Contriving history: making dead time in select works of William Faulkner

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CONTRIVING HISTORY:
MAKING DEAD TIME IN SELECT
WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

by

Tony Delgado

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ABSTRACT

The protagonists of three of William Faulkner’s major novels, Absalom, Absalom!, The Sound and the Fury, and Go Down, Moses each suffer from a compromised self that originates out of a past that contains excised elements. This revised history, which redacts past sins of rape, murder, and racial mixing, serves as a foundation for the present, passed down to the Faulknerian protagonists, Quentin, Jason, and Isaac, along lines of paternal inheritance. The three novels each suggest that when an idea of the self in the present is founded upon a past that has been rewritten, a shattering occurs when that excised past is rediscovered.

This thesis theorizes, through a reading that stresses the necessity of unearthing and facing the excised past as a part of the male coming-of-age story, that the Faulknerian protagonist renders himself dead within Southern society when he reconnects with the events and individuals that have been removed. These excised elements exist outside of society and time due to their being written out of the Southern narrative and become what this examination will call “dead time.” When Quentin, Jason, or Isaac, reintegrate dead time, whether through their own will or not, they invalidate the falsehoods that have created them as individuals and selected them as privileged members of Southern society. With their notions of self thus shattered, they find themselves alienated from the society into which they were born. They cannot connect again with those around them and they fail to succeed in business and enterprise. Though alive, Faulkner’s
protagonists have become dead, within the society of which they thought they were a part.
EDITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS


Introduction

The challenges to one’s notion of self, region, and culture that come from the possession of the power and responsibility of authoring history relentlessly haunt the protagonists of William Faulkner’s texts. Novels such as *Go Down, Moses, Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Sound and Fury* each focus on characters who struggle with the conflict between an undesirable past that has been erased in favor of a more palatable rewritten present. This undesirable past, that has been covered over in Yoknapatawpha includes episodes of murder, incest, and unrestrained sexuality. Since these unwanted past events have preceded Faulkner's characters, creating the subjectivity of the individual living in the contemporary world of Faulkner's novels, they challenge the ability of a Yoknapatawpha protagonist to live as he has defined himself. The misdeeds of history, whether in the story of the progeny of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom*, Caddy’s promiscuity in *The Sound and the Fury*, or the incestuous miscegenation of Carothers McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* attack the culture of the New South, as it wishes to see itself, since it is dependent upon the writing out of these undesirable events.

This phenomenon, which this analysis will refer to as “dead time,” is history that has been erased in favor of a contrived narrative in order to avoid challenging the dominant white patriarchal narrative of Faulkner’s South. Thomas Sutpen’s fathering of an unacknowledged octoroon son, Caddy’s sexual expression, and the disinherited (due to miscegenation) heirs to the McCaslin line are examples of things that must be repressed because each threatens the story of the genealogical history that dominates the concept of social order in Yoknapatawpha.

Dead time is intrinsically paradoxical because it refuses to stay hidden despite the
fact that it must stay excised for Faulkner’s protagonists to continue as they imagine
themselves. Quentin Compson is driven in Absalom, Absalom! to uncover it while his
brother, Jason Compson, in The Sound and the Fury, does his best to repress dead time
with his elaborate schemes. Isaac McCaslin has his future shattered when he accidentally
unearths a past of his ancestor’s crimes. While dead time writes out past crimes and
abuses, it also creates conditions, by effacing truth, that allow misdeeds to occur again. In
Go Down, Moses, Carothers McCaslin’s coupling with his own mixed race daughter
could not have occurred if he had not been a part of the group that history had allowed to
be privileged above others due to skin color. As Faulkner writes in Absalom, Absalom!, it
was a time when a ”young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says
Send me Juno or Missylena or Chlory and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and
waits” (AA 87). The purity of Carothers' whiteness, a false narrative Faulkner constantly
interrogates, allows his abuses of power that paradoxically challenges the racial purity of
the society, and necessitates that those abuses be excised.

While each protagonist experiences a shattering when dead time is reconnected to
the present, these three individuals have a relationship to the past and its discovery that is
unique to them. Though Quentin Compson is driven to understand a past that is
perplexing to him, Isaac McCaslin discovers an undesirable history by accident, an action
that eventually leads him to remove himself from society. Jason is unique in that he is an
actual manufacturer of contrived time, desperately trying to hide away a past event and
individual that refuses to be excised.

Despite the best efforts of men like Carothers to arrest time in a form they prefer,
it will continue to surge forward and the groups of white Southern landowning men will
give way to younger men who are maturing and trying to define themselves in the era known as the New South. Part of the ritual of gaining adulthood will be, for the New South spokesmen, the confrontation with the actions of originary patriarchs, like Carothers McCaslin. These younger men, the protagonists of the novels that will be herein examined all exist within the time of the New South and look backward toward the antebellum, the post-bellum, and the redemption ages. It is in these characters, the spokesmen of the New Southern era that the conflict of understanding and defining the self within a culture constructed by dead time rests.

Utilizing Rebecca Saunders work in “On Lamentation and the Redistribution of Possessions: Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! And the New South” as a theoretical framework, one can see that characters like Quentin and Jason Compson, or Isaac McCaslin find themselves placed at a unique point in history when again the past is being rewritten and a new more palatable future created. She argues that through a recasting of history, performed by Southern politicians around the beginning of the 20th century via the discourse of lamentation, the Old South becomes something that has been destroyed and thus separated from the birth of the New South (Saunders 73). Expanding on Saunder's theory, this thesis will argue that the past becomes a dead time, lamented as both gone and separate from the present, and replaced by an equally unliving one. As Quentin notes in The Sound and the Fury, “Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life” (SF 54). The project of New South reconceptualization that Faulknerian protagonists must grapple with is the active management of time—father’s “click of wheels”—and the contrivance of history into narrative. Furthermore, these
narratives, that exclude events and individuals that do not fit in its design, can be thought of as inorganic dead time. Like a psychic band-aid for the society of Yoknapatawpha, the contrived time covers over a truer history that is more organic and naturally occurring.

The crux of the conflicts that decimate Faulkner's characters, and the focus of this examination, is when an excised past is relinked with a contrived present. Since, the characters that inhabit Yoknapatawpha are the products of their genealogies, the revelation of the falsehood of their past renders their present dead time and challenges their very subjectivity. The end result is a disenfranchisement from society.

The structure of the examination of dead time attempted here is divided into three chapters. Each section investigates a different sphere of effect that the problems of self, in light of dead time in the New South, present.

*Absalom, Absalom!* deals with the problem of dead time as it relates to how Quentin Compson can define himself within the larger cultural sphere of the South, when he is driven to investigate a past that has been violently excised through murder. One son of the landowning patriarch, Thomas Sutpen, has murdered another due to the potential of transgression through racial mixing. There has been a schism and the history has been declared destroyed, as Rebecca Saunders writes. In spite of this, there is something which drives the youthful Compson to seek out the truth and reconnect the past with the present. This section reveals how connecting with an excised past ultimately renders the protagonist in the present dead, alienated from his history and culture. It renders his subjectivity, which in Faulkner is based upon genealogical inheritance, null and void.

The second chapter focuses upon the effect dead time has upon space of the family. Jason Compson, in *The Sound and the Fury*, varies from his brother Quentin, in
that he is the actor that is actively trying to render the past dead time. His sister has a child out of wedlock and is abandoned by her husband for it, shaming her family. The promiscuity of Jason's sister represents a danger to the narrative of the Compson family. The offspring of one of the affairs, Miss Quentin, is tangible evidence of her mother's rampant sexuality, and Jason makes her miserable as a result. Jason would like nothing better than to remove all trace of Caddy and Miss Quentin from the family to write a narrative that is centered around him, continuing the tradition of dominance by white males. In the end, Jason is silenced as his sister Caddy refuses to be erased and continues to overshadow his attempts to write her out of the story, proving that though people and events can be excised they will always return to haunt those in Faulkner's present. They must be dealt with.

Finally, the third chapter investigates, in *Go Down, Moses*, Isaac McCaslin's attempt to escape from the social narratives that construct the Faulknerian protagonist through property and ownership. Though Isaac is being groomed to inherit the lands and power of his ancestor, Carothers McCaslin, he ultimately chooses to relinquish his inheritance due to the revelation of Carothers's incestuous miscegenation during the antebellum era. As someone who has benefited from his family's wrongdoing, Isaac must face the question of what sort of responsibility he has to the excised past he has unearthed. Young Isaac's relinquishment, a decision to neither stop the phenomenon of dead time, nor continue its practice is merely an attempt to escape from the burden of the past that haunts him. However, to relinquish the power of authorship marginalizes him in a society that controls the writing of history.
From the amalgamation of these chapters, which examine three protagonists that grapple with the effects of a subjectivity conceived within a contrived history, one should be able see that while Faulkner offers a stern warning against loyalties to false continuities that ramify through all levels of culture, he problematizes the possibility of finding any sort of solution in overthrowing the fictions that have been promulgated. Indeed, both the maintenance of the narrative and its destruction cause problems for subjectivity. Both Quentin and Isaac are shattered by their discoveries, while Jason's contrivances make him unhappy, and lead to his eventual comeuppance. In many ways, it is not what is repressed that must be atoned for, but the act of repression. One can only conclude that it may be too late to gain salvation for the residents of Yoknapatawpha, since the crime, though paradoxically ever-present, remains in the past. Whether compelled to look backward or buy into the fiction of the present, the one certainty that Faulkner offers is that the past must be endured.
In *Absalom, Absalom!* William Faulkner offers a text whose plot is both uncertain and variable. Opening with young Quentin Compson visiting the aging spinster, Rosa Coldfield, in her wisteria infused and tomb-like home, the narrative tasks the reader and Quentin with constructing a story out of a non-linear jumble of lost historical events whose significance, and even existence, are in constant flux. Told through four narrators, including one who has never been in the South, key plot points are constantly passed over, examined, and redefined.

The jumbled history that Quentin and Rosa attempt to decipher is the tale of Thomas Sutpen, a man born from poor white trash who attempts to reconstruct himself as a member of the wealthy, land-owning elite. Leaving his home for Haiti, he remakes himself much like Dumas's Edmond Dantés does. Unfortunately, the fatal misstep of fathering a son, named Charles Bon, with an octoroon woman in Haiti will become his undoing. After abandoning his first wife and relocating to Yoknapatawpha county, he begins anew. Building his legacy, he has 3 children, Henry, Judith, and a Clytie (she is the product of an affair with a slave). When Bon appears and threatens to take Judith as his wife if Sutpen continues to deny his existence, the eldest child, Henry, murders Bon on the footsteps of Sutpen's plantation house. Told out of chronology, at the center of this family history, is the mystery of why Sutpen's heir murdered his own brother, a man whom he loved.
The answer to the novel's central mystery, why Charles Bon was murdered, varies based upon which character is speaking. Events within the novel are repeatedly told with sometimes contradictory details. The past, with Sutpen, Bon, Henry and others, seems so far from the present of the New South, that it exists only as memory or fantasy in the minds of Faulkner’s narrators. In *Absalom, Absalom!* there is an overwhelming feeling of dread and loss that emphasizes that there can be no certainty as to the veracity of the supposed past that it is the text's main effort to unearth.

This past that is being dredged up has been lost to the expediencies of the present. The history in *Absalom, Absalom!* is one that is filled with murder and wanton cruelty derived from a project of maintaining racial and economic difference. Though those acts have led to prosperity for those in the privileged classes (Quentin, Rosa, and others), they essentially corrupt the origins of a culture that is built on the idea of patrilineal descent. Since history that is predicated upon genealogical inheritance from father to son centralizes the conflict of the two sons in *Absalom, Absalom!* the novel demonstrates the necessity that the child (the black one), who does not fit the story that Sutpen, his heirs, and the denizens of Yoknapatawpha county have constructed, be removed. For those in the South, any hope of an illusion of a future dictates that there must be an act of erasure that removes the troubling moments of the past from history.

However, one has to ask, how does a present exist with a past that was erased? Judging from the compulsion that drives Rosa to tell the story of Thomas Sutpen, and Quentin's need to investigate that story to its inevitable end, the present cannot, for Faulkner's characters, exist cut off from its own history. Like a siren's call, the past pulls on the narrators, Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve. With this in mind, it seems
that the revelation of a past that has been erased, due to adulteration, must recast a present that has been constructed by a society that defines itself by a linear incorruptible genealogical history. For the subject of the New South, this recasting obliterates the notion of the self that has existed based upon the fiction that represses. This results in an inherent paradox in which a character can have the way in which they view their being destroyed, rendering him dead while still alive. Faulkner shows this when he has Shreve remark to Quentin, “The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years” (301). This comment, which precedes the novel’s end, in which Quentin emphatically proclaims that he does not hate the South, underlines the fact that the denizens of Yoknapatawpha, when confronted with their undesirable history are rendered ghosts. At end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the unearthing of dead time has irrevocably altered young Quentin Compson.

What this chapter theorizes is that the compulsion to complete the redacted historical narrative, to find and identify with the erasure, which seems to offer the illusion of completeness, in fact marginalizes Quentin, sending him toward a living death. An analysis of this theory will begin with a look at Quentin's position as a citizen of the New South and the ways in which he straddles the gap between the potentiality of his era and the past that has been both effaced and has led, despite narrative erasures, to the present. From that point, attention will be given to the problems that come from both identifying with the erasure, Charles Bon, and attempts to reinsert moments of excised history back into the narrative. The analysis will then conclude with Quentin' marginalization from his own culture and self.
Faulkner's novel and this chapter center around Quentin because he is a character who is positioned in a location of no small significance: the child of a white Southern landowner, given the opportunity to attend Harvard. Due to this position, he would seem to be granted a chance to reinvigorate a South that has been brought low by war, economic collapse, and racial tension. The paradox of a young man at the apex of potentiality also having outlived himself by years is central to the conflict Faulkner has Quentin wrestle with in the novel. Like Rosa, he seems to be a ghost of the past, but one that exists in the era of the New South.

To properly state the stakes of Quentin's conflict one must first examine the importance that Faulkner invests him with. Faulkner's young protagonist is unequivocally a son of the South. When he travels to the North to attend Harvard, he does not fit in. To the Northerners, he talks like a black man. Shreve questions him about life in the South, not as if it is a different region, but another planet. Quentin's relationship to the history, the land, and the people is inescapable, but Faulkner takes the boy's ties with his history a bit further when he writes of the South that “Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them, his body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth” (AA 7). Quentin is not a symbol of the New South but an actual manifestation of its potential and the achievements and failures of its multitudes. In other words, the antebellum plantation life, the civil war, the reconstruction, and the redemption era have led up to the moments related in the novel; not in a chronological historical way, but in the form of a living cultural history that exists as a jumble, a mix, and a multiplicity.
Given Quentin's unique position of being constituted by Southern history, it is odd that the contemporary cultural narrative should try to distance him so much from the past. As Saunders observes, the political rhetoric of the New South took on a tone of lamentation that allowed for the illusion of an ideological break from that of the Old South and the Reconstruction eras. Quentin actively tries to fight the phenomenon of this break. By investigating Charles Bon's murder Quentin fights against the surrounding and dominant narrative that Saunders examines in her paper. The break she argues, allows the denizens of the New South to view themselves as different from their ancestors and move out of a guilt-ridden agrarian age into an industrialized era of capitalistic potentiality. To succeed in the New South and entrench himself in the narrative that has come to define his era Quentin must declare himself separated by an imagined, and tragic divide. Saunders writes that “rhetorically appropriating the destruction of war also allowed New South spokesmen to insert themselves into that logic of lamentation that simultaneously declares the past destroyed and proclaims loyalty to it” (75).

Furthermore, she writes that the position of the New South spokesman is “not unlike” Quentin's father, Jason Compson Sr., who declares the Old South as both 'a dead time' and 'larger, more heroic' than the 'diffused and scattered' present” (75). Confirming her observations, Mr. Compson, at one point, waxes poetically about the antebellum:

Perhaps you are right...maybe even the light of day, let alone this...which man had to invent to his need since, relieved of the onus of sweating to live, he is apparently reverting (or evolving) back into a nocturnal animal, would be too much for it, for them. Yes, for them: of that day and time, of a dead time; people too as we are and victims as we are, but victims of
a different circumstance, simpler and therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled, author and victim too of thousand homicides and a thousand copulations and divorcements. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps any more light than this would be too much for it. (AA 71)

Even mundane concerns, such as having enough light to read by, cause Mr. Compson’s thoughts to drift toward mourning a cursed past while wishing to be a part of that supposedly simpler and more heroic time. For those like Mr Compson, the New South represents a moment of history rapidly moving in a direction that demands that they separate from the past if they wish not to be left behind. For if Quentin and his father are multiplicities of defeated Southern patriarchs they must be ever-conscious of the potential of being left behind like those from that dead time, those they echo. Saunders wisely notes that “if the narrators of Absalom, Absalom! seem theatrically to resist New South optimism by dwelling on devastation and clinging to nostalgia, they are rhetorically as insistent on producing newness as any New South spokesman” (89). However, the key difference is that with Quentin, Rosa and others their focus is on a newness that could pass them by if they refuse to give up a notion of the past that they are connected with. Though Mr. Compson mourns for a past that is destroyed, he is never able to completely relinquish it. A man like Mr. Compson would have been successful in the antebellum, but in the present he is forced to sell off parcels of his land so that his heir may attend an expensive Northern university and have the opportunity to escape the limits of the dead
time of the South. Mr. Compson's sacrifice, his hope to create a newness in his own child while theatrically mourning the loss of the Old South, ultimately fails. Quentin becomes as engrossed with the past, if not more so, than his father.

The reason behind the youth's obsession with his past is because history, the history of Yoknapatawpha, has constructed him. Barbara Ladd emphasizes this idea in “The Direction of Howling: Nationalism and the Color Line in *Absalom, Absalom!*” when she writes that “both Jason's and Quentin's accounts are dramatizations of the white southerner's sense of his own construction by postbellum history” (542). Consciousness of his own constructedness by the postbellum period juxtaposed with his existence as a “diffused and scattered creature” in the present no doubt powers Quentin’s need to reassemble a narrative of history, and therefore to complete an idea of the self in history. However, James Snead makes an interesting distinction in his book *Figures of Division* that is useful when seen in light of the notion of Quentin as commonwealth. He writes that “the confusions over dates and even the jumbled sequences of each narrative suggest that *Absalom, Absalom!* is not primarily about particular historical events but how actual historical events are transformed” (Snead 104). If Quentin is constructed, not just in a social sense but as a subjectivity derived from the historical echo of “sonorous defeated names,” then the historical narrative being transformed is him. At stake in *Absalom, Absalom!* is more than just the motives behind a murder, but a discovery of one's self as it actively changes with each historical revelation and perception. The conversation between Quentin and Shreve about the South is quite telling:

“You can't understand it. You would have to be born there.”

“Would I then?” Quentin did not answer. “Do you understand it?”
“I don't know,” Quentin said. “Yes, of course I understand it.” They breathed in the darkness. After a moment Quentin said: “I don't know.”

(AA 289)

While Quentin believes that one has to be “born there” to understand the South, he is also quite aware that he does not understand it regardless. The requirement of being born in the South implies that one must be woven into the fabric of the Southern narrative to possess what it means to be a Southerner. Being from the South is not just a regional designation, then, but a signal of being part of the living breathing organism that is the commonwealth. However, as Mr Compson bemoans, the diffused and scattered present points to something lost that must be found. Quentin’s lack of understanding signals that for Quentin, his task in Absalom, Absalom is to find himself. He is aware of the connection between his self in the present and the heroic dead time (the time of the supposedly lost South), but is driven to narrativize that connection by investigating the erasures.

It is through the investigation of Charles Bon that Quentin regains the lost pieces of his history and himself. It is no easy task since Bon has been so thoroughly removed that in a novel focused on recollecting his story, no living character has even seen him. Rosa Coldfield, the character closest to the events around the book’s central mystery even admits, “I had never seen him (I never saw him. I never even saw him dead. I heard a name. I saw a photograph, I helped to make a grave: and that was all)” (AA 117). However, Charles Bon’s strength is in his absence. He haunts the present by being a void at the center of the narrative history. Like a phantom limb of Southern history, Charles Bon’s absence constantly reminds Faulkner’s narrators of what has been taken away.
That Southern society seems bent on removing Sutpen's first son from history is certain. After Quentin finds Henry, the last man to see Charles Bon alive, Clytie (Bon and Henry’s mixed-raced half sister) sets Sutpen's Hundred on fire, killing herself and Henry. In this way, even those who had some contact with Bon are excised.

Bon is a threat to the social order of the South for he stands to gain acceptance and power along the lines of male inheritance despite his racial corruption. In *Figures of Division*, Snead refers to a story about how Socrates, in *Phaedrus*, praised a man that could look upon the various members of society, gaze upon their characteristics and divide the individuals up “along natural formations, where the joint is.” Snead notes that, “with color there are no clean separations; where does white end and black begin? 'The joint,' as such, is where the racial plot of the South both holds together and threatens to fall” (101). Snead's observations are helpful because they highlight not only the fear of racial mixing, but the ways in which these fears legitimate themselves, due to the Southerner's need for Manichaean distinctions that make possible the economic and social, and thereby historical, structures. Returning once more to Mr. Compson's speech, one can see the fear of adulteration manifest itself in that patriarch's bemoaning of being scattered and diffuse. What is key about Charles Bon is that his existence overthrows Mr. Compson's notion of a distinct, uncomplex and heroic time. In other words, the material reality and threat of being mixed was always there. It is not a product of being in the era of the New South, but a fact that has always been and has been consistently rewritten.

Quentin's dilemma of self originates from a false dichotomy Mr. Compson has created. The heroic dead time the elder Compson refers to is his own fantasy. It is contrived time, a simpler racially differentiated past imagined to be lost but never there in
the first place. This fiction has displaced the original history of adulteration, rendering that history as dead as the contrived time. Quentin's crisis of understanding is, therefore, based upon a false premise of the loss of a false time that is constantly undermined by Bon's actuality.

In Bon, the figure of adulteration, his existence as Creole places him at the center of both an economic controversy as well as one of ethnic nationalism that plays out on a larger historical canvas. Ladd places Bon's story within actual historical circumstances when she writes that:

> In the Upper South, the figure of the mixed blood was classed officially and metaphorically as part of the race that was defined as ‘slave’ a legal/political nonentity. In the Deep South, however, traditions were different. Until the Louisiana Purchase, racial classifications were based, in some ways upon the status of the father. Children of white fathers were more easily manumitted in the Deep South, and the fathers acknowledged those children more frequently than in the Upper South. (Ladd 527)

In Bon's obsession with being acknowledged by Sutpen one can see Ladd's analysis playing out in *Absalom, Absalom!* However, it must be emphasized that not only does Bon undermine the notions of the antebellum as unadulterated that construct Quentin and his father, but he obliterates ideas of racial purity at the point of origin. As Ladd says in the above quotation, prior to the Louisiana purchase, mixed-raced children were often viewed as legitimate in the Deep South. Any idea of a dead time that was not complex (i.e. free from the adulteration that Mr. Compson laments) in the antebellum is, therefore, absurd. The same problems of self that originate from the “plot of the South” that Snead
refers to exists both prior to and after any sort of historical break that the Southerner would perceive. Furthermore, this validates Saunders’ point that the spokesmen of the New South were trying to write in a historical break between old South and New South that came as a result of the Civil War and the reconstruction. Ladd's historical observations, juxtaposed with Mr. Compson’s concerns about the diffused present, provide evidence of a continuity between past and present across the break between New South and antebellum.

In the New South of Yoknapatawpha the culture has not turned a corner or experienced a break with the past, but simply developed a new language for the methodology of oppression. For example, the antebellum slave is freed from ownership but again tied to the land and a white master through tenant farming. Ultimately the situation of the oppressed is still the same. He is still subservient to a white master despite his supposed liberation. Though Faulkner’s narrators focus quite a bit on the loss Sutpen, Rosa, and Judith experienced following the end of the civil war, these white characters are always better off, regardless of their poverty level, than a black man or woman can be. The illusion is that there has been some sort of change between past and present, but there has not been. While whites, like Mr. Compson mourn the loss of a time when class and race relations were clearer, the truth is that nothing has inherently changed except the illusions that the ruling patriarchy manufacture.

Though Quentin and Mr. Compson buy into these illusions for a time, the characters that occupy the space of the joint and blur the distinctions between classes and races, like Charles Bon, are aware that there has been no historical change in how difference manifests itself in the South. Critical to the creation of these illusions that
dominate Southern history is an ideological control of a past that is seemingly different from the present. Bon's existence and status as mixed-raced threaten to problematize the narrative and mandate that he be excised. Since he is not part of the narrative, he is marginalized and ultimately killed. Bon's awareness of being excluded from the narrative, his father's refusal to acknowledge him, despite a Creole tradition, causes him to act in ways that baffle those around him. For example, Henry is horrified to discover that Charles Bon is married to an octoroon mistress in New Orleans. When he demands an answer, Bon offers him a baffling explanation:

Not whores. And not whores because of us, the thousand. We—the thousand, the white men—made them, created and produced them; we even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh seven eighths of another kind. I admit that. But the same white race would have made them slaves too, these few men like myself without principles or honor either, perhaps you will say. (AA 91)

Obviously, Bon is not only talking about his wife, but himself as well. One does not need to be an individual of mixed race to be aware of the reality of adulteration, but nevertheless Henry is blinded by the Southern narrative that constructs him. Bon throws this culturally inculcated blindness in Henry's face by pointing out the absurdity of the white man's laws and juxtaposing how being logical (seven eighths should outweigh one eighth) makes him a man without principles or honor. Bon's baffling behavior derives itself out of an undesirable past that, while logical, does not fit. This is the type of past that Ladd cites in her analysis. This past seems to threaten the present because it demands acknowledgement, especially from the patriarch, Thomas Sutpen.
Ironically, Bon, as Quentin and Shreve describe him, is not interested in overthrowing the social order, but succeeding in it. Like his father, who transgressed by raising himself above his poor white trash origins, Bon craves his own place within the social order. For that to happen, he must paradoxically gain acknowledgement from his father, an acknowledgement which would threaten the narrative of inheritance and power along the male line that is foundational to the notion of the South. After all, being allowed to claim his position as the eldest son of a wealthy landowner would be a challenge to the order.

One must consider the difficulty Thomas Sutpen, although a white man, had in crossing the social boundaries erected before him. Shortly after arriving in Jefferson, the citizens of the town, plot to arrest him simply because he is a stranger. Only through a quick marriage to a respectable member of Jefferson, does Sutpen gain the permission of the citizenry to exist within their midst. Sutpen's rise suggests a permeability and malleability of race, class, and culture that must seem terrifying to those who hope to freeze history into a Southern ideal. A mixed-raced heir would not fare very well within this society that would even seek to excise pureblooded white man. The people of Yoknapatawpha are subconsciously aware of the fragility of their illusions and are prepared to protect them.

Thomas Sutpen ritualizes the fight to keep Charles Bon absent in an exercise that sickens a young Henry Sutpen. At night, the Sutpen patriarch would wrestle shirtless in the barn with his wild Negroes. These matches are a physical manifestation of Sutpen's fight with the palpable past that should dictate that he cannot and should not be successful. The fights in the barn represent a struggle with both the memory of the Negro
servant, a symbol of the class divide he wishes to conquer, who turned him away as a child and with his own destructive history in Haiti. While Thomas Sutpen decided that the best way to gain revenge upon Pettibone, the man whose Negro servant slighted him, was to be successful, the wrestling matches contradict his thinking and originate out of his father’s initial reaction to class difference. Sutpen tells the story, to Quentin’s grandfather, of one night in which his father captured and beat one of Pettibone’s black servants:

he asked what the nigger had done and his father said, ‘Hell fire, that goddam son of a bitch Pettibone’s nigger,’—how, without knowing it then since he had not yet discovered innocence, he must have meant the question the same way his father meant the answer: no actual nigger, living creature, living flesh to feel pain and writhe and cry out. (AA 187)

Sutpen’s use of the wrestling matches to work out his anger about being snubbed dehumanize the wild Negroes in much the same way his father’s assault on Pettibone’s servant did. Blackness whether it is in the form of Charles Bon, Pettibone’s servant or others comes to represent the tools from his past by which Sutpen is barred.

Henry, as Quentin understands him, also faces a confrontation with an undesirable past. The reason for Henry's sickness is that, like Quentin, his life has been built upon a lie. While Sutpen's white son sees himself as the heir to a powerful and wealthy Southern landowner, Bon's attempts to reinsert himself into the narrative threaten the very idea Henry has of himself.

Henry not only finds himself confronted with the loss of his own legitimacy within the society which made him (since he was raised in Yoknapatawpha unlike Bon or
Thomas Sutpen), he is also faced with “the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister” (AA 286). That Charles Bon, who is revealed as an octoroon, would bed down with Judith could not be allowed. While Bon challenges the legitimacy of the social order simply by being, the prospect of further racial mixing through marriage with a citizen of Yoknapatawpha exacerbates the problems of being that confront the Sutpen heir. Charles Bon's attempt to reinsert himself in the narrative brings about his murder. Henry tries to excise Bon from the narrative permanently.

Paradoxically, Henry's murder of Charles Bon, perpetrated to preserve the social order, marginalizes him from society. He must flee. By repudiating his father's history, erasing his brother, and secreting his motives and the truth of Bon's history away with him, he has effectively unwritten himself by association. Though he had protected the South from the individuals who confuse class and racial distinctions, he was a product of that same family he had destroyed. He has, therefore, rendered his origin dead time.

Returning to Quentin, one must notice that he faces a similar situation to Henry. He is implicated by association in propagating a lie about the notions of the South that persist and construct his own time. Though Henry slays Charles Bon, he cannot un-know his discoveries and neither can Quentin. Henry may have hidden the truth of his origins, but his knowledge of his past, both Bon's and Sutpen's cannot but effect how he perceives the world around him.

To understand Bon as Henry did, is to begin to identify with him. Quentin, as detective, falls prey to a similar danger. Ultimately, he identifies with the erasure, denying the history that excised Bon and allowed his own creation. When Quentin discovers Henry hiding out in Sutpen's Hundred, he queries him about why he returns.
The Sutpen's heir's answer is “to die” (298). Henry had destroyed himself, but has, as Shreve observed of Southerners, outlived himself by years. When one identifies with the erasure, becomes it in effect, all that is left in a society that wants to live without you, is to await death.

Quentin’s tale ends in death also, when Faulkner concludes the novel with Quentin and Shreve sleeping in a cold tomb-like dormitory at Harvard. Like Henry, Quentin's discoveries are his unmaking. Quentin learns his position and being come not from a fallen heroic time, but from a contrived history that covers over oppression and murder. As a creation, a commonwealth, of that project of obfuscation his origins are both hidden and deadly to him. The search for Charles Bon is a quest for the beginnings of Quentin Compson. To succeed in that search is to supplant a redacted history that made Faulkner's New South spokesman. The effect of this is an undermining of the very subjectivity that is Quentin. In the end, a turn toward dead time, to Charles Bon and the excised history he represents, is a turn toward death. Quentin's investigations breakdown his being and excise him from history in much the same way Henry's discoveries shatter him. Harvard becomes not the site of reviverist opportunity that his father had sold land for, but a tomb for him to haunt as another ghost of the South.
It is no accident that many critics have considered Caddy Compson the central figure in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Despite being the only member of the Compson children to be denied her own narrative voice and section of the novel, each character's attention, angst, and desire remains focused upon her regardless of her absence. Faulkner's own comments made during his time at the University of Virginia further substantiate Caddy's centrality in the novel when he said “To me she was the—the beautiful one. She was—she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote about—” (Faulkner at Virginia). Faulkner went on to describe how the image of a pre-adolescent Caddy climbing a tree captivated him. The strength of the character has continued to captivate readers to this day.

In fact, Catherine Baum reads *The Sound and the Fury* through the lens of Caddy Compson as the protagonist in her essay, “‘The Beautiful One’ Caddy Compson as Heroine of *The Sound and the Fury.*” She posits that “the main aim of the novel is to allow the reader to piece together information and derive for himself a true picture of Caddy” and that the book's structure is based upon the developmental stages of Caddy's life (Baum 163). Citing Faulkner's seminars at the University of Virginia, Baum likens the novel's form to the author's explanation of *Absalom, Absalom!* in which he described the multi-perspective narrative technique as “thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird,” with the reader creating a fourteenth amalgamated and truer image of the blackbird (Faulkner at Virginia).
However, unlike *Absalom Absalom!* there is no narrative distance between the narrators of *The Sound and the Fury* and the book's action. Put simply, the characters who are actors in *Absalom's* conflict (Henry and Thomas Sutpen or Charles Bon) are noticeably absent from the action of telling their story. With the exception of Caddy Compson, this is not the case in *The Sound and the Fury.* The Compson children, Benji, Quentin, and Jason, all tell their tale in their own unique fashion, revealing a personal relationship with their sister.

Caddy is denied a voice as narrator and absent from the third-person omniscient section that finishes the novel. She, like Charles Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*, has been oppressed to such a degree that she only appears through someone else’s narration. Her presence is constantly being adjusted and contaminated by Faulkner’s narrators. Regardless, Caddy does not need to be reconstituted in a truer form. She is there in the novel despite being silenced by the men who narrate her.

It is the interplay within the narrative of presence and absence, via silence, that interests Minrose Gwin in her essay “Hearing Caddy's Voice.” For Gwin, Caddy constitutes a feminine void at the center of the novel that undermines male rhetoric (35). She characterizes Caddy as engaging in a freer creative space that eventually becomes bounded, silencing her voice. She writes that Caddy “continues to play, but her text becomes more and more bounded. She is encircled in the concentric spaces of her own maternity created within the male discourse” (Gwin 45). Combining Gwin's idea of Caddy as a space in the novel bounded by a male ideology focused on repressing her with Baum's notion of Caddy as the novel’s heroine highlights Caddy's potency in the novel. It is a potency that breaks through the barriers of male rhetoric, like Jason's definition of
womanhood, to ultimately become more central, even in absence, than the potency of her
of siblings.

That Caddy's freedom and effect upon the familial unit of the Compson family
needed to be minimized is no shock. Jason, who tries the hardest to silence her, says to
Caddy, “We dont even know your name at that house...You'd be better off down there [in
a grave] with him and Quentin” (SF 128). Though Jason is wrong about her erasure and
Miss Quentin shows that she has more in common with her mother (thus knowing her
name) than he would have hoped, Jason has essentially tried to write Caddy out of the
familial history, rendering her a dead time. Dead time, or history that has been excised in
favor of a contrived and equally unliving narrative of the past, continually returns in
Faulkner's narratives, and The Sound and the Fury is no exception. Jason sees himself as
the center of the Compson family history and does his best to insure that the history he
contrives to placate his ego succeeds over the story of Caddy's existence.

However, given Gwin and Baum's statements about Caddy's force and centrality,
along with Faulkner's own statements, Jason's efforts are doomed to fail. With that in
mind, the object of this essay is not to contest either Baum or Gwin's claims but to use
this notion of Caddy as powerful albeit silenced force that breaks through barriers to grab
and hold the spotlight as a foundation to examine a character, Jason Compson, who
manufactures those barriers and contrived histories, and is nevertheless ultimately
overshadowed by the potency and existence of a figure of dead time, Caddy, that he
attempts to erase. For Faulkner, Jason represents a man who “was inhuman, but he was
still a living man” (Faulkner at Virginia). He is unable to inhabit the spaces that Caddy
easily pushes him out of, those of compassion, kindness, and self-sacrifice.
The Sound and the Fury is as much about writing and expression as it is about the actual events in the plot. Benji’s unfortunate efforts in “trying to say” evince this point early in the novel. Similarly, after a lifetime of missed opportunities and being outshined by Quentin and, more importantly, Caddy, Jason's efforts “to say” reek of desperation. Jason is like a bit player mugging to the camera behind a real star, desperately trying to rewrite the scene he is forced to share. Jason's narrative, the most forceful in the novel, is an effort to vindicate his masculine supremacy by rearranging Faulkner's cosmos so that he is at the center with Caddy erased. To understand this notion, this chapter will first examine Jason's artificial ideas about how the world functions. Expanding on that, the investigation will move to a consideration of how this viewpoint interacts with notions of the feminine and the maternal. Finally, the chapter will conclude with Jason's failure to translate Caddy and her progeny into dead time.

Jason's efforts to supplant Caddy within their familial history begins with his voice. A large part of the appeal of Jason's section is the character's sarcastic and biting sense of humor. Following two confusing and philosophic sections, Jason's section paints the portrait of a sarcastic pragmatist. Unlike Benji who is “trying to say,” Jason does say and is willing to tell all those around him the way he thinks things should be. As James Snead notes in Figures of Division, “his word rests on the valorized 'I'” (33). Jason notes in frustration when comparing his treatment to Benji's, “I feed a whole dam kitchen full of niggers to follow around after him, but if I want an automobile tire changed, I have to do it myself” (SF 117). His overall point is that he is an undervalued commodity. Despite the fact that he provides for and has never abandoned the family, either through suicide, mental illness, or promiscuity, even Benji is looked after better than him. Snead
elaborates: “in any case no one will see his 'I' as being as privileged as he does. Jason's life in the community effectively separates him from it...one feels that even in third-person narration, Jason would always wish to be the first” (33). One should conclude that Jason's habit of ending sentences with “I say,” including his opening “Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say,” denotes a desperate need to announce both an opinion and the fact that that opinion is his, and therefore valuable.

Jason's desperate monologue is ultimately an attempt to win a silent audience to his side. In *Ink of Melancholy* André Bleikasten argues that “Jason's discourse at once emphasizes the narrator's awareness of himself in the very act of speaking...and suggests time and again the silent complicity of a listening you, often referred to in the text, who at any time could become an interlocutor” (105). This is why Jason is constantly pulling apart social interactions and relationships to form them into some sort of pseudo-logical, albeit skewed, system of living that would allow him success if only others allow him to do as he pleased. Chief among his consideration, due to his bitterness over Caddy's promiscuity that caused the loss of a job opportunity, is women. When reading a letter from the prostitute, Lorraine, he comically utters the following platitude:

> I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you can't think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw. (SF 122)

Jason's explorations into the way he thinks things should be done both provide much of the comedy in the section but also convince the reader that there is a subtext that is being obfuscated by his false logic. Expanding on Snead's point that Jason always wants to be
first, it would seem that Jason's worldview represents a desire to write a history that is both more to his liking and masterable. Bleikasten notes that “behind the accumulation of pseudo-logic and tauto-logic, one senses an atrophied intelligence, frantically feeding on the meager diet of its stale truisms and sophisms. A nauseous compound of clamorous clichés, a dreary dictionary of idées recues: Jason's monologue has nothing else to offer” (118). The emptiness of Jason's words render him a poor liar, inviting those he speaks to, reader included, to search for a subtext that seems truer than his ridiculous and offensive logic. In one scene, Earl the shopkeeper tells Jason that his untruths about taking care of his family are not convincing anyone:

“I believe I know more about where that automobile came from than she does.”

“You think so, do you?” I says. “When are you going to spread the news that I stole it from my mother?”

“I don't say anything,” he says. “I know you have her power of attorney and I know she still believes that thousand dollars is in this business.” (SF 143)

The truth is that Jason is a leech who is deriving sustenance off of money from Caddy and his mother. Jason performs complex, but futile, mental gymnastics to convince himself, the reader, and anyone listening that he exists as he constructs himself.

The world that Jason goes through such pains to write for himself, utilizing the kind of pseudo-logic Bleikasten mentions, is constantly under threat by the fact of his reliance upon the women who provide for him. To plug the holes in his leaky worldview, Jason does his best to define the world in the most black and white sort of terms. For him
there are only two ways of going about anything: a right one and a wrong one. Jason is, of course, the one in possession of the right way that stands diametrically opposed to anyone else's. Regarding Miss Quentin's behavior, he tells his mother “You haven't had much luck with your system. You want me to do anything about it, or not? Say one way or the other; I've got to get on to work” (SF 114). Later when negotiating with Caddy about seeing her daughter, Jason says, “You dam right there's no other way...Sure I'll do it. I said I would, didn't I? Only you'll have to do just like I say, now” (SF 128). In this scene Jason strikes a deal in which Caddy pays him an exorbitant sum to view her daughter. In Jason’s negotiation, he is trying to say how the world should be and force others by agreement to conform to it. The result of the interaction is Jason at his most villainous. After taking Caddy’s money, he drives by and holds the infant Miss Quentin up to the window. Not stopping, he leaves a distraught Caddy in the dust. Gwin comments that Jason is operating “within an economy that takes more than it gives. Caddy is its ideal victim because of her willingness to give excessively” (56). In terms of business deals, Jason divides individuals using the terms right and wrong or sharks and suckers. One can extrapolate that taking Caddy for everything she has makes him feel as if he is doing things “correctly” and alleviates the feeling of having been made a sucker when he lost the promised bank job.

However, Jason's victories are small and insignificant because his imagining of himself as an authority is constantly thwarted by the actuality that lies beneath his narrative. Though Jason may have stolen thousands of dollars from Caddy and Miss Quentin, the money subverts his notions of himself as a man. Though he defines a man as one who earns his own keep, he is dependent on a woman to keep him fiscally afloat.
Somewhere in his subconscious, then, he is aware that his notions of the world are not tenable and he develops a persecution complex as a result. In his mind he is constantly thwarted by others, and although he knows the “right” way of doing things, he is never listened to. He wonders aloud, “What the hell chance has a man got, tied down in a town like this and to a business like this. Why I could take his business in one year and fix him so he'd never have to work again, only he'd give it all away to the church or something” (SF 143). However, Earl provides the best rebuttal to Jason's fantasies when he tells him that “you'd be a good business man if you'd let yourself, Jason” (SF 155). Again, Earl is able to see through Jason's delusions to point out a painful truth to him: Jason's persecutor is himself. While his economy is, as Gwin points out, one that is always concerned with taking, it ultimately isolates him from those who would do good to him.

While Jason preys upon victims like Caddy who are willing to give excessively, in the end, those sources of exploitation will dry up. Though he defines himself as a self-sufficient man, the theft of Miss Quentin's money comes back to bite him when she robs him of his stolen funds. This robbery is a misfortune he has brought upon himself. Perhaps he would have been better off participating in the type of economy in which Earl takes part. A healthy flow of personal gain and generosity (represented by Jason’s idea that Earl would give his profit to the church) would avoid alienating those around him or bringing his fantasies of persecution to reality. Instead, Jason begins his Easter Sunday without the wealth he coveted or the assistance of anyone who would help him to recover it.
For Jason, giving is womanly and he is a person desperately trying to define himself as a man. In Gwin's reading, the feminine space within the narrative, which Caddy inhabits, is defined by a willingness to give, love, and play creatively. Jason's desire to fashion himself after a masculine ideology of profit that abhors surprises (and therefore creativity) ultimately binds her in the text of the narrative he defines. Baum also notes that “Caddy's life also thematically represents love, compassion, pity and sacrifice in a family which is destroying itself through lack of these qualities” (164). These qualities, which come out of the feminine space in the novel assault Jason's black/white notions of the way things ought to be and terrorize him.

This fear of the feminine originates out of his relationship with his mother, Caroline Compson. This relationship is key for from it Jason’s for Jason’s understanding of the all women who exist in his life can be seen to have been derived. As Jason turns to the world, reconstructs it in his imagination, and tries to oppress Caddy, his mother is at origin of his motivation. It is a relationship that manifests itself through an illusion of dependence, but is, in reality, one of mutual exploitation. As Caroline tells Jason, “I dont mean to meddle in your affairs. But I dont know what I'd do if anything happened to you” (SF 149). Caroline emotionally grabs tightly to her son to create the sort of relationship that is more appropriate for husband and wife than for mother and child. Jason, for his part, profits by misleading her into thinking he is burning Caddy's check and taking the thousand dollars meant for Earl's business to buy an automobile.

Their relationship is akin to that of the master and the slave. While Jason is enslaved to his mother's needs he fancies himself the master of the house, delighting in
the power he receives as Caroline's surrogate husband. One scene has him cruelly tormenting Luster with the possibility of getting free tickets to see the traveling band:

“I dont want them,” I says. I came back to the stove. “I came in here to burn them up. But if you want to buy one for a nickel?” I says, looking at him and opening the stove lid.

“I aint got dat much,” he says.

“All right,” I says. I dropped one of them in the stove. (SF 159)

Assuming the role of the father gives Jason the rule of law, a role that was previously inhabited by his own father (not coincidentally also named Jason). Unfortunately, this is a role that suits Jason as well as motherhood suits his own mother. The scene with Luster shows that in many ways Jason is like a child suddenly given the keys to the castle. While he can delight in having access and power, he does not have the maturity and compassion to manage the responsibilities. The power of authority, which the scene with Luster shows Jason is unequivocally unsuitable for, is, beneath everything, granted to him from his mother. The intoxication of his granted power and his mother's desire to avoid responsibility lock the two in a nearly unbreakable relationship of mutual dependence.

Furthermore, this relationship of mutual dependence, however unhealthy, colors Jason’s view of the world. When Caddy or Miss Quentin fail to live up to his expectation, and act in ways that challenge or show independence, he attempts to write them out of his narrative. While he suffers under the rule of his mother, he is desperate for the acknowledgement that his ideas and plans are the right ones. Unfortunately, his sister suffers no compulsion except under duress, unlike Mrs. Compson to defer to Jason’s wisdom.
Juxtaposed against Caddy, Caroline Compson, much like her son, is deficient in the ability to provide and care for others (emotionally or materially). This can be seen in her consistent avoidance of parental responsibility. When faced with conflict, she is constantly excusing herself due to supposed ill health. In “If I Could Say Mother: Construing the Unsayable About Faulknerian Maternity” Philip Weinstein describes Caroline as after “having delivered her children…[taking] to her bed—the childbirth, not the marriage bed, acting like a child, exacting from her children the sustenance she should be offering them” (432). One could say she and Jason are perfect for one another. They are two leeches feeding off of one another. However, Caroline's crimes against her children do elicit some sympathy for Jason Compson. After all, she is an adult who has poisoned the development of a young child. In Jason's section the reader is treated to a view of the results of such an upbringing. At one point she tells him, “You are my only hope...Every night I thank God for you...Think if he had to be taken too, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson” (SF 126). Caroline constitutes her children as either Compson or Bascomb, not as an amalgamation of the two. For Jason, this creates a paradox, for he is named after his father and yet his own mother invalidates that paternity. Furthermore, she characterizes her marriage in adversarial terms that would be at home in Jason's economy of personal gain. She whines that “They deliberately shut me out of their lives...It was always her and Quentin. They were always conspiring against me. Against you too, though you were too young to realise it. They always looked on you and me as outsiders” (SF 163). It is not her status as Bascomb that renders her an outsider but her unwillingness to nurture her own children.
Developmentally, her libidinal attachment to another (Jason's father) should drive her own child to desire another Other. Unfortunately, Caroline spurns the father and seeks out her own child for completeness, smothering him and robbing him of the opportunity of libidinal attachment to another. As Weinstein writes, “No child escapes from this dungeon, and insofar as the dungeon is a womb, no child gets fully born. In place of nourishment she feeds her children repressive ideology, and they sicken on it” (434).

Caroline's view of the world and her idea of self isolate her. It's no surprise that Jason, the child closest to her, finds himself equally alone.

Taken to the sickbed, she repudiates the origin of her children: the sexual act. With Jason's father deceased, she constructs herself as virgin mother despite the actuality of her three children, thus repudiating sexual desire. When discussing a woman who has run around with a showman (Miss Quentin in reality) she claims, “Thank God I dont know about such wickedness. I dont even want to know about it. I'm not like most people” (SF 162). Of her antics Weinstein argues the following:

I am still a virgin, her camphor and tears keep saying: I don't know anything about checks, about report cards, about business deals, about what girls do on the street or within their own bedrooms. Weeping and mourning, ritually heading for the cemetery throughout the novel, she registers her marital and maternal experience as a curse that makes a mockery of all her training. (433)

Her repudiation of the maternal and marital leaves an indelible mark upon Jason. The notion of motherhood that is virginal imprints a virgin/whore binary upon Jason's mind that causes him to punish Caddy and Quentin over and over. Furthermore, beneath Jason's
cynicism and sarcasm one can sense a consuming rage for having been denied a mother's love for his entire life. Kathleen Moore diagnoses him with a mother complex in her essay “Jason Compson and the Mother Complex.” His upbraiding of his mother for not doing anything about Miss Quentin's behavior and his sarcasm when she bemoans her inability to face the world are challenges to her to be a mother. This desire for maternity translates itself onto other relationships as well and Moore points out that “it is apparent that women in Jason's life are all mother surrogates for him. He relates to them as deputy figures for his mother, each of them—Caddy, Quentin, and Lorraine is a substitute who in some ways allows for the enactment of his mother-fixation” (539). It is at these other women, particularly Caddy, that he directs his anger at being denied both maternal love and the opportunity to develop into a man.

Jason utilizes his unique worldview as a defense mechanism against the threat of the feminine. Due to his mother's false investiture in him as a lawgiver, he has some potency. This role is still at work as Jason shows contempt for any woman who would dare to pretend to have the purity of virginal motherhood but still enjoy sexuality. He says of Lorraine, “I've got every respect for a good honest whore” (SF 146). That a mother could both enjoy giving sexually and be maternal, as Caddy does, is unthinkable. Due to the binary nature of virginal purity and corrupt promiscuity, to like sex, as Caddy obviously does, and be a mother is fundamentally dishonest and has no place within Jason's world.

In Caddy, there is a paradox at work that outshines both Jason and his mother. Due to their mother's unwillingness to nurture her own children, Caddy steps into the maternal role. It is something that most of the Compson children are willing to accept.
However, Jason is the exception. As a young child, when told to mind Caddy, he resents it. That said, the real problem only comes to fruition when she tries to inhabit multiple spaces, merging the imagined binary of both mother and sexual being. At that point Benji moans about the loss of her innocence and Quentin fixates on her lost virginity. Jason's resentment originates out of the fact that even as a promiscuous woman she outshines him and his mother, undermining his impression of himself as a provider.

While Jason is smothered by his own mother, Caddy develops libidinal attachments to another and gives freely of herself sexually. Gwin notes, “when women give excessively, they both fulfill cultural expectation and subvert phallocentric codes of give and take” (57). While Jason and his mother are locked into a strange master-slave dialectic, Caddy spurns her “children” for a father. Ultimately, it renders her a dishonest whore in Jason's accounting, a woman who nurtures but also possesses sexual desire. In Jason's view of things, she is better off being like his mother, only desiring him, or like Lorraine, only desiring his phallic power, represented monetarily. She fails at being the mother-surrogate Jason desires from every woman. Not able to deal with the threat of being castrated by her desire for another, he is hellbent on categorizing her as a whore, rendering her desires hollow.

Ironically, even as a whore, or mistress, she castrates and outshines him. She provides money (that Jason steals) for Quentin. He is suspicious of the origin of the cash but nonetheless takes it. He taunts her when she offers him more money for Miss Quentin:

“You haven’t got a thousand dollars,” I says. “I know you're lying now.”
“Yes, I have. I will have. I can get it.”

“And I know how you'll get it,” I says. You'll get it the same way you got her. And when she gets big enough—” Then I thought she really was going to hit me at me, and then I didn't know what she was going to do. She acted for a minute like some kind of a toy that's wound up too tight and about to burst all to pieces. (SF 131)

While Jason has leverage on Caddy because of her love for Miss Quentin, the irony is that by taking her money and forcing her to sell herself, he has made her the provider for the very family which has spurned her. Though Jason fancies himself in the role of the father, for which he is named, like his brother Benji, he is also castrated. This point comes through particularly strongly in the following scene in which Jason discusses with his mother whether or not to burn Caddy's latest check:

“If you want me to, I will smother my pride and accept them.”

“What would be the good in beginning now, when you've been destroying them for fifteen years?” I says. “If you keep on doing it, you have lost nothing, but if you begin to take them now, you'll have lost fifty thousand dollars. We've got along so far, haven't we?” I say. “I haven't seen you in the poorhouse yet.”

“Yes,” she says. “We Bascombs need nobody's charity. Certainly not that of a fallen woman.” (SF 138)

Caroline thinks she is destroying Caddy's check, but Jason has performed a switch so he can pocket the money Caddy has sent. Though Jason continually complains about the burden of responsibility placed upon him, the truth is that he is not weighted down in
acting as the Compson father figure. The task of providing for the family is, instead, performed by the shunned Caddy. While they may not even know her name in the Compson household, her effects are continually felt. Although Jason pockets the cash and plays the markets, one has to surmise that any shortages in the Compson budget that would send them to the “poorhouse” would be attended to by his ill-gotten gains.

In the male economy that Jason operates in, the task of earning money and bringing home pay is something which proves oneself as a man. Providing for one's family evinces a man's superiority within the culture Jason sees himself within. Jason states his belief in the value and necessity of self-reliance when he says, “Do you think I need any man’s help to stand on my feet? ...Let alone a woman that cant name the father of her own child” (SF 164). His rhetoric stands in stark contrast to his dependence. His contributions are essentially empty. Though he obfuscates the origins of his money, he fails at his own test of manhood, providing for one's household.

Furthermore, the sheer amount of money that Caddy has provided, fifty thousand dollars (exaggeration or not), again attacks his potency as father. Caddy's sexuality, registered in his paradigm as bad, is more valuable than his hard work and sweat at Earl's store. This is what Gwin is discussing when she argues that Caddy's self-expression and creativity subvert male codes. The Compson sister's great sacrifice for her child renders her heroic and overshadows Jason's selfish and incompetent financial meanderings. In this way, she crosses gender barriers and dethrones Jason's legitimacy as master of his own household.

It should also be noted that the household that Jason's mother tells him he is the head of is one that has essentially run its course. From the male heirs there are no
offspring to shepherd in a future for the Compson name and history. Miss Quentin is both female and illegitimate. While Faulkner does investigate inheritance along the distaff line in *Go Down, Moses*, Dilsey's exclamation that she's “seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin” signals that for the Compsons, Jason will be the last of his name (SF 185).

Since Jason will be the last of the family, Caddy’s ability to create offspring humiliates him and ensures that she will not be erased from history, as he wishes. It is the men of the Compson family that should be siring children. Furthermore, one of them, Quentin, is feminized by having his name given to Caddy's child. Miss Quentin thus represents the physical culmination of Caddy's fearful fertility. In Jason's traditional paternalistic narrative, something is hideously wrong if the men of the family are castrated and the women sow wild oats. Jason's mother laments the situation in one scene:

“You dont know,” Mother says. “to have my own daughter cast off by her husband. Poor little innocent baby,” she says looking at Quentin.

“You will never know the suffering you've caused.” (SF 125)

Caroline, like Jason, sees Miss Quentin as a disruption of their personal and familial narrative. Unfortunately for Caddy's child she knows the suffering she's caused day in and day out. Miss Quentin acts as a surrogate for the absent Caddy and is made to pay for the disruption she has caused by coming into being.

With the real Caddy absent, Miss Quentin represents a second chance for Jason to ensure that a Compson daughter becomes a “good honest whore” (SF 146). Being Caddy's child and already showing a tendency to desire the attentions of men, there is every potential for her to become like her mother, a powerful feminine force that subverts
the dominant male cultural expectations. In the end, Jason is less concerned over whether Miss Quentin guards her chastity than whether or not she fits into his existing paradigm. If Miss Quentin is not another Caroline (impossible given her parentage) then she must be forced to be like Lorraine.

With this idea in mind, Jason does not follow Miss Quentin around to ensure her good behavior but to catch her fulfilling his own secret wishes for her. Bleikasten interprets Jason's desire to catch Miss Quentin in the act as an incestuous desire not unlike Quentin's desire for Caddy. Along similar lines, Moore points out Jason's thrill in the role of voyeur when hiding in Earl's store, watching Miss Quentin. However, there is an even greater desire being played out that should not be missed. Catching Miss Quentin would provide ocular proof that his surrogate for Caddy is nothing but a whore, thus fitting her into his system of pseudo-logic. For Jason, the simple thrill of being right would then vindicate his manhood. With that in mind, it is obvious that Jason's desire to shape Quentin into the evidence that he wants is not lost on the young girl in the following scene:

“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 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.” (SF 162)
This scene, which is evocative of the earlier scene in which Benji corners Caddy, pulling at her dress and detecting her loss of innocence, portrays a young woman bound, like her mother, within male discourse. All of Quentin's actions are constantly reinterpreted and recontextualized into the narrative that Jason is trying to imagine. When she despairs that Jason has made her into a bad girl, she is right for she has been robbed of a voice to express herself. As Moore argues, “Jason apparently thinks of Quentin solely in terms of sexual promiscuity” (540). Caddy's transition from virginal maternal figure to sexual being was difficult and Miss Quentin's is vexed from the start since she is denied the ability to define it. Unable to express herself and feeling trapped in the same way Caddy did with Benji, she wishes to be relegated to dead time like her mother. Like Caddy her name would not be known in the Compson household.

Miss Quentin's wish for death seems to signal Jason's victory over her and her mother. If the male-created codes are restricting feminine expression, Miss Quentin's chances to express herself maternally, sexually, or otherwise are limited as long as she subjects herself to Jason's sexist logic and gender paradigms. In the end, the victory over Jason is wrought through the theft of his stolen money. Miss Quentin wishes herself dead and accomplishes this fact, removing herself from the Compson history. Even in the Compson Appendix not much is said of her future. However, Miss Quentin's disappearance signals the end of the steady stream of stolen money he has received. As Faulkner points out in the Appendix, Jason is unable to fully pursue the matter with the police because it was not his money to begin with. This fact really underlines the point that his wealth and well-being were not his own, but those of his sister that he had tried to erase from the familial history.
One would have to ask whether the flight of Miss Quentin signals the final erasure of Caddy Compson from history and some sort of victory by Jason in his effort to supplant his sister. However, the departure of Caddy is unlike the rewriting Jason would like. Rather than signal an upstaging, the exit of the novel's heroine cues the audience that, like Dilsey, they are seeing the end of a familial narrative.

Jason's efforts to resist the potency of Caddy have failed. His attempts to convince himself and others through pseudo-logic and fantasies of paternal authority could not erect enough barriers to contain the force of his own sister. As he feared, he is ultimately passed-by and overshadowed. Though he wanted to excise the past, all he has done was ensure that he will be, as Dilsey predicts, the end of the familial line, removing himself from the future. At the end, one cannot help but be struck by all the effort and subterfuge Jason goes through to desperately make his fantasies a reality. Earl's earlier advice is extremely apropos. Jason would be a “good business man if he let himself” (SF 154). Villain or not, there is a tragic futility that is still poignant in Jason’s efforts to contrive history to his liking, erect boundaries and limitations of difference, that wastes his potential, and finally dooms him to obscurity.

*Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike', past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one. (GDM 3)*

HOWEVE, WHAT FAULKNER OFFERS TO THE READER WITH THIS “FATHER TO NO ONE” IS THE STORY OF A BOY WHO AGES, BUT DOES NOT COMPLETE THE TELEOLOGICAL JOURNEY TYPICALLY EXPECTED OF THE WHITE MALE. HE WRITES OF ISSAC THAT “ALL HIS LIFE [HE] HAD OWNED BUT ONE OBJECT MORE THAN HE COULD WEAR AND CARRY IN HIS POCKETS AND HIS HANDS AT ONE TIME, AND THIS WAS THE NARROW IRON COT AND THE STAINED LEAN MATTRESS WHICH HE USED CAMPING IN THE WOODS FOR DEER.”
(GDM 3). Normally, the coming-of-age story arc ends with the youthful protagonist assuming the mantle of manhood and entering into the culture of ownership. Instead, Isaac's development ends, not with responsibility and property, but with relinquishment and obscurity.

While interesting by itself, Isaac's development has ramifications beyond the personal due to the rules of patriarchal inheritance. Since Faulkner's protagonist is heir to the lands and property of Carothers McCaslin, the future of his family, the tenant farmers on the plantation and the townspeople depend upon Isaac's development. In this way, the expectations of his personal narrative, Isaac's bildungsroman, tie into the larger social narratives of the South. What Faulkner questions, with this connection, is the validity of an imposed narrative (the teleological bildungsroman and the rules of patriarchal inheritance) within a culture that is fluid and ever-changing. Édouard Glissant writes in *Faulkner, Mississippi* of the world in which Faulkner's story is set: “What is Yoknapatawpha? A composite culture that suffers from wanting to become an atavistic one and suffers in not being able to achieve that goal” (115). With Glissant's point in mind, Isaac's journey to manhood and the expectations of those around him can be seen to be part of a culture that wants to be atavistic. The woods, the hunt, and the inheritance are contrived narratives that point toward a desired linear familial and cultural history constructed on top of a fluid, hybrid past.

Isaac obviously senses his place at the center of this conflict and maneuvers himself into the space between a number of dialectics, with nature/civilization being the key one. His goal seems to be to become either the champion of past wrongs or, at the very least, the end of a line of artificial history. Dead time, or contrived history that
covers over an undesirable past often does violence to those it erases as Isaac discovers when he unearths his family’s secrets. The mixed-raced characters of Go Down, Moses, Lucas Beauchamp, Tomey’s Turl, and others that are erased from the narrative are like Charles Bon from Absalom, Absalom! and Caddy Compson from The Sound and the Fury in that they have been erased to preserve a patriarchal atavistic narrative that Yoknapatawpha desires. To complete his goal of ending this cycle of harmful contrived history, Issac must abandon his own “narrative.”

That Isaac never grows up, never completes the bildungsroman, and never accepts the responsibility of keeper of the atavistic culture is a given, but the end of “Delta Autumn,” the penultimate chapter of the book, makes one question his success in breaking the engines of history. This conclusion is in contrast with what seems to be happening in the central section of the book, “The Bear.” In this earlier section, after having discovered a ledger that records the plantations profits and losses for generations, Isaac reads between the lines of the book to discover a history of rape, incest and miscegenation that has been covered over. In the story, told through a conversation between Isaac and his cousin, Cass McCaslin, Isaac relinquishes all his wealth and lands. However, Faulkner undermines Isaac’s heroism with “Delta Autumn” when he presents the reader with the image of an elderly Isaac driving away a relative's black and incestuous mistress, thus erasing her from the historical record. This is again a reenactment of the erasure committed by the ancestors whose narratives Isaac meant to escape from. With this scene, Faulkner indict Isaac for not facing the horrid history he had discovered.
Though he fails, Isaac's attempt to change the course of history causes him to ultimately choose the side of nature over civilization, avoiding becoming the expected synthesis of the two, and imagining his decision to be a means of breaking what he thinks is the curse of ownership. Ronald Schleifer writes in his essay, “Go Down, Moses and the Translation of Time” that “the hunt for Isaac is a means of escaping time, leaving the world to enter a primeval 'essential realm of truth and freedom” (339). Though Isaac imagines hunting and the place of the Big Woods as an escape, why does he fail? Why does the atavism that Glissant claims Yoknapatawpha strives for persevere despite the repudiation of the heir? To answer these questions, this chapter will examine Isaac's escape by looking closely at the characterization of the two ends of the nature/civilization dialectic, which Isaac sees himself at the center of in his own coming of age narrative, in order to undermine the two concepts oppositionality, and fundamentally question the role Isaac's repudiation plays in the struggle between a composite culture and an atavistic one.

In “The Bear,” Isaac's concerns about the dialectics of nature/civilization, childhood/adulthood, and innocence/responsibility come to fruition. Once again, this section is the novel's climax and it is the location in the narrative in which Isaac arrives at the threshold of adulthood and elects not to cross it. He refuses his inheritance, choosing to spend his life hunting and eschewing ownership as much as possible much like his Native American father figure and tutor in the Big Woods, Sam Fathers. Like Sam, Isaac becomes disinherited, in this case by his own choice. However, Isaac's fateful decision is juxtaposed with the death of the bear, Old Ben. What is interesting is the way in which the events in the woods interact with the later events in which Isaac denies his inheritance. The two separate plot points, that would seem to work in opposition as part
of the nature/civilization dialectic, are, in fact, more like an echo in which a moment placed next to another alters the meaning of the moment that follows by its adjacency. This adjacency alters the narrative from what it at first seems to be, a typical bildungsroman, to something that subverts itself.

By the time the bear is lying dead in the river, it becomes obvious that something in the narrative is out of joint. The young boy's training in the woods leads not to the culmination of his hard work, but atrocity. The arc of the traditional developmental story would lead one to believe that Isaac would be the one to kill the bear. There is even a scene in which the elder General Compson steps aside to give young Isaac his moment of achievement. Faulkner writes:

General Compson said, “I'm too old to go helling through the woods on a mule or a horse or anything else any more. Besides, I had my chance last year and missed it. I'm going on a stand this morning. I'm going to let the boy ride Katie.”

“No, wait,” McCaslin said. “Ike's got the rest of his life to hunt bears in. Let somebody else—“

“No,” General Compson said. “I want Ike to ride Katie.” (227) This scene represents the near culmination of all of Isaac's preparation. Prior to this moment Isaac was training himself as a hunter and he is rewarded for his effort when General Compson, an elder in the atavistic culture, allows him to replace the general in the hunt and ride, giving him a privileged position.

It is not only at the plantation but also during his time in the woods that Isaac is being primed to take over for his elders. The boy's sense of purpose, the arc of his
preconceived narrative is so strong that he even begins to believe it. When pondering who would finally get the bear, Isaac thinks to himself, “It would have to be Lion, or somebody. It would not be Boon” (GDM 225). Isaac's analysis could not be further from the truth. Boon is indeed the one who kills the bear and the hunt, the ritualized game he had played since he was ten, results in the death of his father figure, Sam Fathers, and the gruesome disembowelment, and later death, of Lion. Boon as bear-slayer is inherently antithetical to the expectation of the narrative. In the hierarchies of the hunt, he is the lowest member of that culture due to his lack of skill and his mixed-raced heritage.

These variances from the expected narrative not only foreshadow Isaac's deviation from familial expectation, but call into question the validity of Isaac's Big Woods coming of age tale. Describing the bear as “old Priam reft of his old wife and outlived all his sons,” Faulkner fashions Old Ben not as a figure of a father to be conquered, but a legendary one (GDM 186). He is a totem of Sam Fathers designated to be slain by the son on his path to adulthood.

While Isaac should slay the bear, a symbolic stand-in for Sam Fathers, the Native American/Black guide that taught the boy everything about hunting and the woods, to prove his manhood, he does not. Instead, the father is not killed symbolically, but literally, and Isaac is cursed. One must conclude that Isaac's failure to act, to fire his gun upon Old Ben, has caused Sam Father's lethal “injury.” Faulkner never makes it explicit, but after the hunt spirals out of control, the unintended consequence is Sam's death. Faulkner writes that “he could not remember if it had been a call or an exclamation from Tennie's Jim or if he had glanced up by, he saw Tennie's Jim stooping and saw Sam Fathers lying motionless on his face in the trampled mud” (GDM 231). Isaac's failure to
assert his masculinity by being the champion of the hunt signals a disinclination to enter into the realm of the symbolic by claiming the role of authority and power held by the father. Isaac’s contempt for ownership of land (a symbol of wealth) and rejection of the ledger (writing and language) is a consequence of Isaac's rejection of maturity.

If one questions Isaac's suitability as hero of the hunt narrative then one also must wonder about his mentor, Sam Fathers. If the bear is, invariably, connected with Sam symbolically, and Sam engages in the training (engineering would be a more appropriate word given Lion's mechanical tenacity) of the dog that will allow the hunters to kill Old Ben, then has the hunt become a form of suicide for Sam? Faulkner does not offer many moments within “The Bear” in which the reader is privileged to observe Sam's inner-voice, but when he does, it seems that Sam Fathers may not be suicidal per se, but certainly ready to welcome death. When the tensions escalate between the hunters and the bear due to the slaying of one of Major De Spain's colts Sam ponders his own fate:

It had been foreknowledge in Sam's face that morning. And he was glad, he told himself. *He was old. He had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever meet again. And even if he were to, he could not have touched it, spoken to it, because for seventy years now he had had to be a negro. It was almost over now and he was glad.* (GDM 206)

Though Isaac had looked at the bear and thought of him as “old Priam reft of his old wife and outlived all his sons,” that seems a more appropriate description of Sam than his totem. Isaac’s mentor is the last of his kind, descended from Native American royalty, living alone, and speaking a dead language. The brief moment of introspection offered
here is key because Faulkner invites and maintains an air of natural mysticism about both
the hunt and Sam. David Evans, who also links the scenes in the woods with the scenes in
which Isaac rejects his inheritance writes in his essay “Taking the Place of Nature: ‘The
Bear’ and the Incarnation of America” that “Ike moves in a world of myth—a specifically
American myth of special epistemological privilege and redemptive mission” (182).
What Sam's aside accomplishes is that it counters the special privilege of the myth that
Isaac buys into. While Sam seems an authority to the young boy and is able to illuminate
the metaphysical aspects of hunting in the woods, the section quoted shows that in the
culture he inhabits he is an unimportant and marginalized individual. Although earlier
narration specifies that through Sam runs the blood of Indian kings, unlike Boon's
“plebeian blood,” to those out in the Big Woods, he is simply a Negro. That
categorization, and the experience of it, is so bad that it makes him want to die. Sam's last
lines of dialogue in “The Bear” are when he pleads with those taking him to his hut “Let
me out, master...let me go home” (GDM 234). Despite the importance of Sam Father’s
death, Faulkner does not write a death scene for him. The reader is informed of the
character's end after the fact, thus underlining Sam’s marginality.

Since Sam lives alone, has no friends, and has been marginalized by his skin
color, it is an odd choice, by the adults of the tale, to pair the young heir, upon whose
destiny the McCaslin dynasty rests, with someone who has such contempt for the
materiality and racial difference that are intrinsic to that family's success. As Faulkner
writes of Isaac, “If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and
squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old
male itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered
progenitor, was his alma mater” (GDM 201). The boy's stages of development, to the point at which he decides to repudiate his inheritance occur in the woods and not in the social apparatuses that should be inculcating him with the values of his culture. The Big Woods are, in this way, an escape from the responsibilities and problems of the culture in which he was born. The social structures, based in ownership, seem less real to Isaac than the Big Woods. Schleifer observes that “The hunt for Isaac is an initiation into a realm without time. From the very moment he shot his first deer—the timeless, forgotten moment—and saw the vision of its avatar walking proudly before him, Ike was attempting to live a Keatsian moment when truth and beauty coalesce” (340). Recalling Evan's point about the privileging of the natural world, one can see that Isaac buys into the idea of a mythic Sam Fathers that occupies a space of epistemological privilege regardless of Sam's obvious failures (albeit for some reasons outside his control) within Southern society. Juxtaposed with Schleifer's previous point in the above quotation, the Big Woods, and Sam Fathers, by extension (for Isaac associates the man with the natural world), not only represent the completion of some sort of truer American experience but they offer an escape from the contrivances of the white society that has supplanted the truer, older equilibrium with nature that Sam offers.

In fact, Isaac's privileging of Sam and the natural world is encouraged by the other hunters. When Sam is on his deathbed, Faulkner's protagonist wants to stay with his dying mentor. The always practical Cass McCaslin is against the idea, citing the fact that Isaac needs to not miss school. General Compson responds with the following speech:

And you shut up, Cass...you've got one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank; you aint even got a good hand-hold where
this boy was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks to keep yourselves from having to find out what this boy was born knowing...(GDM 240)

Isaac is of the old breed, according to the General, a person who values his hunting compatriots over an economy of exchange. Isaac is thus encouraged to turn away from the contrivances of civilization (bank books, property, and grades) for the “truth” of the natural world. Bank books and farming are some of the falsities that cover over the real past, dead time, and are truly valueless. This is why, when Isaac discovers the ledger, he reacts so strongly against his family's legacy. The economies of difference and those of profit and loss have muddled valuable truths.

However, the inherent problem with Sam Fathers' privileged position and General Compson's rhetoric is that Isaac buys into it. Despite their spoken beliefs, General Compson and Major De Spain will sell off their holdings in the Big Woods for a hefty profit and Sam Fathers wishes for his own death. Although Sam trains Isaac to be in equilibrium with the natural world and eschew the false ways of the civilized world, he like everyone else, only wants one thing: for Isaac to conquer and subjugate nature. To kill the bear is to return Sam Fathers to the dead past from which he belongs. To punish the bear for killing De Spain's colt is to educate the wilderness on the rules of property that should be obeyed. Evans writes that it is “rather difficult to accept at face value the hunter's claim to have left civilization behind, or for that matter the notion that the line between civilization and the wilderness is really much of a division” (187). In other words, the nature/civilization dialectic that Isaac sees himself at the center of is a figment of masculine fantasy. The hunter's subjugation of the natural destroys the dialectic, for the
hunter never encounters nature but civilization's idea of it. The hunters never encounter nature for they bring their rules, their beliefs, and their worldview with them and render the Big Woods with those brushes. If there was ever an essential nature to interact with, and Evans theorizes there is not, then Isaac and the members of his hunting party will never find it because they cannot see it. When in the woods, the other hunters proceed as if the words they speak are true, but with the foreknowledge (conscious or unconscious) that the “nature” that they experience is of their own creation. Isaac is the only one who attempts to bring to reality the dead time that the hunters wistfully long for.

If the slaying of the bear fails at grander ambitions, like what Schleifer calls the “Keatsian moment when truth and beauty coalesce,” then it is merely representative of the more personal crisis of Isaac's assumption of manhood and responsibility. Schleifer writes of the bear hunt as initiation into adulthood, saying that “initiation whether it be courtship, communion, or a hunt—is a formalized behavior to test the self which, if found worthy, enters in possession of some special community, the estate of adulthood” (338). When Isaac refuses the test and the estate of adulthood and does not kill the bear, he takes a step away from the symbolic realm and backward to the womb.

Though Isaac refuses to enter into adulthood, Faulkner still describes the boy's experiences in the woods as transformative. The key moment of the novel occurs not during the final bear hunt, but earlier, when Isaac endeavors to see the bear for the first time. The following occurs as Isaac tries to gain equilibrium with imagined natural rules:

He had left the gun; by his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice but a condition in which not only the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the ancient rules and balance of
hunter and hunted had been abrogated...He stood for a moment—a child, alien, and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of the one and looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and entered it. (GDM 198)

The abandonment of the gun signals an intention to not conquer the wilderness like the other hunters would. With the loss of the compass Isaac decides to not impose an artificial structure upon the “markless woods.” The points of the compass also designate the user as a separate being, tasked with moving through the Big Woods. To relinquish it allows Isaac to “enter it.” Entering the woods here thus requires the loss of subjectivity to the natural world. Finally, the watch represents a wish to escape from the structure of time that demands that when Isaac is of a certain age he will complete certain accomplishments. It is an abandonment of the bildungsroman. From this point forward, Isaac will be a boy forever. Isaac's relationship with nature differs, in this way, from those he hunts with. For his compatriots, the hunt represents an opportunity for individual or group achievement. For Isaac, the hunt represents the relinquishment of the individual subject.

Schleifer notes that the way in which Faulknerian protagonists in Go Down, Moses handle their desire to reject a subjectivity that has been constructed by the atavistic culture, by comparing relinquishment and repudiation. To accomplish this he contrasts Isaac with the unsuitable heir to the McCaslin dynasty, Lucas Beauchamp. Lucas, the protagonist of the story, “The Fire and the Hearth” is descended from Carother's
McCaslin's incestuous coupling with a mixed-raced slave girl he fathered. Though the McCaslin dynasty proceeds down the distaff line when Isaac rejects his inheritance, Lucas is closer in the family tree (and of the male line) to the originary patriarch. However, like Charles Bon in *Absalom, Absalom*, Lucas is ineligible, due to his race, to receive the wealth in the culture in which he lives.

Written off as an heir as much as Isaac is written in as the heir, Lucas also feels pressured by his familial history. Unlike Isaac, Lucas does perform his own act of initiation that brings him into adulthood. Schleifer writes that Lucas repudiates the past when he changes his last name to Beauchamp. Through this act he performs an autogenesis and creates himself anew. In short, Lucas did not like the narrative that was written for him, so he wrote himself a new story that could exist independent of anyone's expectations.

As mentioned previously, Isaac does not redefine his identity, but instead relinquishes it along with the gun, the watch, and the compass. Isaac says in the section of “The Bear” in which he gives up his inheritance, after discovering the ledger that details his family's misdeeds, “I can't repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate” (GDM 245). In other words, Isaac never claims his property, his power and by extension his identity. He has written himself out of Yoknapatawpha’s narrative.

Lucas's repudiation and autogenesis present less of a danger, for the name, Beauchamp, creates for him a place within the society around him. Though he may have to constantly fight for that space, it nevertheless creates an origin and a foundational line. This is something that is especially valuable in a culture that is so atavistic where an origin creates a sense of legitimacy, as Glissant explains:
The quest for legitimacy and the assurance of filiation promise that we can conquer the ephemeral and the everlasting at the same time, whether by trying to establish an estate and a family or by trying to make people believe we are destined for a new creation of the world and therefore become “founding fathers,” archetypal or first men. (78)

Isaac will conquer nothing and found nothing when he relinquishes his inheritance. Lucas, at least, creates a future for himself. Not having the same limitations that Lucas possesses as a black man, it should one should wonder what sort of potential for change there could be had Isaac recreated himself. While it’s doubtful that one could imagine Isaac enacting sweeping changes, at the very least he could begin a progressively more tolerant and responsible line. Isaac's choice is to instead spend the rest of his life trying to recreate the moment of losing himself in the woods. Even in “Delta Autumn,” when the Big Woods have been reduced to the tiny delta, Isaac tries to enter into a spaceless and timeless natural location that is increasingly bounded and endangered by the wheels of change.

Isaac's choice to avoid making any foundational gestures, to not perform a similar autogenesis to Lucas Beauchamp, is due to the problematic nature of the history revealed to him through the ledger. The ledger, a totem of the originary patriarch, Carothers McCaslin, is a multi-layered symbol of history and authorship. It represents the power of those who rule the culture that Isaac is poised to enter. That power has been frequently abused and used to erase undesirable events and people from the contrived narrative Isaac's forefathers wanted to tell. History, as told by the originary patriarch, has become emblematic of the civilization end of the nature/civilization dialectic Isaac envisions.
himself at the center of. Isaac cannot force himself to either accept the past as presented or to create a new history originating from the contemporary, as Lucas does.

Like the initiation of the hunt, when Isaac is confronted with the history presented in the ledger, Carother's sexual encounters and offspring from his slaves and the suicide of the slave-child's mother, the boy must conquer the totem of the father. However, the figure of the father is fiercer than even the mythic bear. Carothers McCaslin, at his essence, embodies the figure of the primal father. He fathers an offspring with both a slave and the child he produced from that slave. Doing so, he becomes like Saturn consuming his own young. While the inherent immorality of his actions is obvious, Carother's position as founding patriarch makes him immune to any sort of penalty in the Southern society of which he is one of the originators. Faulkner writes that even Isaac's own father and uncle could never repudiate the originary patriarch:

the two brothers who as soon as their father was buried moved out of the tremendously-conceived, the almost barn-like edifice which he had not even completed, into a one-room log cabin which the two of them built themselves and added other rooms to while they lived in it, refusing to allow any salve to touch any timber of it other than the actual raising into place which two men alone could not handle, and domiciled the slaves in the big house... (GDM 250)

Buck and Buddy wait until their father dies and only then do they dare to defy him in small and passive ways. They feel guilt for their affluence, as Isaac does, that came at the cost of the enslavement and abuse of others, but they nevertheless cannot make any sort of sweeping change to the situation, like freeing their slaves. The desire to create their
own abode shows an impulse to found a new beginning, but the continued enslavement evinces a failure to realize that ambition. After all, if the ledger represents history then the narrative of white success at the expense of others did not merely result in just a domicile, but an entire culture that allows power and opportunity to individuals based merely upon their color. To repudiate Carothers McCaslin, is to take up the difficult task of rebelling against everything that founded the Southern individual. Faulkner’s point seems to be that the effects of history and its narrative are difficult to overcome quickly. Buck and Buddy’s efforts to subvert their father testifies that change, if ever possible, will not come quickly or easily.

Furthermore, the ledger also makes it quite clear, since it is a ledger with recordings of profits and losses, that the history of the McCaslin line is shaped by the material interests of the patriarch. The maintenance of a successful plantation necessitates that past crimes be excised. Glissant notes that in “the surreal metaphysics of the South, miscegenation truncates the family line. Mixing would establish an extended family, which would not 'include' patrilineal descent and therefore, would not allow for the founding of a dynasty” (87). With Glissant's argument in mind, one must note that one of the few sure things in *Go Down, Moses* is the continuation of the McCaslin dynasty. The members of the extended family that undermine the legitimacy of the heir are excised from the historical record. The branch of the family tree that comes from the slaves, Tomasina and Eunice, becomes the Beauchamps. The possibility that Lucas should inherit the lands and wealth of his ancestor must, therefore, be written out of existence. The objectivity of history is untenable since it is essentially controlled by the interests of the ruling class.
If one returns to consider General Compson’s speech to Cass McCaslin then it should come as no surprise that Isaac is wary of the Southern narrative laid out for him. The ledger, with its record of slaves bought and sold, through which one can make out the McCaslin family history, “has one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank” (GDM 240). History and capitalism have become conflated in the ledger, the totem of the originary patriarch. Profits dictate the ways in which humans should treat one another. This is altogether alien to the sort of camaraderie that the adults in the Big Woods hypocritically preach.

With only such a contradictory and muddied past as the basis for Isaac’s completion of his bildungsroman, it becomes difficult for the young man to know what is actuality or fiction. When Carothers, Buck, and Buddy obfuscate past misdeeds they render time and events dead. While Isaac has been able to ferret out the parentage of the Beauchamp line, what other things were excised for the success of the plantation that are undetectable? The narrative up to the point of Isaac's decision is so vexed that the prospect of joining the story is unappealing. Schleifer writes that “to consult continuity is to define oneself, as Isaac does, as simply and absolutely a son, a 'unit' that is 'complete;' to ignore it is to translate oneself, as Lucas does, into a father and to embed oneself in the 'process' of completion” (344). Isaac's choice to relinquish due to a problematic history (basically a fear of the primal father) will always render him a son and he will look for completeness within the womb of nature, refusing the lack of the symbolic realm.

Nature, specifically the Big Woods as we have already seen, offers a realm in which Isaac can lose his subjectivity. It is a place in which he can be physically surrounded and complete, without ownership. However, the events of “Delta Autumn,” in
which he appears as a pathetic old man, furiously trying to hold onto the experience of nature and the values ingrained into him by Sam Fathers, makes one question Isaac's idea that obliterating the subject is a panacea to the ills of the false and harmful narrative of the ledger. Evans observes that Isaac is “only one more member of a tradition that runs from the Puritans through Emerson and beyond, seeing in American nature the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture” (186). The use of the word “tradition” by Evans is apropos because while Isaac fantasizes about escaping his identity as constructed by history, he has essentially traded one tradition for another. General Compson notes this when he calls Isaac an “old man.” Isaac believes himself in tune with an older tradition derived from a mysticized Native American father figure, but Sam Father’s misery and wish for death illustrate that the boy’s belief is a fiction.

Evan's essay goes further, attacking the idea of nature, challenging its very existence. He writes:

there has never been a point when the lay of the land was not shaped by human interests and intentions, and the concept of the natural landscape is incomprehensible apart from the culture that defines it as its own opposite...nature, that is to say, does not exist without culture, and does not exist otherwise than as a cultural category. (180)

Evan's analysis hits upon the chief problem with Isaac's escape to nature because it illuminates the falsity of the nature/civilization dialectic of which Isaac imagines himself at the center. Isaac can neither be the synthesis of the two ends of the dialectic nor choose one side over the other. Though he fantasizes the Big Woods to be a timeless, spaceless location that he can enter and relinquish his self to, the fact that he chooses and values
nature at all, bounds the very thing he wishes to be boundless. Though nature is boundless, it stands outside civilization, and though nature is a place to escape time, Isaac imagines it prior to man, making it chronological.

Isaac’s imaginings of the natural world as different and opposed to civilization cause him to utilize it as an escape. However, problems Isaac faces in both nature and civilization are the same and the resolutions he arrives at culminate with the protagonist's failure to overcome the oppression of a past patriarch.

In the scene from “Delta Autumn”, Isaac is confronted with the same problem as before, the abuse and erasure of oppressed minorities, but he does nothing to stop it. Ronald Schleifer writes that Isaac is “completely possessed by old Carothers, and even in escaping he is destined to repeat his crime just as he repeats the 'cursed' name: he is another version of Carothers” (349). Though Isaac fails in his personal development and that failure has larger social ramifications, Schleifer’s criticism is too harsh. Isaac is not another Carothers. He lacks the virile potency of Carothers. Isaac merely trades one narrative, the McCaslin one, for Sam Fathers' own. Like his mentor, Isaac is isolated from society, childless, and living without material wealth. Isaac could never become Carothers.

Unfortunately, history merely sidestepped Isaac and continued along the distaff line of the family tree. In fact, Carothers' potency is so strong that he returns in the form of Roth Edmunds. In “Delta Autumn,” Faulkner describes Roth as “the youngest face of them all, aquiline, saturnine, a little ruthless, the face of his ancestor too, tempered a little, altered a little” (321). Roth jokes with his friends about “hunting does,” or sleeping
with local black women. The revelation that Roth's mistress is a relative shows that Carother's McCaslin's crimes repeat themselves regardless of Isaac's participation.

To return to Glissant, the idea of Yoknapatawpha as composite is key here. Isaac's response to an overly atavistic culture is to remove himself entirely. However, this is as much a denial of the true nature of the Southern society Faulkner depicts as what is practiced by those Isaac abhors. That is why it fails. For better or for worse, the past misdeeds, the undesirable offspring, and the economic exploitation must be lived with for they are part of the makeup of Yoknapatawpha county. Faulkner famously wrote of his black characters that “they endured.” If Isaac's wish is do some good for the culture he inhabits, to simply not participate is not enough. Ultimately, Faulkner's protagonist must claim his true inheritance, that is to say his undesirable past, and acknowledge the past crimes that have been perpetrated. He too must endure the guilt and make the conscious choice to repudiate the influence of racism and an exploitive economy that has given him the luxury of even having an inheritance to relinquish.

Finally, if Isaac sees himself as liberator or repairer of past wrongs he is sadly mistaken. Schleifer notes that “Faulkner's fiction attempts to see 'father' and 'son' not as absolute designators, but as roles—that is, 'positions' which, like the signifiers of language are susceptible to translations because, like language, they themselves are prior to their particular manifestations” (344). To expand on this, the role in which the denizens of Yoknapatawpha inhabit are and should be fluid in such a way that individuals can move in and out of them as needed. To elect perpetual boyhood, to avoid the consequences and compromises of adulthood, is folly. Though the truth of the ledger must be faced, if one does not like the story being told one can and should write a new
story. This authorship should not be the type that Carothers McCaslin practices, writing that erases, but the kind that allows for fluidity, evolution, and change, and disregards thinking in binaries and dialectics. The problem of Isaac McCaslin is not uncommon to the Faulknerian protagonist. He, like many others, has the opportunity to effect change within his society due to privilege and opportunity, but is paralyzed by past narratives that threaten to write him. Furthermore, Faulkner’s text makes clear that non-participation, especially by those in power, in a harmful society is not enough to escape culpability. For a chance to break with the corrupted past, individuals must and should be the authors of themselves and the world around them.


