as the vessel upon which Ben may wander through the fields of memory. We have not considered Quentin's delivery of his suicide notes—the actualized transference of his idea—through the Uncle Tom characterized Deacon, nor the paradoxical nature of his memory while thinking of Ben—

O Benjamin. Dilsey said it was because Mother was too proud for him. They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in inarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears. They will bet on the odd or even numbers of mourners at a funeral. A brothel full of them in Memphis went into a religious trance ran naked into the street. It took three policemen to subdue one of them. Yes Jesus O good man Jesus O that good man; (108)

—pawing, both affectionately and disdainfully, at the tapestry of another realm of existence, which occasionally bursts in an extraordinary and defiant power, an instinct Quentin encapsulates in the image of Jesus as man. We have not considered Dilsey's strength, as she throws herself between Jason and Miss Quentin, and the terrible juxtaposition of Dilsey's maternal affection with Miss Quentin's weakness and disgust: “‘Dilsey,’ she says. ‘Dilsey, I want my mother...’ ‘Now, now,’ Dilsey says. I aint gwine let him tech you.’ She put her hand on Quentin. She knocked it down. ‘You damn old nigger,’ she says” (117). We have not considered the pervasive presence of blacks in the consciousnesses of all the Compson brothers.

Unfortunately any such consideration of the first three sections must be confined to such a pitifully short paralipsis, lest we find ourselves simply reexamining the whole tale, but from new and necessarily hazarded perspectives. However, there is time yet to make amends, for I believe Faulkner's work cannot be understood without its black perspectives; that in fact the whole drama of the novel grows out of their truth-bursting laughter. For evidence we need look no further than the beginning of the novel's end, as the artist breaks free of the bonds of individuated perspective in an Apollonian expression of Dionysian impulses:

The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of gray light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust that, when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, needled laterally into her flesh, precipitating not so much moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil. (165)

Here is a voice wholly unique from those that preceded it, grasping above the pure image of Ben, and seeing more deeply than Quentin's temporal shadows, as the narrator realizes in "The day dawned bleak and chill" an authority over time so simple as to seem almost biblical, and with such authority recognizes as the object of time a becoming, through the dawning of substantive, in that they are bodily, sensations. The epic image of the day's becoming then breathlessly transforms into a more particularized, but still large in scope, active subject; the "moving wall of gray light" belies an imagism beyond the Apollonian individuation of mere appearance, as the light itself, not the object of the light's rays so neither the "true" object of the vision, is the subject, and it is in that seemingly insubstantial yet revelatory power that the artist finds the substance of his vision's movement. It is thus only in the light of the Apollonian that the flux and movement of the Dionysian is realized, a relationship consummated and called true in the conviction of the narrator's first creations. But if the reconciliation of the Apollonian and Dionysian is the subject of these first images, the object of this substantive light, again realizing

its object by transformation, albeit destructive, is, finally, a material thing. Technically the object is the morning dew, but the narrator denies such an event its normal associations, finding not the fluidity of “moisture,” but, the substance of “particles” as the effect of this becoming. From the epic simplicity of the day’s dawn, to the gray and foreboding objectification of that simplicity, the narrator eventually magnifies his gaze to find in the most precise examination a “minute and venomous” material. We might see in this development something of the effect the novel up to this point would have on its creator, as the simplicity of the initial vision gives way to grander movements, before disintegrating within that simplicity and movement into poisonously small realities. The seeming arbitrariness of the particles being “venomous,” as well as the elementally contradicting creation of them, is thus explained as the root nature of the individuation that creates the tale, and so we might understand these poisonous particles as the Greeks considered Dionysus torn to pieces: “Thus it is intimated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian *suffering*, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, that we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the origin and primal cause of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself” (*Basic Writings*, 73). So we may see a disintegration in the very creation of the image, but, as the artist once more expresses an authority within time, he finds in the indirect object of the poison a new and human object, and he anoints Dilsey in the paradoxes and evil of the individuating light, thus marrying existential dismemberment to the drama and defiance of an already powerfully realized life. The whole first page continues to give Dilsey an unparalleled physical description that, as it spans time and endurance, creates a haunting regality and reality in the character. That the description ends with her “expression at once fatalistic and of a child’s astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed

the door,” not only foreshadows the coming catastrophes, but sets Dilsey as their ideal spectator (Faulkner, 165).<sup>9</sup>

Of course we cannot understand Dilsey merely as a spectator, for, as the sole beholder of the scene, she is the means by which the artist’s vision of the dawn is made real within the scene. But before examining the thematic implications of this position, let us first consider how the final section begins: with Dilsey, slowly yet persistently going about the household chores, which is soon revealed to have been compounded by Luster sleeping in after Miss Quentin ultimately gave him the quarter he needed for the carnival. These acts, the stoking of the fire, the making of breakfast, find symbol in Dilsey’s song as she works: “she sang, to herself at first, something without particular tune or words, repetitive, mournful and plaintive, austere,” before being interrupted by a more jarring routine, “the old woman in her quilted dressing gown at the head of the stairs, calling her name with machinelike regularity” (168). After tricking Dilsey, wracked by a visible infirmity, to climb the stairs to take care of Ben while he is still asleep, the narrator describes Dilsey’s reaction:

Dilsey said nothing. She made no further move, but though she could not see her save as a blobby shape without depth, Mrs. Compson knew she had lowered her face a little and that she stood now like cows do in the rain...“You’re not the one who has to bear it,” Mrs Compson said. “It’s not your responsibility. You can go away. You don’t have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out. You owe nothing to them...” Dilsey said nothing. She turned slowly and descended, lowering her body from step to step, as a small child does, her hand against the wall. “You go on and let him alone,” she said,...“Let him alone, now.” (169-170)

Dilsey, even as she creates the conditions necessary for the drama to happen in her position as servant, is regularly told by those she serves that she is not part of their world, that she has no right to suffer in their suffering, a distancing expressed by Mrs. Compson couched in an ironic

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. pp. 18-19 on idealizing.

protestation of Dilsey's freedom from subservience after an arbitrary and worthless exertion of her own refuting authority. Yet the lie of that freedom is exponentially confounded by the very firmly established affection of Dilsey for Ben and Miss Quentin, who must then endure the slander of the culturally empowered mother by means of her passionate and more natural maternal affection. These burdens and cruelties litter the beginning of Easter Sunday, as Dilsey, slowly making breakfast, sets the stage for the day's drama proper to begin, the discovery of Miss Quentin's flight in Dilsey's useless calling at her door. These actions, subservient as they are to the Compsons, may still be seen as the fundamental, if mundane causes of the novel's immediate drama, with Dilsey's life of servitude, occasionally buttressed by family that are not yet able to escape, the means through which the truths of the Compson land are made real—the families, the core object of the culture's morality, only realize Miss Quentin is gone once she fails to respond to Dilsey's persistent, while patient, call.

Is not this the role of blacks in the morality of the Southern family romance? Dilsey, as servant to the Compson's cultural power, makes that power a reality by her very presence; it is only by her ability to stand as object for the hatred and insecurities of the white power structure that that structure exists. Is not this how the entire drama of the tale has thus far unfolded—whether that be in Luster's Sancha Paza role in Ben's quixotic dreams, Quentin's obsession with his sister's virginity, or Jason's vengeful racism? The concerns of the Compsons are only realized as reactive forces of black existence, and thus we might understand the concerns and strivings and sufferings of the Compsons as merely the effect of black personhood within a culture that calls such an idea a contradiction in terms. But this self-sustaining contrast of a dream reality is precisely what Nietzsche finds in the satyr chorus of ancient Greek tragedy:

The contrast between this real truth of nature and the lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality is similar to that between the eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself, and



the whole world of appearances: just as tragedy, with its metaphysical comfort, points to the eternal life of this core of existence which abides through the perpetual destruction of appearances, the symbolism of the satyr chorus proclaims this primordial relationship between the thing-in-itself and appearance...But now we realize that the scene, complete with the action, was basically and originally thought of merely as a *vision*; the chorus is the only "reality" and generates the vision...In its vision this chorus beholds its lord and master Dionysus and is therefore eternally the *servicing* chorus: it sees how the god suffers and glorifies himself and therefore does not itself *act*. (*Basic Writings*, 61-62)

What does Dilsey first stand witness to as Easter Sunday begins? A vision of light and matter, appearance and thing-hood, both made substance within her cragged and worn flesh as that contrast's natural and fatalistic disciple. As Dilsey creates the Compsons' days day in and day out she thus proclaims the relationship between the reality of her suffering and the mad lies of her cultural masters, while, within the drama she makes possible, her role is solely that of impassioned and wholly concerned witness: the chorus of the Compson tragedy.<sup>10</sup>

The most transcendent example of the chorus generating "the vision, speaking of it with the entire symbolism of dance, tone, and words," is the episode of the visiting Reverend Shegog's Easter sermon:

The visitor was small and undersized, in a shabby alpaca coat. He had a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey...When the visitor rose to speak he sounded like a white man. His voice was level and cold. It sounded too big to have come from him and they listened at first with curiosity, as they would have to a monkey talking. They began to watch him as they would a man on a tight rope. They even forgot his insignificant appearance in the virtuosity with which he ran and poised and swooped upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice, so that at last, when with a sort of swooping glide he came to rest again..his monkey body reft of all motion as a mummy or an emptied vessel, the congregation sighed as if waking from a collective dream and moved a little in its seats...Dilsey whispered, "Hush now. Dey fixin to sing in a minute..." (Faulkner, 183)

From the beginning there is a physical detraction in Shegog's appearance, an animality and smallness that contrasts with a large white voice whose words the narrator denies articulation,

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<sup>10</sup> That is not to say the blacks of the novel are doomed to this position, merely that so long as they constitute part of the Southern family romance there role is that of a serving chorus. Once they escape that role they literally disappear from the drama, hence the notableness of Versh and T.P. in their absolute absence later in the tale.

but rather subsumes in the consistent descriptions of Shegog's being ape-like and thrashing his body about with all the ecstasy of a religious trance. This is the black-preacher's relation of the white world in which the blacks live; a furious, incomprehensible, flurry of motion. Seeing the qualities of the oppressor in the body of an animalistic black man, thus becoming curiosity and spectacle for the congregation (which Faulkner calls the South's art [*Introduction*, 228]), seems to be the catalyst for the congregation's escape from the dream world of white power, and, as Dilsey makes clear to Ben as he soundlessly moans through this paradoxical image, having thus recognized the unreality of white authority, it becomes time for song, a new sound that grants repose and order within nature to this paradoxical image. That is found as Shegog, having expended his bodily fury, finds in his desolation a white man's voice that makes justifiable what suffering the black chorus endures:

Then a voice said, "Brethren." The preacher had not moved...he still held that pose while the voice died in sonorous echoes between the walls. It was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes. "Brethren and sisteren," it said again...he began to walk back and forth...his hands clasped behind him, a meagre figure, hunched over upon the implacable earth, "I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb!" He tramped steadily back and forth beneath the twisted paper and the Christmas bell, hunched, his hands clasped behind him. He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest...his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: "Yes, Jesus!" (183)

Just as the Christian's reality begins in the Word, Christ, the black church's reality begins in a repeated utterance: "Brethren," thus signifies the essential aspect of their church's nature, a natural community, born in appropriation by submission to the powerful voice of the white man's apparent god. Shegog finds in the recollection and blood of the lamb the community's remembrance of a shared suffering, the words

literally humbling him beneath the simple structure of the small space, symbolic of the weight of the whites' temporal authority confining their community in poverty and universally understood sorrow. As the voice consumes his body, he consumes the congregation, and his monkey-like face transforms into the image of Christ on the cross, realized within Shegog's own scene in the response to his call, an affirmation by means of personification, "Yes, Jesus!" We find in this refutation of Shegog's animality the same effect Nietzsche sees in the satyr chorus:

Nature...with bolts of culture still unbroken—that is what the Greek saw in the satyr who nevertheless was not a mere ape. On the contrary, the satyr was the archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions, the ecstatic reveler enraptured by the proximity of his god, the sympathetic companion in whom the suffering of the god is repeated... (*Basic Writings*, 61)

Even as the black congregation is bolted in the confining realm their culture affords them, the narrator finds in it the "embodiment of [man's] highest and most intense emotions," to the extent that this chorus suffers and endures one of the worst existential tyrannies man created in modernity. The companionship of community is thus crystallized in the shared image of their god, and realized in the woman's alliteratively sonorous voice.

That the transition away from the white dialectic occurs after one last whisper of "Brethren," is interesting in that it makes of the solace the white man gave blacks in their servitude the very language necessary to, not only condemn the white man, but appropriate his universal, if superficial, language and thus makes it particularized and life-affirming in the blacks' own experiences:

"Breddren en sistuhn!" His voice rang again, with the horns... "I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb!" They did not mark just when his intonation, his pronunciation, became negroid, they just sat swaying a little in their seats as the voice took them into itself... "Listen, breddren! I sees de day... I hear de angels singin de peaceful songs in de glory; I sees de closin eyes; sees Mary jump up, sees de sojer face: We gwine to kill!... We gwine to kill yo little Jesus! I hears de weepin en de lamentation of de po mammy widout de salvation en de word of God!"... "I sees hit breddren! I sees hit! Sees de blastin, blindin sight! I sees Calvary, wid de sacred trees, sees de thief en de murderer en de least of dese; I hears de boastin en de braggin: Ef you be Jesus, lif up yo tree en walk! I hears de

wailin of women en de evenin lamentations; I hears de weepin en de cryin en de turnt-away face of God: dey done kilt Jesus; dey done kilt my Son!...O blind sinner! Breddren, I tells you; sistuhn, I says to you, when de Lawd did turn his Mighty face, say, Aint gwine overload heaven! I can see de widowed God shet His do; I sees de whelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlastin upon de generations. Den, lo! Breddren! Yes, breddren! Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb!"

In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bolt upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered Lamb. (Faulkner, 184-185)

The Word is stolen out of its oppressor's mouth, and made real in the reverend's communal tongue. But what image is thereby created? What sound is this that, as it holds Ben's rapt gaze, moves Dilsey to tears in the hardening and suffering of its remembrance? The image Shegog creates and Dilsey transfers to the Compson drama is not an image of comforting authority or escape: Shegog's recollection and blood of the Lamb is, overwhelmingly, an image of sympathy, and, born from that sympathy, affirmation. In the crucifixion Shegog lights upon the same assault on truth's value that is manifested throughout the three brothers' perspectives, and in fact encompasses those perspectives, as the images of the three men crucified on Good Friday translate perfectly to the brothers: Jason, the thief of his niece's inheritance, Quentin, the murderer of himself, and Ben, the least of these, but the one whose suffering provides a faith in the reality and value of one's god in his life, even in the most desperate of circumstances. In his fatalistic sense of justice, the evils of some will be deservedly condemned, the weaknesses of others bountifully forgiven, the perseverance of the poor richly rewarded. That is the image born from the voice of reverend Shegog, a God that finds in the suffering striving of the individual the justification for life. That this God is born from memory of suffering is essential, for that is what allows Dilsey to realize the justification of life in a glorious vision that, while of the future, is actualized in the faith of the present. Thus Dilsey's martyrdom, her assumption of suffering for

faith, is not meant as a condemnation of her world, but as an affirmation of the meaningfulness of her life's sufferings, realized in the communal blood of the Lamb. So we cannot see in the furious and joyful sound of Shegog's sermon a curse on life; the image of the future horror and salvation, the idea of "Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it is eternally reborn and comes back from destruction." For where is the memory of Christ's resurrection? Where the good news of Easter? "Dey kilt me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die." The promise of individuation is thus rebirth, and those who not only witness the glory of that recurrence, the "again," but believe in its reality may transcend the curse of death and find in the unity of existence a oneness of life. The only reality of the present is the agony of Christ's passion, the foundational evil of individuation, and so we might understand in the congregation's yearnings for the second coming the same impulse that motivated the songs of Dionysus' disciples:

...the hope of the epopts looked towards a rebirth of Dionysus, which we must now dimly conceive as the end of individuation. It was for this coming third Dionysus that the epopts' roaring hymns of joy resounded. And it is this hope alone that casts a gleam of joy upon the features of a world torn asunder and shattered into individuals... This view of things already provides us with all the elements of a profound and pessimistic view of the world, together with the *mystery doctrine of tragedy*: the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of all evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness. (*Basic Writings*, 73-74)

Here is the only hope that may ultimately be found in *The Sound and the Fury*: that, even as the toxic world of the South disintegrates in the agonies of individuation, life will be reborn, and the lost dead shall rise once more in the strength of the future to condemn what was wrong, strengthen what was weak, and affirm what was right—an existential belief in the value of life's recurrence. That is the power resounding within the personified body of the "other" in Reverend Shegog, and it is that image which allows Dilsey to cast "a gleam of joy upon the...world torn

asunder and shattered into individuals,” as she finds in the remembered blood of the Lamb the unity of existence in the present, “I seed de beginnin en now I sees de endin” (Faulkner, 185).

So she says at one o’clock, as Dilsey herself ends the choral hymn and brings us back into a particular time and the Compson drama, as she pronounces, in her visionary power, Jason’s doom: “‘One oclock,’ she said aloud. ‘Jason aint comin home. Ise seed de first en de last...’ She set out some cold food on a table. As she moved back and forth, she sang a hymn...[Ben] and Luster ate. Dilsey moved about the kitchen, singing the two lines of the hymn which she remembered. ‘Y’all kin g’awn and eat,’ she said. ‘Jason aint comin home’ (187). The narrator grants her vision immediate weight by the swift transition to “He was twenty miles away at the time,” before describing the details of Jason’s day up to that point. The narrator finds in Jason’s maniacal focus on Miss Quentin’s theft of Caddy’s money (meant for Miss Quentin, but stolen by Jason) precisely the symbols of vengeful obsession we considered in the examination of Jason’s section, but the drama of Jason’s final chase is brought to a head once he finally, after much self-inflicted hardship, finds the carnival that had recently left the town of Jefferson:

It never occurred to him that they might not be there, in the car. That they should not be there, that the whole result should not hinge on whether he saw them first or they saw him first, would be opposed to all nature and contrary to the whole rhythm of events. And more than that: he must see them first, get the money back, then what they did would be of no importance to him, while otherwise the whole world would know that he, Jason Compson, had been robbed by Quentin, his niece, a bitch...

Then he went to the car and mounted the steps, swiftly and quietly, and paused at the door...The man was a white blur, singing in a cracked shaky tenor. An old man, he thought, and not as big as I am. He entered the car as the man looked up.

“Hey?” the man said, stopping his song.

“Where are they?” Jason said...

“Where’s who?” the man said.

“Dont lie,” Jason said. He blundered on in the cluttered obscurity.

“What’s that?” the other said. “Who you calling a liar?”...

“Come on” Jason said. “Where are they?”

“I’ll tell you where they are,” the man shrieked. “Lemme find my butcher knife.”

“Here,” Jason said, trying to hold the other. “I’m just asking you a question...”

But the other still struggled...he turned in time to see the little old man leaping awkwardly and furiously from the vestibule, a rusty hatchet high in his hand.

He grasped at the hatchet, feeling no shock but knowing that he was falling, thinking So this is how it'll end, and he believed that he was about to die...and he thought Hurry. Hurry. Get it over with, and then a furious desire not to die seized him and he struggled, hearing the old man wailing and cursing in his cracked voice. (192-193)

The action is driven by an uncompromisable belief that Jason must confront the ones who would rob him of his inheritance, finding in Miss Quentin's appropriation of her inheritance a recurrence of the job and future denied him before he ever had it. More than that, she herself serves as symbol for a trinitarian hatred as Jason realizes in Miss Quentin's name the memory of the brother who wasted the family's land, in Miss Quentin's relationship to him a personal burden, and in Miss Quentin's own character the symbol of the sister who cost him his future. Yet the plans of Jason's illusions are baffled by the old man, who becomes, in an almost Kafkaesque fashion, "the other" reality whose ignorance of Jason's reality constitutes in Jason's mind his being a liar. Yet this other responds in a spontaneous and all-consuming rage, driven mad by the man who would dare slander the honesty of his reality. That mad violence is certainly Dionysian, and, as Jason chases suffering as the path to redeem his existence, to nullify it, the power of the intoxicated and furious god expends itself on the life-denying goals of the Crucified. Jason's initial reaction to the belief that he would shortly die seems to signify a loss of will, or at least a will into nothingness as he thinks "Hurry. Hurry." But here we cannot deny that, in the face of man's fatality, Jason's hatred and contempt, his perishing antichristianity, is a will to power, an instinct for destruction that only life may provide him, and thus his goal and fervent desire is, ultimately, "not to die."

But here the tragedy of Jason Compson is made plain, for, his illusions of purpose shattered before the rage of an uncompromising "other," Jason's only reason for living is to delay, and thereby defy, the essential fact of life; thus we might understand his entire psychology

of persecution and vengeance as symptomatic of a worldview that at its very core denies existence's reality. Faced with a world that he shortly before thought literally impossible, Jason may only be helped by other "others," who inform him his mission was in vain because Miss Quentin and the boy in the red tie had been sent away due to the carnival owner's sense of propriety. Beyond that, they banish Jason from the carnival, lest the old man's fury finish its work. Thus Jason finds not the triumph he imagined, but the humiliation he most feared, as the rusted hatchet of the old man symbolizes Dionysus' destruction of Jason's self-deceptions. His return to Jefferson thus takes on a sense of unreality: "Something—the absence of disaster, threat, in any constant evil—permitted him to forget Jefferson as any place which he had ever seen before, where his life must resume itself" (195). The novel's tragedy shall be found in Jason's reaction to Ben's last disaster, as Jason reactualizes his false authority in a savage resumption of life.

Luster and Ben take their final odyssey to the graveyard so that Ben may escape the house's smell of decay and cease his moans, the depth of his torment belied in the narrator's description: "'Hush now,' [Dilsey] said, stroking his head. 'Hush. Dilsey got you.' He bellowed slowly, abjectly, without tears; the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun" (197). The pure affection of Dilsey for this most pitiable of men means nothing for the youngest Compson brother in the face of the sensational recurrence of his uncomprehended existential catastrophes—how could we not see that, as Luster takes Ben to the cellar amidst talk of Miss Quentin's departure, Ben would remember once more the drunkenness of T.P. and Quentin's beating his ceaseless laughter, as Caddy is lost above in the wedding, her smell of trees drowned in perfume—both siblings' destruction within Ben's reality are thus recalled in Miss Quentin's departure, and Ben has proven to the reader that he, however ignorantly, instinctually creates



those connections in his own experience. That the only means to calm him is a ride to the town's graveyard is emblematic of a vital impulse to escape despair through a ritual of symbolic movement.

That the novel's final catastrophe is precipitated by Luster's mistake seems natural as the confining of black men to subservient roles has been well established as the cultural lie that creates the drama:

They approached the square, where the Confederate soldier gazed with empty eyes beneath his marble hand in wind and weather. Luster took still another notch in himself and gave the impervious Queenie a cut with the switch, casting his glance about the square. "Dar Mr Jason car," he said, then he spied another group of negroes. "Les show dem niggers how quality does, Benjy," he said. "Whut you say?" He looked back. Ben sat, holding the flower in his fist, his gaze empty and untroubled. Luster hit Queenie again and swung her to the left of the monument.

For an instant Ben sat in an utter hiatus. Then he bellowed. Bellow on bellow his voice mounted with scarce interval for breath. There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound, and Luster's eyes backrolling for a white instant. "Gret God," he said. "Hush! Hush! Gret God!" He whirled again and struck Queenie with the switch. It broke and he cast it away and with Ben's voice mounting to its unbelievable crescendo Luster caught up the reins and leaned forward as Jason came jumping across the square and onto the step.

With a backhanded blow he hurled Luster aside and caught the reins and sawed Queenie about...He cut her again and again, into a plunging gallop, while Ben's hoarse agony roared about them...Then he struck Luster over the head with his fist.

"Dont you know any better than to take him to the left?" he said. He reached back and struck Ben, breaking the flower stalk again. "Shut up!" he said. "Shut up!" He...jumped down. "Get to hell on home with him. If you ever cross that gate with him again, I'll kill you!"

"Yes, suh!" Luster said. He took the reins...

Ben's voice roared and roared. Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place. (Faulkner, 199)

The Confederate statue is an Apollonian image that encapsulates, fixed, the tradition of Southern culture, and it is beneath the auspices of those blind eyes that Luster attempts to express his own power and significance, thus fitting into the terribly predictable stereotype of an "uppity nigger."

But the superficiality of the image is vital, for it is merely the change in appearance that causes Ben to express in totally insubstantial sound all of the agonies and miseries of individuation, a howl that transcends the reach of any sympathy, Lear-like in its proportions. Luster, astonished at Ben's beyond-astonishment, can only uselessly cry to the God that but lately afforded Dilsey her existential solace. In a world filled with meaningless sound and the desperate futile cries of a black boy to his God, Jason resumes his life, and grants the narrative his own urgency of action, as he viciously attempts to right a course gone awry, and make his suffering in the scene real by its destructive actualization in violence towards both Luster and Ben. Jason's command to his brother, "Shut up!" stands in stark secular contrast to Luster's subservient pleading, and damns Luster back to the place of Ben's initial suffering, already signifying the recurrence of Ben's agony, even as the expression of authority is merely the superficial means by which Jason may avenge himself of what he views as Luster's wrong. Jason's useless fraternal beating thus becomes symptomatic of the same denial of reality in favor of a dream that was only just recently shattered by the old man's hatchet. The ultimate order of the scene in Ben's serenity finally seems a cruel joke: after being himself all the empty pain of existence, Ben finds uninterrupted solace in the image of the broken narcissus and the smooth flow of his ordered path, a transformation so profound and swift as to essentially deprive the artist's image of Ben its humanity, separated so wholly as he is from the apparent world.

The novel's ending, and thereby its effect as a whole, are largely recognized among critics as failures. Perhaps Donald Kartiganer best describes the formal critique:

Neither in the Dilsey section, whatever the power of her characterization or sheer attractiveness of the human being, nor anywhere else in the novel do we see demonstrated the ability of the human imagination to render persuasively the order of things. Instead there is the sense of motion without meaning, of voices in separate rooms talking to no one: the sound and fury that fails to signify. (Kartiganer, 342)

Of course we must understand in the closing image of Ben's ordered idiocy a profound challenge to the meaningfulness of any arbitrary order, and the reader is forced to confront that this tale, told by an idiot, seems to signify nothing. The characters' world of appearance is broken, their final objectification within it lacking, and man's ultimate objective value refuted. But

One question remains: art also makes apparent much that is ugly, hard, and questionable in life; does it not thereby spoil life for us?... "liberation from the will" was what Schopenhauer taught as the over-all end of art; and with admiration he found the great utility of its tragedy in its "evoking resignation." But this... is the pessimist's perspective and "evil eye." We must appeal to the artist's themselves. What does the tragic artist communicate of himself? Is it not precisely the state without fear in the face of the fearful and questionable that he is showing? (*Portable Nietzsche*, 529-530)

Having the ultimate image of the Compsons' tragedy make apparent all that is hard and questionable in its prime actor's individuated experience might give the appearance of a meaningless, and therefore valueless, life; yet how can Kartiganer not find signification of these apparent sufferings throughout the novel? Dilsey's "sheer attractiveness as a human being" largely comes from her ability to look at Ben's misfortune with empathy; all three of the brothers' perspectives grapple, at an existential level, with the necessity of a temporal existence bound in an instinct to memory and self-justification, which transcends any need to "persuade" the reader or even the characters themselves; the last sound and fury of the novel has not only a clear signifier in Ben's section, but one that affirms the apparently meaningless position of the Confederate statue in his perspective:

I could hear Queenie's feet and the bright shapes went smooth on both sides, the shadows of them flowing across Queenie's back. They went on like the bright tops of wheels. Then those on one side stopped at the tall white post where the soldier was. But on the other side they went on smooth and steady, but a little slower... The shapes flowed on. The ones on the other side began again, bright and fast and smooth, like when Caddy says we are going to sleep. (Faulkner, 8)

To privilege the mere appearance of Ben's ultimate reaction to the disrupted drive to the graveyard is to deny the truth the artist discovered within Ben's perspective: that the flowing shapes and colors of the

journey provide Ben the Dionysian image of movement and oneness of experience that allows him to imagine his god as present, and that signifies Ben's affirmation of existence. For Ben to have the ordered drive interrupted is for him to not only be reminded of his family's discord, but to experience it immediately and wholly; but the swift return to calm is not emblematic of that discord's unmeaning. Rather, we must understand that alongside the apparent world of Ben's immediate and baffling calm is his true perspective, in which the discord of his life is calmed not in the individuated order of "the post and tree, window and doorway and signboard..." but by their flowing, which sensation allows Ben to realize once more his god, and Caddy's obdurate beauty as a broken individual finds symbol and substance in Ben's rapt gaze before the broken narcissus. Any distinction between the appearance of Ben's suffering and the truth of his perspective, "is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the *decline of life*." That Faulkner esteems the world of "objective" experience higher than the truths of the brother's perspectives in his close "is no objection to this proposition. For 'appearance' in this case means reality *once more*, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction." That what Faulkner selects to look at "once more" in the final section suggests the superficiality and baselessness of appearance does not imply a nihilistic sense of his creation's value. Rather, by illuminating what is hard and terrible in reality, the artist thus expresses, and demands from the reader, that "state without fear in the face of the fearful and questionable..." We may thus understand in Faulkner's final objectification through art a "Courage and freedom of feeling before a powerful enemy, before a sublime calamity, before a problem that arouses dread—this triumphant state is what the tragic artist chooses, what he glorifies in" (*Portable Nietzsche*, 530). By setting Ben's idealized realization of his god within the world of broken appearance, Faulkner glorifies both in the assurance of his prose, even as he fully comprehends the depths of the problems and questions such a relationship entails. So, we may thus arrive at Nietzsche's ultimate turn to art in his theses on "Reason" in philosophy, what we might now understand as a conception of reality's truth *and* appearance: "The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible—he is *Dionysian*."

The true world—we have abolished. What world remains? the apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.* (Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.) (*Portable Nietzsche*, 486)

Easter Sunday, even as its narrator ravages in the appearance of the Compson family's recurring and fruitless tragedy, yet stands as the artist's crowning achievement. For what does the final, terrible image of Ben's superficial order signify? To say nothing is to deny the whole rest of the novel, and to deny any achievement in Faulkner's realization of the brothers' perspectives. We cannot truly appreciate the novel's parts apart from their whole, and therefore we must understand in the final aesthetic synthesis of the action the artist's, and therefore the viewer's, confrontation with the problem of truth in life. The result of this confrontation is the forceful revelation of man's defiance of objectivity in an unjustifiable, in the face of suffering, recurrence of life. Hence we might understand the narrator's ultimate concerns with appearance, truth, and life, as the exact same concerns that moved Ben, Quentin, and Jason respectively. Thus the image of Ben's apparently random extremes of emotion informs and is itself informed by the few moments in Ben's narrative in which he might escape the apparent bonds of the past and find in Caddy an actively present image of his god. Even as we recognize the illusoriness of Ben's dream world, and thus refute its objective "truth" in the appearance of his idiocy, that refuted "true" world itself refutes the "objective" truth of Ben's apparent idiocy. In the destruction of "truth" in the apparent worlds of the brother's visions, the artist thus destroys even the possibility of a world purely of appearance. This destruction cannot be seen as anything less than an existential challenge to man: a compulsion to witness what is most bereft of meaning, to boldly stare at the abyss peeking out of the Sphinx's mouth. Yet, again, is not this the strength of the artist and the honest reader? To boldly stare into what is most questionable, and discover that

in the question itself is the only possible answer, even if that means leaving man bereft of any objective value. To find in life the only justification necessary to not merely witness, but experience as real its drama is to have life affirm life. To discover that in our primordial humanity we recognize and suffer in the image of our individuation is the grounds out of which tragedy grows, and it is that natural ground of feeling that is expressed so powerfully in Shegog's sermon. The hope of the sermon, its transcendent realization of restored oneness in the strength of the future, must be challenged by all of the crimes of the present if its yearning is to have any meaning. The reader himself must understand the terrible repetitions of astonishment and pain in which Dilsey discovers the remembered blood of the Lamb. And so, confronted with this recurrence of suffering, this bereavement of objective value in appearance, I remember unabashedly the beauty and vitality, even within this world of ugliness and despair, of life. I affirm as good that life that must find expression even in destruction. As Faulkner writes in one of his earliest reexaminations of *The Sound and the Fury*, "It's fine to think that you will leave something behind you when you die, but it's far better to have made something you can die with. Much better the muddy bottom of a little doomed girl climbing a blooming pear tree in April to look in the window at the funeral" (*Introduction*, 232). Life for life and honesty within life: that is the significance of Caddy's stained and transcendent femininity, the effects of her life resounding through the world that would deny her that life and thus wrecking it from within. If we ourselves thus affirm life in all its problems, if we have the strength of the future Dilsey hopes for, then we might affirm the reality of her suffering, and call the terrible effects of that suffering the necessary result of a culture that, at bottom, is hostile to life. To deny that destruction its value, is to deny life's value.

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