SILENCE AND THE IMPECCABLE LANGUAGE

A STUDY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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TO MY WIFE, BARBARA

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INTRODUCTION

> In poetry, of course, there's no room at all for trash. It's got to be absolutely impeccable, absolutely perfect.
>
> --William Faulkner

I

The making of the dream

In a reminiscence about his early friendship with Sherwood Anderson in New Orleans published in 1953, Faulkner recalls seeing Anderson "sitting on a bench in Jackson Square, laughing with himself."[1] The reason for his solitary laughter was a dream Anderson had had in which he found himself walking along country roads while leading a horse which he was trying to exchange for a night's sleep. Faulkner joined Anderson on the bench, and, "with me to listen now," Anderson began to tell about the dream, "elaborating it, building it into a work of art with the same tedious (it had the appearance of fumbling but actually it wasn't: it was seeking, hunting) almost excruciating patience and humility with which he did all of his writing, me listening and believing no word of it: that is, that it had been any dream dreamed in sleep. Because I knew better. I knew that he had invented it, made it; he had made most of it or at least some of it while I was there watching and listening to him."[2]

The moment the attentive Faulkner sat down on the bench Anderson assumed the role of tale teller, confronting in life as he did in his fiction the problem of words as a medium for telling. By means of his

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[1]William Faulkner, Essays, Speeches, & Public Letters, edited by James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

special confrontation--his "seeking, hunting" for the exact phrase--Anderson built the telling of his dream into a work of art. In Faulkner's mind the telling was the real accomplishment, not his friend's ability to communicate in words the precise nature of the dream. He saw Anderson's telling of the dream as a conscious, imaginative structuring of meaning, a preliminary sketch for a work of verbal art. He took for granted that "no word" of the telling corresponded to the unconscious reality of Anderson's experience. Yet Faulkner perceived (at least by 1953 if not during that moment in Jackson Square) that for his act of telling Anderson needed to sustain the illusion that his "fumbling" was simply his way of seeking the exact sequence of words which would express the reality of the dream, and that the telling was merely a means to an end, that end being the recreation of the experienced dream. One aspect of this illusion, that the telling is a means to convey the truth, is the implicit confession that the purity of the experienced dream about the horse and the night's sleep will never fully be rendered in words; the telling will be interrupted by continual revision and amplification. "His was that fumbling for exactitude," Faulkner says, "the exact word and phrase within the limited scope of a vocabulary controlled and even repressed by what was in him almost a fetish for simplicity, to milk them both dry, to seek always to penetrate to thought's uttermost end."[3]

Faulkner's analysis of his friend's need to believe that his fumbling was merely a technique for seeking the right words to convey the

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[3]Ibid., p. 5.

truth also comments on Anderson's philosophy of literary art. We know that Anderson felt that the inspiration of the artist is incommunicable, and that he regarded the complexity of language as an obstacle to be circumvented through simplification of syntax and diction.[4] Faulkner saw that Anderson thought of his dream as a kind of prophecy analogous to the inspiration of the artist, and that the telling of the dream would be doomed from the first spoken word to an endless penetration of thought's uttermost end. Somewhat like the Ancient Mariner, Anderson feels compelled to tell someone about his dream while he knows all along that the coherence of the experienced dream will dissipate as it is made to conform with the patterns of verbal syntax. Anderson is a Romantic here, skeptical of the artist's ability to commit the inchoate energy of inspiration to the discipline of concrete form.[5] The word, in short, is a barrier to the telling.

Faulkner sensed a degree of self-delusion not only in Anderson's act of telling (the illusion that he was really telling the "dream dreamed in sleep"), but also in the meaning of the dream itself. Without Anderson's knowing it, the horse in the dream, according to Faulkner, represented the experience of Anderson's entire lifetime, "his own America." He was trying to swap this horse (without success, it turns

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[4]Roger Asselineau, "Language and Style in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio," and Jarvis A. Thurston, "Technique in Winesburg, Ohio," reprinted in Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson, edited by John Ferres (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

[5]Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (New York: Noonday Press, 1956), p. 14. See also Charles Feidelson's discussion of the "true romantic" in his Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 45-46.

out) not for a night's rest but for "his own dream of purity and integrity and hard and unremitting work."[6] Faulkner sees the dream as a "parable" of Anderson's "whole biography" and as a symbol of the paradoxical nature of his philosophy of art. Anderson is compelled to make endless attempts to "swap," to transform the coarse stuff of his experience into the purity of art. But he will never--to continue Faulkner's interpretation--succeed in rendering into words the private vision of his experience, he will never get that night's sleep. Anderson "would never have been able to see it even, and he certainly would have denied it, probably pretty violently, if I had tried to point it out to him."[7]

The fact that Faulkner, the listener to the teller, saw something in Anderson's mode of telling that Anderson himself could neither see nor put into words is an instructive dimension to this complicated telling of a telling of a dream about a horse. Faulkner is acting as a cooperative shaping spirit for Anderson's tale, and Faulkner's complicated role as listener to Anderson is in some ways a model for our own listening role as readers of Faulkner's novels. Faulkner's rich response to the silences of Anderson, his ability to sketch in the intervals between words caused by Anderson's fumbling, is an example of Faulkner's attraction to a mode of language that claims as its province the vast reaches beyond the frontiers of the spoken word. It is what Anderson does not say in words that interests Faulkner most. As listeners to the many voices that abound in Faulkner's novels, we must keep our ears tuned to those inter-

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[6]Faulkner, Essays, p. 4.

[7]Ibid., p. 4.

vals of silence which carry so much meaning. Faulkner's actual words, of which there are many in these novels, generate thrusts of movement toward a language beyond words; they bring us to a point where we can "overpass" the natural inhibiting character of the word and let us hear for ourselves, by means of a creative "inference" of our own (a term Rosa Coldfield uses), a silent but powerful communion. Faulkner's language aspires toward silent communion, and the prolixity of his words supplies the protean forms that the word can assume in order to transcend itself.[8]

While Anderson pursues aloud the meaning of the dream, Faulkner silently pursues the meaning of Anderson's special mode of telling, and this meaning seems somehow vibrating within the spaces of silence that appear between the fumbling words. The situation is analogous to what Robert M. Adams says about the reticence of Mynheer Peeperkorn in Mann's The Magic Mountain:

> By saying nothing, [Peeperkorn] implies the vital reverence which is everything. A gesture, a meaningless phrase, a touch, an inaudible dedication--it is all in the refusal to smudge what is sacred with mere words--and the chord unfulfilled, the beat missed, by a familiar inversion, becomes supremely emphatic.[9]

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[8]Florence Leaver, "Faulkner: The Word as Principle and Power," reprinted in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 201. Leaver discusses Faulkner's ability to make language transcend itself through the use of abstractions. Faulkner "knowingly faces the inadequacy of language; he knowingly confronts the impossibility of understanding the imponderables. Making use of abstract terms around which have clustered untold associations, he makes language transcend itself by hypersuggestion."

[9]Robert M. Adams, Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 182.

Anderson does not say nothing, but he is afraid to smudge the sacredness of his dream with words, and so his telling reflects a kind of despair, a sense of futility with the medium.

The word for Anderson was a stumbling block rather than a fluid medium for his art. The dynamic energy that Kenneth Burke sees in the life of the word Anderson looks at as an obstacle. Burke calls the word the "base" of the writer's sentence. The word, continues Burke, is "the first full 'perfection' of a term. And we move from it either way as our base, either 'back' to the dissolution of meaning that threatens it by reason of its accidental punwise associates, or 'forward' to its dissolution through inclusion in a 'higher meaning,' which attains its perfection in the sentence."[10] Anderson was made uneasy by the individual word's tendency to dissolve itself into other meanings.

Faulkner's account of his listening to his friend's words is a dramatic example of just this unpredictable behavior of words that continually disturbed Anderson. From Anderson's viewpoint throughout all this telling of a dream, words really are obstacles to the truth, simply because his listener is not listening to the words but to the intervals of silence created by Anderson's fumblings with words.

Faulkner was certainly aware long before 1953 that he was the greater artist, and for his formal reminiscence of Anderson years after his death Faulkner had an uncluttered perspective from which to judge his former master's limitations as a writer. Faulkner was not the first

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[10]Kenneth Burke, "Fact, Inference, and Proof in the Analysis of Literary Symbolism," Symbols and Values: An Initial Study (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 284.

to recognize that Anderson's fiction had become "just style," as he puts it, "an end instead of a means."[11] His remarks are compassionate, but phrases like "he had to believe this . . . he would never have been able to see it" qualify to an extent some of the honest praise in the essay. Yet in spite of Faulkner's incisive criticisms of Anderson's philosophy of art--especially his belief that the teller somehow compromised the truth, the meaning of the tale, by using words, and so was forced to pursue the telling to thought's uttermost end--at the time of their meeting on the bench in Jackson Square the relationship between the two men was the other way around: Anderson was the accomplished artist (Winesburg, Ohio had recently been published) and Faulkner had yet to write his first novel. Faulkner, to be sure, acknowledged that he learned a great deal from Anderson. "I learned that, to be a writer, one has first got to be what he is, what he was born. . . ." And so, Faulkner continues, it was Anderson who encouraged him to write about Mississippi. "'You're a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from. But that's all right too. It's America too. . . .'"[12]

But all of this taken together--Faulkner's superior tone, his acknowledgement of debt to Anderson in only the most general terms, of which the phrase "to write about Mississippi" is a good example--glosses over the fact that for a long time their thinking about the problem of words as a medium of art--the very paradox that Faulkner felt limited Anderson's achievement--was quite similar. The belief that the speaker,

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[11]Faulkner, Essays, p. 5.

[12]Ibid., p. 8.

the teller of the tale, is faced with a paradox when he chooses to speak, that this paradox involves the disparity between the experience and the word for the experience, that the "pure" teller must speak a language which would assume, paradoxically, some form of silence--all are working assumptions in Faulkner's fiction well past the writing of The Sound and the Fury, and indeed form some of the tensions that generate his finest longer fictions, As I Lay Dying and Absalom, Absalom!

II

All this is not to say that Anderson was unconscious of the dramatic possibilities present in a situation where a fictive teller confesses his inadequacy with language, and tries to fumble his way past the barrier of the word. In a perceptive article that analyzes what he terms the "rhetoric of silence" in Winesburg, Ohio, Glen Love concludes that "these repeated professions of verbal inadequacy encourage the reader to doubt the power of words and serve to intensify the verbal failures which occur within the stories themselves."[13] Although Love also sees Anderson as an artist who is, "at bottom, skeptical of his medium," he feels that Anderson was attracted to the values of silence because of his concern with "the loss of human significance in America with the onset of urban, machine civilization," with all its accompanying noise and distraction.[14] My own feeling is that Anderson's distrust of words stems not from fear of noise, of mindless babble, but from an

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[13]Glen A. Love, "Winesburg, Ohio and the Rhetoric of Silence," American Literature, 40 (March, 1968), p. 52.

[14]Love, p. 55.

aversion to ambiguity itself, especially the ambiguity of language.

Anderson's "fumbling for exactitude," to use Faulkner's phrase again, was prompted by a belief that the truth of art is best communicated by the least complicated arrangement of words, and that the mark of genuinely good writing is spontaneity. In his own account of the composition of Winesburg, Ohio, for example, Anderson insisted that the words came swiftly, spontaneously, products of the inspiration of the moment: "I wrote the first of the stories, afterwards to be known as the Winesburg stories. I wrote it, as I wrote them all, complete in one sitting. I do not think I afterwards changed a word of it."[15] We know from the evidence of the manuscripts that, in fact, Anderson changed many words: but Anderson was attracted to the notion of spontaneous and inspired composition because he believed that such writing "aroused the poet" in him, breaking down for the moment the barrier of words and dissolving the inhibiting presence of a skeptical listener to his voice. Anderson liked to think that for his best writing he wrote to himself, the only listener he ever trusted: "Tears flowed from my eyes," he recalls after finishing the story, "Hands." "It is solid," I said to myself. "It is like a rock. It is there. . . ."[16]

For Anderson, the most significant moment of the truth telling act occurs when the speaker is also the listener. Each so perfectly understands the other that language, and all the problems inherent in

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[15]Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 286.

[16]Anderson, Memoirs, p. 279.

language, can simply be dispensed with--the paradox of the telling process dissolves. Hence the saving grace of the old writer with the white mustache in Winesburg, Ohio, and the test of his authenticity as a truth-teller, is his determination to write the stories of the grotesques but not to publish them. The old writer is the truth telling act incarnate; he speaks the truest language because he is his own listener, and this language cannot be communicated to another. Although the old writer was "filled with words" and wrote "hundreds of pages" we, the readers of Winesburg, Ohio, never do listen to his voice--we only know that the speaker read the old writer's words, and that they "made an indelible impression" on his mind.

Faulkner admired Winesburg, Ohio and was impressed by Anderson's artful use of the baffled teller. The stories in Winesburg, Ohio were good, he said, because "they did sound clumsy and not quite strained but a little puzzled."[17] Faulkner sensed that Anderson's real achievement was the creation of a unique fictive voice which "sounds" clumsy in order to dramatize the groping effect that is part of the telling process. Anderson's fictive speaker and Faulkner's recognition of the rhetorical function of that speaker represent the limited common ground for each writer's distinctive philosophy of language. The two men sustained a public image of themselves as pure story tellers, but each was more concerned in his fiction with dramatizing some facet of the telling process. Anderson and Faulkner, moreover, both posit an ideal act of truth telling in which the speaker (called the "poet" on different

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[17]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 229.

occasions by each writer) circumvents the problems inherent in the complexity of language by composing an alternative language which is, paradoxically, some form of silent communion. The poet-speaker therefore sees language as a risk and silence as an ideal. Perhaps George Steiner's discussion of the poet puts it best:

> To speak, to assume the priviledged singularity and solitude of man in the silence of creation, is dangerous. To speak with the utmost strength of the word, which is the poet's, supremely so. Thus even to the writer, perhaps to him more than to others, silence is a temptation, a refuge when Apollo is near.[18]

In the case of Caddy as speaker in The Sound and the Fury, for instance, Faulkner chose not to risk language. Caddy was "too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling."[19] She is like the poet taking refuge in silence, not because she has nothing to say, but because she has too much divine fire in her, too much to say. Quentin Compson, the one brother who tells Caddy's tale as if it were a risk, is obsessed by the silence that Caddy's non-telling represents, and sees his own phychological condition in terms of the same crisis of language that the poet faces. Faulkner once described Quentin as a speaker who "dispensed with grammar," a remark which suggests Quentin's role as teller will involve, to some extent, an attempt to purify language of its syntactical restrictions, its rational structure. Quentin, like Steiner's poet, speaks with the utmost strength of the word in order to dispense with the word.

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[18]George Steiner, Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 39.

[19]Faulkner in the University, p. 1.

III

About the same time that he wrote the reminiscence of Anderson, Faulkner began to comment in public about the evolution of the writing of some of his novels. What he said about The Sound and the Fury--a book which in style and form is dramatically different from the studied simplicity of Anderson's fiction--suggests the extent to which Faulkner at this early stage in his career was fascinated by the special plight Anderson so well embodied--the teller who is obsessed by the conviction that words are obstacles to the telling. In an interview with Jean Stein in 1956 he recalled that The Sound and the Fury all began with a particular "mental picture" (a term he changes later in the conversation to "dream") which he felt compelled to tell even though he knew he would fail in the telling.[20] "I didn't realize at the time," he continues, that the image was "symbolical." "The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawer's in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized that it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and it would have to be a book."[21] What Faulkner calls a mental picture, and which later becomes symbolical, is really a dynamic object

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[20]Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: An Interview," reprinted in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1960), p. 73.

[21]Stein, p. 73.

perceived as voice. It is not so much her muddy drawers that caught the inner eye of Faulkner--it is Caddy's rhetorical stance, her position as teller of a tale to a specific audience, her brothers. As she looks through the window and confronts the suddenly new experience of death, she silently perceives an insight which immediately becomes a problem of language when she attempts to tell what she sees to her listening brothers who stand below, unseeing. Faulkner's initial perception of the novel takes the form of a teller poised in a moment of stasis, about to engage in the act of telling, but never actually doing so.

Faulkner amplified his remarks about the mental picture of Caddy's drawers by relating its origin to a dream. Like Anderson's horse, Caddy and her drawers first appeared in a dream, and the freshness of his non-verbal image is the mark of its truth. But the problem of communicating the truth of the image will be frustrating and endless because, and here is Anderson's paradox again, the telling process must involve words. "I wrote it [The Sound and the Fury] five separate times," he said in the same interview with Jean Stein, "trying to tell the story, to rid myself of the dream which would continue to anguish me until I did."[22] Faulkner felt that even after the fifth telling he failed to render the story in a way that would recapture the freshness of the image in the dream. In an interview with Cynthia Grenier in 1955 Faulkner revealed that he had always felt that his several attempts at telling Caddy's story were "not enough":

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[22]Stein, p. 73.

> The story told wasn't all. The idiot child had started out as a simple prop at first as a bid for extra sympathy. Then I thought what would the story be told like as he saw it. So I had him look at it. When I'd finished I had a quarter of the book written, but it still wasn't enough. So then Quentin told the story as he saw it and it still wasn't enough. Then I tried to tell the story and it still wasn't enough, and so I wrote the appendix and it wasn't enough.[23]

With so much said publicly by Faulkner about his fascination with the image of Caddy on the verge of telling what she saw through the window, he was asked several times why Caddy never actually says what she sees. (In Section I she utters a sound--"Shhhhhhh"--but no word to her brothers below her.) Faulkner's answer to one such query at the University of Virginia is revealing. He said that he had tried to tell the story of Caddy and her muddy drawers through three other people, her brothers, who were all standing below that pear tree. He called on these other tellers of what is really Caddy's story "because Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes, I thought."[24] Faulkner suggests here the extent that as a young writer he had assumed that the problems about words and truth which had mesmerized Anderson were also his own problems. Caddy would be "reduced" in significance the moment she moved from the static posture of teller poised in the tree to the actual telling of what she saw through the window, and the non-verbal, mental picture of Caddy--the dream he felt compelled to "rid" himself of--would be vitiated by the only medium that

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[23]Cynthia Grenier, "The Art of Fiction: An Interview with William Faulkner," Accent, XVI (Summer, 1956), p. 168.

[24]Faulkner in the University, p. 1.

allowed Faulkner the writer to be rid of it. "It would be more passionate" to see Caddy through another's eyes. The word "passionate" was once used by Gertrude Stein to describe the quality of Anderson's sentences. If Anderson, as Miss Stein had said, was the only writer in America capable of writing a "passionate sentence," there was at least one other young writer who was trying very hard to capture that kind of passion.

Caddy was not the only character Faulkner talked about almost exclusively in terms of her potential role as a teller. More than any other quality, the range of fictive voices in his novels drew his most intriguing comments about his art. He thought of almost all of his characters as tellers--even Caddy, who is an ideal teller and tells nothing in the conventional sense of the word. Referring to Quentin's role in Absalom, Absalom!, for example, he said that although the novel is really Sutpen's story, "every time any character gets into a book, no matter how minor, he's actually telling his biography--that's all anyone ever does, he tells his own biography, talking about himself, in a thousand different terms, but himself."[25] Each of these characters--Quentin, Rosa Coldfield, Caddy, and others--is for Faulkner not a living personage but a focal point of voice, whose potential ability to talk about himself is a continually present phenomenon. On one occasion he said that within his mind "the characters themselves are walking out of that book still in motion, still talking, and still acting."[26] The sign

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[25] Ibid., p. 275.

[26] Ibid., p. 198.

of vitality in his characters, Faulkner felt, is the sound of their voice, just as he valued most in real people he knew in Mississippi the special way they talked: "I like these people, that is, I like to listen to them, the way they talk or the things they talk about."[27]

For Faulkner, there is something timeless about the act of speaking, and this paradox--the ephemeral nature of voice, which emanates from silence and returns to silence, and the distinctly out-of-time existence of his "still talking" fictive voices--is an index to his philosophy of language. As Judith Sutpen says about her letter from her dead lover, Charles Bon, (or is made to say by Mr. Compson's hypothesis), the act of speech which momentarily links "one mind to another" creates a mark of remembrance on a living moment that "was."[28] This mark is not like a scratch on a block of stone, Judith continues, but rather a capsule containing a fluid moment of time, pulsating outside of chronocity,[29] free from process. Speech, which is an aspect of process and chronocity, sometimes can escape process, thrust itself beyond the claims of time, so that certain voices can be "still talking" for those who can hear.

The way Faulkner himself talked when he responded aloud to questions about the state of his mind during the writing of one or another of

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[27]Ibid., p. 233.

[28]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, Inc., 1936), p. 127.

[29]Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 44-50. Kermode coins the word "chronocity" from the Greek "chronos," meaning "passing time." Chronocity is the flow of time without a sense of fulfillment; God's time, or the fulfillment of time, is defined by the Greek word, "kairos." Quentin's notion of time precludes a sense of fulfillment; for him there is only time as "chronos."

his fictions is a listening experience in its own right. While each of his explanations varies slightly according to the particular question from the audience, most involve an impromptu search for a metaphor to describe his special experience, and most of these metaphors relate the intangible act of telling to the handling of a tangible tool. To a question about the evolution of the Yoknapatawpha County material, for example, Faulkner characteristically responded that he was using the "quickest tool to hand." "I was using," he continues, "what I knew best, which was the locale where I was born and had lived most of my life. That was just like the carpenter building the fence--he uses the nearest hammer."[30] Faulkner not only liked to think of his own act of telling in terms of manipulating a tool, he often saw his fictive tellers as so many tool handlers. He said of Caddy that "she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy."[31] The rendering of moral quality in some of his characters he regarded as a problem of choosing the right tool for the telling. Narcissa Benbow's apparent change in character throughout two different novels prompted this remark: "There again I am using the most available tool to tell what I'm trying to tell, and my idea is that no person is wholly good or wholly bad, that all people in my belief try to be better than they are and probably will be. And that if--when I need for a tool a particular quality in an individual I think that quality is there."[32] The choice of Benjy's age--thirty-three

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[30] Faulkner in the University, p. 3.

[31] Ibid., p. 6.

[32] Ibid., p. 9.

--was, again, simply a "ready-made axe to use, but it was just one of several tools."[33] Even the quality of the telling is to Faulkner a question of choosing the right tool. Sensationalism, for example, is "in a way an incidental tool, . . . [the writer] might use sensationalism as the carpenter picks up another hammer to drive a nail. But he doesn't --the carpenter don't build a house just to drive nails. He drives nails to build a house."[34] His choice of certain significant dates in The Sound and the Fury was, he says, merely "a matter of hunting around in the carpenter's shop to find a tool that will make a better chicken-house."[35] He was not consciously "writing any symbolism of the Passion Week," he continues, "I just--that was a tool that was good for the particular corner I was going to turn in my chicken-house and so I used it."[36]

After comparing the numerous variants of Faulkner's metaphor of the artist-carpenter endowing some tangible substance with form, by means of a tool, what we come away with is not so much an insight into his mind engaged in the act of literary composition as a deeper appreciation for the dynamic flow of his voice as it seeks in metaphor an alternative to the language of literal statement. Thus if we do not take seriously what Faulkner says about the artist fitting words together as if they

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[33]Ibid., p. 17.

[34]Ibid., p. 49.

[35]Ibid., p. 68.

[36]Ibid., p. 68.

were so many blocks of wood, we do take seriously the way in which his voice, in answering this question on different occasions, consistently circles back to the metaphor of the carpenter and his tools, embellishing and adding new variations to it as he goes along. These anecdotes about the process of composition are themselves minor works of art--his voice rambles on about tools and lumber and chicken houses but it is his ability to assume the posture of tale teller that fascinates us, just as he himself was fascinated by the sound of Anderson's tale-telling voice. To Faulkner, voice signals the presence of life itself, and for his special renderings in words of the illusion of life, to use Henry James's phrase, Faulkner turned to certain rhetorical situations which dramatized best his conviction that the sound of one human voice articulating meaning to another is itself a symbol of the subtlest, most complex function of the human mind.

The most significant of these rhetorical situations, and the one which provides the framework for parts of all of his finest fictions--The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!--can be described by the special way it functions as an aural-oral dialetic. For such a rhetoric of voice Faulkner places in a static setting two fictive speaker-hearers who take turns articulating and listening to an experience that is more an analysis of the complexity of language as a mode of communication than it is a "story" in the ordinary understanding of the word. (Faulkner, for example, often referred to the "story" in "The Bear" as if it were a sentence structure: "The pursuit of the bear was simply what you might call a dangling clause in the description of that

man when he was a young boy.")[37] The form of the aural-oral dialetic, with its accompanying tension between the two poles of fictive voice, generates a unique rhythmical flow to the narration. This flow, if the term dialetic in the Hegelian sense is too restricted to illuminate a fiction as complicated as Absalom, Absalom!, nevertheless does involve a movement from confusion to insight, from darkness to light, from a language that dramatizes the disunity between experience felt and experience communicated to a language that attempts to unify experience felt and experience communicated by means of a sense of sudden relation of meaning, of vision. The effect of the dialetic is to thrust the language of the speakers toward a silent communion. The word brings about a dispensation from the barrier of the word.

IV

Faulkner, poetry, and the need for silence

Faulkner's earliest efforts to write creatively took the form of lyric poems written in the style of the French symbolists,[38] and throughout his life he regarded himself as a poet, although, as he said, a "failed" one.[39] His conception of poetry is consistent if conventional; he once defined a poem as "some moving, passionate moment of the human

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[37] Ibid., p. 273.

[38] Aside from Faulkner's imitations of the French symbolists, Mallarmé and Verlaine, his interest in the French Symbolist movement is well documented in H. Edward Richardson's William Faulkner: The Journey to Self-Discovery (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), pp. 52-56.

[39] Faulkner in the University, p. 4.

condition distilled to its absolute essence,"[40] a definition that his individual poems do not always live up to, poems like his first, "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faune," or the volume of poems in The Marble Faun, his first published book. Another comment about the nature of poetry, made many years after he had ceased to write it, suggests that Faulkner thought of the poet not so much as an accomplished writer, penning actual words as he is inspired, but as an ideal to be approached, a kind of ever illusive goal. The poet to Faulkner is a rhetorical stance, a posture of aspiration, compelled to tell of man's condition yet somehow dispensed from the burden of language:

> I don't think that difficulty is the word. It's a combination of a demon and a fire that you have. Difficulty or ease has nothing to do with it. I wish I did know exactly what it is that it takes to make a poet. I think that any writer is better off if he looks on himself as a poet--he's a failed poet, I agree with you--but to look on himself primarily as a poet. That he has found man's history in its mutations, in the instances in which it becomes apparent, his anguish, his triumph, his failures, the whole passion of breathing, is so strong and so urgent that it must be recorded. If he is very fortunate, he can do it as the poets did it. If he's a little less fortunate, he can do it as the short story writers do it--as Chekov did it. If he is least fortunate, he's got to go back to the clumsy method of Mark Twain and Dreiser.[41]

With terms like fire and demon we are very close to Plato's idea of the poet, and in the end it is this age old concept of the poet as a person driven to express a truth that "must be recorded" that leads Faulkner to regard poetry as the highest form of literary achievement. But if Chekhov represents the "less fortunate" gift of words, we get the im-

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[40] Ibid., p. 202.

[41] Ibid., p. 145.

pression that the purest poet would be writing some form of abbreviated language, one even in which words have no place. It is this notion of the poet that characterizes Faulkner's thinking on the problem of language. The best sayer of the word, the poet, somehow gets beyond words. Those writers most enmeshed in words--Twain and Dreiser--are lesser artists, precisely because they cannot free themselves from words.

Some of Faulkner's early poems do reflect this strain for release from language that constitutes Faulkner's more mature definition of poetry. His youthful imitations of Mallarmé and Verlaine touch on themes that he would later develop as a writer of prose fiction, but these admiring tributes to the tradition of the French symbolists carry with them some of his French model's assumptions about the poem, namely, that the language of a poem is most poetic when it aspires to the condition of music.[42] The poet, as it were, arranges words to direct our response beyond those words. The poem thus vibrates on the threshold of musical tone, which is a more numinous and "truer" language than words. George Steiner aptly sums up the linguistic assumption of the symbolist poets whom Faulkner actively strove to imitate:

> The principal moods and energies of Symbolism and of the Wagnerian dialetic of musical totality now lie behind us. But the idea that music is deeper, more comprehensive than language, that rises with immediacy from the sources of our being, has not lost its relevance and fascination.[43]

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[42]Speaking of poetry in his essay, "Music and Literature," Mallarmé said, "Then when the melodic line has given way to silence, we seem to hear such themes as are the very logic and substance of our soul." Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters, translated by Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), pp. 43-56.

[43]George Steiner, Language and Silence, p. 45.

Faulkner's first published poem, "L' Apres-Midi d'un Faune," appeared in the New Republic on August 6, 1919. He received $15.00 for it. The choice of Mallarmé as a model for his poem is significant not because it displays a nascent talent for lyric poetry, but because it reflects his determination to use verbal language to evoke indefinite images rather than to state explicitly the plight of the speaker. His poem is a vehicle that moves us within range of the ineffable, an attempt to escape the restrictions of verbal syntax. The "Faun" of the title is the speaker of these concluding lines from the poem:

> I have a nameless wish to go
> To some far silent midnight noon
> Where lonely streams whisper and flow
> And sigh on sands blanched by the moon,
> And the blond limbed dancers whirling past,
> The senile worn moon staring through
> Their hair is powdered bright with dew.
> And their sad slow limbs and brows
> Are petals drifting on the breeze
> Shed from the fingers of the boughs;
> Then suddenly on all of these,
> A sound like some great deep bell stroke
> Falls, and they dance, unclad and cold--
> It was the earth's great heart that broke
> For springs before the world grew old.

The "nameless wish" is nameless because verbal language, it seems, cannot express it. But the chanting, lilting lines suggest to us that if the wish cannot be named it can be inferred by a silent intuitive act of our own. The poem's climactic moment is an unnamed sound, one "like a great deep bell stroke," and we sense that this sound resonates outside of language as an aspect of musical tone. The poem confesses that words cannot be adequately marshalled to convey the nature of this "sound," but it is like a bell stroke, and so we seem to progress from verbal simile to the non-verbal and thus purer language of music.

The Marble Faun (1924) was written shortly after the publication of "L' Apres-Midi d'un Faune," and represents an extended version of the Faun-speaker, who is now a marble statue endowed, as Richard P. Adams says, with "consciousness but not with the power of motion."[44] The individual poems of the volume are arranged to follow the cycle of the season, and for each season the Faun-speaker laments that he cannot participate in its flow of life because he "marble bound must ever be." The Faun-speaker's stance is the reverse of Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury. Quentin is in process and wants to escape, while the faun is outside the flow of process and wants to enter it. The mood of the Faun-speaker is frustration. He yearns to escape from a rigid mode of expression so as to enjoy the freedom of the "quick green snake" he sees in the garden. The poem strains between the two poles of rigidity and expansiveness, and the following passage from the Prologue is representative of the entire cycle:

> Why am I not content? The sky
> Warms me and yet I cannot break
> My marble bonds. That quick keen snake
> Is free to come and go, while I
> Am prisoner to dream and sigh
> For things I know, yet cannot know,
> 'Twixt sky above and earth below.[45]

The Faun's lyric cry that he is a "prisoner to dream and sigh/ For things I know, yet cannot know," sums up not only his plight as an immobilized consciousness, but Faulkner's plight as a young writer experimenting with

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[44]Richard P. Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 18.

[45]William Faulkner, The Marble Faun and A Green Bough (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965), p. 12.

literary forms. Faulkner in The Marble Faun is writing within a rigid framework from which he wants to escape.

Richard P. Adams, in commenting on the limitations of The Marble Faun, faults Faulkner's use of imagery. "The imagery of the poem is so repetitious, and in such a flatly redundant way, that its effect is lost in monotony."[46] But to stress the ill effects of the repetitiousness, the redundancy, is to overlook the assumptions about verbal language and music that underlie Faulkner's deliberately repetitive and redundant rhymes. Faulkner is trying, as were his models, Mallarmé and Verlaine, to arrange words in such a rhythmical way that they suggest more compelling modes of expression. He is aiming, in short, at music, not clarity of statement. Adams regrets the absence of a "clear and firm differentiation of the seasons" in the poem,[47] but here again, Faulkner should not be censured for not accomplishing something he never intended. He did intend to free himself from the restrictions of verbal syntax, of "clear and firm distinctions," in order to create a wordless sensation of music. The repetitions and monotonous chants of the poems are deliberate rhetorical devices to push the word past its own inhibiting powers.

The Faun-speaker sighs for things he knows and cannot know, and this paradoxical starting point is also Faulkner's, whose poem is a long sigh for a more compelling language than the one he is working in. When the Faun says of the seasons, "They sorrow not that they are dumb:/ For they would not a god become," the chanting may be monotonous, but the

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[46]Richard P. Adams, p. 20.

[47]Ibid., p. 20.

utterance is rich with implications about the value of language. The Faun wants to pass from dumbness to divinity, past the barrier of verbal language to a god-like language, which is a version of the poet's divine powers of wordless utterance that Faulkner defined years later as the poet's special grace.

Faulkner's poetry writing period ended shortly after the publication of The Marble Faun, although he did publish a volume of poems under the title A Green Bough (1933) which contained slightly revised versions of poems written not much later than 1925. The first poem of A Green Bough's forty-four poems, Poem I, represents a significant step beyond the rhythmic chants of frustration with rigidity of expression that made up A Marble Faun. Poem I is a reprint of the poem "The Lilacs: To A..... and H....., Royal Air Force: August 1925," first published in the Double Dealer for June 1925 but written earlier.[48] "The Lilacs" is composed for the most part of an unnamed pilot suffering from an emotional trauma brought on by a war wound. He is clearly a forerunner of Donald Mahon in Faulkner's first novel, Soldier's Pay (1926). The pilot-speaker talks to himself silently while he overhears other voices talking about him in a tone that varies from compassion to detachment. Two companions of the speaker (apparently also pilots) are present in the setting, and all three are "drinking tea/ Beneath the lilacs on a summer afternoon," but they do not hear this speaker's voice. Several ladies walk by the pilots and "eye us strangely as they pass," observes the pilot speaker, and although

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[48]Carvel Collins, William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry (Boston: Atlantic, Little, Brown, Inc., 1962), p. 11.

fragments of the ladies' conversation intrude into his consciousness ("Are you quite all right, sir? she stops to ask"), none of the ladies is privy to his thoughts. As Quentin will do in The Sound and the Fury, the voice of the pilot articulates a wish for some kind of watery oblivion: "I should like to be/ An ilex in an isle in purple seas." The pilot voice then assumes a more objective role, and articulates on behalf of his two pilot companions their mutual indifference to the passing ladies: "To us they are like figures on a masque." Thus the personal suffering the pilot voice reveals at the beginning of the poem we now begin to see as a more general malaise suffered by those who have experienced the war:

> To us they are like figures on a masque.
> --Who?--shot down
> Last spring--Poor chap, his mind
> ....doctors say...hoping rest will bring--
> Busy with their tea and cigarettes and books
> Their voices come to us like tangled rooks.
> We sit in silent amity.

The pilot takes refuge in silence. He and his fellow pilots are linked together in a wordless communion, and this core of "silent amity" is surrounded by the noise of voices like "tangled rooks," harsh and grating and obviously far inferior in value to the rich solace of their silent amity. The pilot voice probes the meaning of language and silence, and it is clear he is crippled not so much by the war as he is by the barrier of the word. The following passage from "The Lilacs" marks still another shift in the role of fictive voice in the poem. Where once the pilot voice articulated a thought on behalf of his silent but mutually suffering companions--"we sit in silent amity"--now a new voice emanating from a source outside the mind of the pilot-speaker begins to articulate a

significance about the pilot that he himself is incapable of perceiving:

> One should not die like this.
> His voice has dropped and the wind is mouthing his words
> While lilacs nod their heads on slender stalks,
> Agreeing while he talks,
> Caring not if he is heard or not heard.
> One should not die like this.
> Half audible, half silent words
> That hover like gray birds
> About our heads.

The fictive voice for this part of the poem is in effect commenting on the lyric shortcomings of the pilot's voice. We see the pilot isolated now by his language. His voice has become subject for parody, in so far that the wind is mouthing his words and his only audience--lilacs--is indifferent to what he says, "Caring not if he is heard or not heard." The pilot speaker's language, reverberating halfway between the points of sound and silence, has evolved into a symbol of his emotional stasis. His words "hover like gray birds" and have a separate, almost tangible existence outside his mind. The focus of the poem on its subject matter has changed radically. We are not confronting in "The Lilacs" the lyric cry of a traumatized pilot so much as we are witnessing the spontaneous probing of the limits of the spoken word by a particular speaker. The poem directs our attention to the silence beyond the life of the word, to the "half audible, half silent words," which we sense are superior to the actual words spoken in the poem. Like The Marble Faun, "The Lilacs" strives to release itself from the confines of verbal statement by assuming a purer mode of expression, one akin to musical tone. The poem's diverse and cadenced voices suggest a conscious loosening of form. George Steiner's analysis of the intention of symbolist poetry could be applied with equal force to Faulkner's poem, "The Lilacs":

> By a gradual loosening or transcendence of its own forms, the poem strives to escape from the linear, denotative, logically determined bonds of linguistic syntax into what the poet takes to be the simultaneities, immediacies, and free play of musical form.[49]

The language of Faulkner's poetry never reached the purity he demanded of his ideal poet, the writer touched with "a demon and a fire," and so he modulated to the "less fortunate" mode of expression, the short prose sketch for which he designated Chekhov as the master.

V

"Frankie and Johnny:" Faulkner's early prose sketches and the value of silence

Faulkner's abandonment of poetry coincides roughly with the time he began to know Sherwood Anderson in New Orleans. Between 1924 (the date of the publication of The Marble Faun) and 1925 Faulkner began to experiment with prose, and a number of short monologues, critical essays, and descriptive sketches were published in The Double Dealer and the New Orleans Times-Picayune.[50] Various explanations have been offered to explain Faulkner's shift from verse to prose, and most agree that Anderson's friendship with the young writer was instrumental. H. Edward Richardson, in an exhaustive analysis of Faulkner's poetry and early prose, attributes these energetic experiments with prose fiction to Faulkner's reading of Winesburg, Ohio and other works by Anderson. "When Faulkner read Anderson's books, lent to him by Phil Stone, he was encouraged at the possibil-

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[49]Steiner, p. 43.

[50]Carvel Collins, "About the Sketches," William Faulkner: New Orleans Sketches (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), pp. 9-34.

ities which prose fiction offered."[51] This conjecture needlessly assumes that Faulkner's acquaintance with fine prose fiction prior to 1925 was limited indeed. A more convincing reason, it seems to me, for Faulkner's turning to the kind of prose represented by the eleven "New Orleans" sketches published in the 1925 January-February issue of The Double Dealer can be deduced from the internal evidence of the poems we have looked at. The Marble Faun and "The Lilacs" share a common theme of escape from rigidity of expression and awareness of language as a potential barrier to communication. Faulkner did not have to read Anderson's books "lent to him by Phil Stone" to sense that the notion of the word as obstacle which confronts the Faun-speaker and the pilot of "The Lilacs" could be dramatized in prose with a fuller sense of the vitality of the spoken word.

One of these eleven "New Orleans" monologues, entitled "Frankie and Johnny," represents a significant transitional piece between the need for silence on the part of the wounded pilot in "The Lilacs" and the thematic implications of the silence of Donald Mahon, another wounded airman, whose return home precipitates the incidents that compose Soldier's Pay (1926), Faulkner's first novel. "Frankie and Johnny" mediates between the poem's and the novel's aspirations for silence.

In "The Lilacs" the pilot's voice alone cannot convey a sense of his isolation, and, as we have seen, an objective voice points out the crippled stature of his language. The short sketch, "Frankie and Johnny,"

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[51] H. Edward Richardson, William Faulkner: The Journey to Self-Discovery (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969), p. 123.

is composed of one voice--Johnny's--which accomplishes several rhetorical tasks at once. Johnny attempts to articulate an emotion to Frankie, but comes up immediately against the barrier of language. It is difficult to find the words that would say what he wants to say. Faulkner renders Johnny's voice in the act of confronting the word as a barrier. We hear him construct an alternate language in metaphor for what cannot be expressed literally, and his search for this metaphor provides both a dramatic setting for the fictive listener, Frankie, and a moment in time from which past action can be recalled:

> Listen, Baby, before I seen you it was like I was one of them ferry boats yonder, crossing and crossing a dark river or something by myself; acrossing and acrossing and never getting nowheres and not knowing it and thinking I was all the time. You know--being full of a lot of names of people and things busy with their own business, and thinking I was the berries all the time. And say, listen: . . . and when you kissed me it was like one morning a gang of us was beating our way back to town on a rattler and the bulls jumped us and trun us off and we walked in and I seen day breaking acrost the water when it was kind of blue and dark at the same time, and the boats was still on the water and there was black trees acrost, and the sky was kind of yellow and gold and blue. And a wind came over the water, making funny little sucking noises. It was like when you are in a dark room or something, and all on a sudden somebody turns up the light, and that's all. . . .[52]

"Frankie and Johnny" creates the illusion for us of hearing a speaker engaged in seeking the right words for what he needs to say (but perhaps believes is unsayable), improvising metaphors as each new difficulty with using actual words arises. In spite of the brevity of the monologue, we sense the tension between Johnny and the implied listener to his words, the silent Frankie. What we have here in miniature is one of Faulkner's most consistent rhetorical situations for probing the

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[52]Carvel Collins, William Faulkner: New Orleans Sketches, p. 42.

implications of language as a potential barrier to a character who is nevertheless compelled to speak. This rhetoric consists of a continuing dialetic between two speaker-hearers who are in some way antithetical, often, as here, of the opposite sex. The speakers make tortuous progress toward overcoming, or "overpassing"--Faulkner's own term for it--the phenomenon of the word as obstacle. In the most complicated and skillful of these dialects, the progress toward "overpassing" results in a mutual vision in which both speakers achieve a level of intimate communion without "using the words," as Dewey Dell says in As I Lay Dying. These male-female verbal thrusts past words themselves and into silence are the skeletal frames around which Faulkner winds a prose rich with implication about language as a medium of art, as a symbol of our humaneness, and as a gateway to the "timeless."

In "Frankie and Johnny," we have the rough outline of the crisis of language that Darl and Quentin face in Faulkner's later novels. Johnny, moreover, is fumbling with words the way Anderson did. He wants to strike on the most convincing verbal expression of his love for Frankie, and he is aware that up to the moment of his utterance his life had been characterized by a lack of faith in the word: he had been "full of a lot of names of people and things" but had failed to establish a living relationship between the word and the experience. Johnny's situation is like Addie's in As I Lay Dying--words go one way and "doing" goes another, and the word becomes only a "shape to fill a lack."[53]

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[53]William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930, reprinted by Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1957), p. 164.

Johnny sees his plight in terms of linguistic bankruptcy, and like Quentin's circular quest in The Sound and the Fury, his life has been a flight without motion, crossing rivers compulsively but "never getting nowheres." Yet Johnny's determination to continue "acrossing and across-ing" is significant, for it implies a need for a radical conversion from one realm of being to another, from land to water, from words to wordless communion. When Johnny confronts the ineffable--the nature of her kiss--he gropes for a metaphor that strains away from touch and toward silent vision. The entire metaphor of movement across water is Johnny's way of using words to overpass the obstacle of the indescribable kiss, and the metaphor dissolves in wordless illumination. "It was like when you are in a dark room or something, and all of a sudden somebody turns up the light, and that's all. . . ." Johnny's voice is colloquial, incoherent, even coarse, but his efforts to overcome the formidable block that words have placed in the way of his need to articulate the nature of Frankie's kiss result in eloquence.

The situation of a speaker confronting the limits of his ability to speak, to force the word to yield up its relationship with the experience, is Faulkner's most characteristic rhetorical device for his novels. It structures certain important scenes in his first novel, Soldier's Pay, when, for instance, Mrs. Powers attempts to articulate to Gilligan an intimation of her suffering. In his second novel, Mosquitoes (1927) the "Frankie and Johnny" sketch appears in a revised form as a third-person description of a moment of silent communication between David, the steward on the yacht, Nausikaa, and Patricia, niece of the yacht's owner. The passage's setting of dawn over the water, the colloquial diction,

and the metaphor of sudden illumination, is remarkably similar to "Frankie and Johnny."

> . . . and it was like he had been in a dark room and all of a sudden the lights had come on: simple, like that.
>
> It was like one morning when he was in a bunch of hoboes riding a freight into San Francisco and the bulls had jumped them and they had to walk in. Along the waterfront it was, and there were a lot of boats in the water kind of rocking back and forth at anchor. . . .[54]

The metaphor of a journey across water again dissolves into silent illumination, "simple, like that." The complexity of language, under the pressure of the dialectic of speaker-hearers, transcends itself into pure, "simple" wordless communion.

VI

After writing in rapid succession a number of sketches like "Frankie and Johnny," Faulkner began Soldier's Pay, a book which, among other accomplishments, probes again and again in scenes like that created by Johnny's voice the implications of language as a possible mode of expression which is best realized when it is "overpassed" into silent communion. We have already seen how the kind of rhetoric represented by Johnny speaking to a female listener functions as an expanded version in Faulkner's second novel, Mosquitoes. But the novels that display the most complex variations of this clash of male-female voices that move us past language into silence are also Faulkner's greatest fictions: The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom! The dialetic exchanges between Quentin and his hypothesis of Caddy, between Darl and

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[54]William Faulkner, Mosquitoes (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1927, reprinted by Dell Publishing Company, Laurel Edition, 1965).

his dead mother, Addie, and between Quentin and Rosa are the sharp-edged instruments with which Faulkner carves his deep "Kilroy was here," a wry comment he once made to sum up his aspiration as a writer. The subject of this study, then, will embrace five of Faulkner's novels. The first two, Soldier's Pay and Mosquitoes, reflect Faulkner's extensive pairings of speaker-hearers and increasing awareness of the value of silence in a fiction. In each of the last three novels, The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner experiments with radically different variations of the male-female dialetic, and each novel represents a unique dramatization of the predicament of the speaker who sees his plight in terms of a breakdown of language. By analyzing what Faulkner makes his fictive voices say to each other about language and the need for escape from its constriction, I hope to point out some of the Romantic assumptions of his art and to illuminate his philosophy of language.

We can say briefly here that Faulkner's philosophy of language posits, at least in theory, an ideal speaker whom he calls the poet, who speaks an "absolutely impeccable, absolutely perfect" language.[55] Like Caddy, the ideal speaker is too beautiful to be reduced to telling, and so surrogate speakers must be called, speakers like Benjy and Quentin, to grapple with the intractability of the spoken word. These surrogate speakers, especially Quentin, see the word not only as confining but as the only medium of escape from this confinement--for them the word is both barrier and building block. If these speakers are "reduced" in

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[55]Faulkner in the University, p. 207.

stature, made less beautiful than the ideal poet because of their compulsive assaults on the word's limitations, they also assume an enduring reality for us that the ideal poet does not, because there is no "absolutely imbeccable" language as Faulkner knows full well. I hope also to explain why Faulkner's acute sense of the limitations of verbal language did not lead him to actual silence, to becoming a "one-or-two-bookman," a phrase he used to describe Sherwood Anderson.[56] His affection for the purity of silence, for his "too beautiful" Caddy, did not stem in the least his life-long flow of more and more eloquent words.

From "Frankie and Johnny" we can go directly to Soldier's Pay.

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[56]William Faulkner, Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, p. 6.

CHAPTER ONE

SOLDIER'S PAY: THE SOLDIER AS SILENT PROPHET

> The silence of the preformation expressed in and through language cannot be expressed by language. But language can be used to convey what it cannot say--by its interstices, by its emptiness and lapses, by the latticework of words, syntax, sound and meanings. The modulations of pitch and volume dilineate the form precisely by not filling in the spaces between the lines. But it is a grave mistake to take the lines for the pattern, or the pattern for that which it is patterning.
>
> --R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience

I

Faulkner's first novel, Soldier's Pay, is a rapidly written book, and in style, tone, and technical experimentation it represents a direct flowering of that concern for the limit and power of verbal expression that we can sense as a gathering force in his poetry and first prose sketches.[1] Faulkner prefaces this novel with four lines of verse entitled "Soldier" which, by setting up the theme in terms of music, suggests that the book's prose style will offer a continuing tonal variation on the theme. The words of the short poem are arranged as a form of incantation, and we are left with the vague impression that there is some numinous significance in the return of this unnamed soldier "home again," and that the proper response to his return--"Hush, hush!"--is not words but some form of silence.

"Soldier"

The hushed pliant of wind in stricken trees
    Shivers the grass in path and lane
And Grief and Time are tideless golden seas--
    Hush, hush! He's home again.

There is something about the priority placed on the melodic design of certain words in these lines that hints at one of the implicit linguistic assumptions about style in Soldier's Pay. As in the cycle of poems that made up The Marble Faun, musical tone represents a richer

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[1]William Faulkner, Soldier's Pay (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1926, reissued by The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1961).

mode of expression than direct verbal statement. For those more significant moments in his first novel Faulkner's rendering of the narrator's voice strikes on a prose so incantatory that we find ourselves looking beyond the actual words for some silent illumination. By arranging words that push our awareness toward the edges of musical tone, Faulkner makes special demands of the reader. He is asking us to cooperate with a voice that confesses that it cannot state directly, it can only suggest; by implication he is also asking us to postulate some form of silent language by means of which this kind of wordless communion is possible.

The enigmatic power of language, the complexity of the telling process, the relation of truth and the energies of the word assume central importance in Soldier's Pay. Faulkner not only demands that we discriminate between kinds of voices--there is a great range of verbal command in the languages of Gilligan, Emmy, Jones, and Mrs. Powers--we must also discriminate between kinds of silence. The silence of Cadet Lowe, for instance, signals little more than his callow superficiality. He has had no meaningful experience (like Faulkner, Lowe missed the war), and so he has not been forced to take up the burden of articulation. The intervals of silence in Gilligan's speech, on the other hand, reflect his frustration with the illusive nature of the word; the unspeakable reality of his war-time experiences acts to smother his attempts to articulate their significance. Mrs. Power's version of silence is rich with the suggestion that her reticence is a strategy, and that she is conserving her inner thoughts for special moments of articulation in which a sympathetic listener would call forth from her private silence

the most meaningful verbal expression. Mahon's silence is impenetrable, gnomic; whatever searing vision has been his, it has blasted his verbal power while leaving him, paradoxically, on the verge of telling all. Mahon's potential telling confers a core of silence to the book. We feel his actual silence is a mode of language somehow superior to the mindless clichés of the townspeople who surround him, and to the abortive attempts by Cecily, Emmy, and the Rector to articulate the meaning of his return.

Soldier's Pay also tells us much about the way Faulkner saw character as a form of voice; each of the several fictive speakers of the book embodies a possibility of style. Jones and Gilligan, for example, are antithetical characters, and they eventually come to physical blows. But the pair also represent two sides of a continuing dialectic between the loquacious and laconic modes of human speech, and by the end of the book we feel that Gilligan's reticence is the superior style. Moreover, the proximity to silence implicit in Gilligan's speech hints in still another way of the assumption about language that controls the book--conventional speech is a limited medium for rendering the truth of experience, and perhaps the whole telling process is in doubt.

Two forms of voice share in the composition of Soldier's Pay. There is the range of the voices of the individual characters, which we can call dramatic. The other and more dominant voice is that of the narrator himself, whose prose style emulates the lyrical aspirations of the poems in The Marble Faun. The chanting flow of the narrator's words not only calls attention to the paucity of language that is, to one degree or another, each character's plight (not even Mrs. Powers can

match the flights of language that we come to expect as routine in the narrator's voice), but it also implies that there is still a richer mode of expression lying just beyond the reach of even the narrator's words. The combination of clusters of inarticulate dramatic voices with the lyric bias of the narrator's voice is itself a significant statement: Faulkner is asking us to consider the word in its most persuasive form allows our imagination to pass beyond the limitations of the word, and that beyond the word's frontier there is a superior kind of literacy which takes its contours not from the word but from musical tone and even silence itself.

II

The novel's plot offers little to distinguish it from the mass of novels published during the same period about disillusionment with that war to end all wars. Olga Vickery says of Soldier's Pay, "his characters are seldom more than types--the sensitive veteran, the unfaithful sweetheart, the bereaved mother, the envious youngsters, and the callous civilians--all of whom move woodenly through stock situations."[2] The plot gets underway when Donald Mahon, wounded in the war and now gradually dying, is assisted home by Mrs. Powers and Gilligan, two individuals who are also caught up in the cosmic movement of disbanding armies. The three arrive at Charlestown, Georgia, Mahon's home, where his badly scarred face and obvious unawareness of his surroundings shock his father, the Rector, out of his complacent view of life. Mahon's fiancé before the war, Cecily, is so appalled at his face that she breaks off the engagement, grieving

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[2]Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959, revised edition, 1964), p. 2.

the Rector infinitely more than Mahon, who is pathetically unaware of anything. Januarius Jones, described as a "satyr," immediately chases after Cecily, and his frustrating attempts to seduce her provide the book with a number of humorous scenes. As the days progress through summer, the Rector grows more despairing, Gilligan falls in love with Mrs. Powers, and Jones gives up pursuing Cecily and settles for the plain Emmy. Finally Mrs. Powers marries Mahon out of pity, and he dies shortly after the wedding. She leaves Charlestown and Gilligan, and the novel closes with the Rector and Gilligan walking together at night, trying to articulate the meaning of it all.

The opening scene of this first novel is a curious affair, and it gives us a glimpse of the kind of experimentation with fictive voices Faulkner was eager to take on in his first book. First we hear fragments from an "Old Play (About 19--?)":

> Achilles--Did you shave this morning, Cadet?
> Mercury--Yes, Sir.
> Achilles--What with, Cadet?
> Mercury--Issue, Sir.
> Achilles--Carry on, Cadet.

The compressed nature of the exchange between Achilles and Mercury, with its satiric thrust at the pompous formality of military life, functions as a counterpoint to the wandering dialogue of Lowe and Gilligan, who are both in the process of divesting themselves of military claims. The narrator informs us of Lowe's plight--"They stopped the war on him" (7) --but Gilligan speaks in his own voice, and when we hear him impersonating a range of other voices we sense that we are being treated to the sounds of a consummate tale teller engaged in the act of his art:

> "Listen, I had a swell jane and she said, 'for Christ's sake, you can't dance.' And I said, 'like hell I can't.' And we was dancing and she said, 'what are you anyways?' And I says, 'what do you wanta know for? I can dance as well as any general or major or even sergeant, because I just win four hundred in a poker game,' and she said, 'oh, you did?' and I said, 'sure, stick with me, kid,' and she said, 'where is it?' Only I wouldn't show it to her and then this fellow come up to her and said, 'are you dancing this one?' And she said, 'sure, I am. This bird don't dance.' Well, he was a sergeant, the biggest one I ever seen. Say, he was like that fellow in Arkansaw that had some trouble with a nigger and a friend said to him, 'well, I hear you killed a nigger yesterday.' And he said, 'yes, weighed two hundred pounds.' Like a bear." (8)

Lowe is an unwilling listener to this impersonator of voices, and his silent incomprehension at the close of Gilligan's tale suggests that if the war is their common bond, language is their common barrier, and that the meaning of their individual experience will consistently elude their attempts to articulate that meaning. There is something sterile in the verbal exchanges between Lowe and Gilligan, and this sense of sterility is enforced by the lush prose of the narrator, whose voice now articulates the pathos of their situation, which they perhaps feel but cannot say:

> Outside the station in the twilight the city broke sharply its skyline against the winter evening and lights were shimmering birds on motionless golden wings, bell notes in arrested flight; ugly everywhere beneath a rumored retreating magic of color.
>
> Food for the belly, and winter, though spring was somewhere in the world, from the south blown up like forgotten music. Caught both in the magic of change they stood feeling the spring in the cold air, as if they had but recently come into a new world, feeling their littleness and believing too that lying in wait for them was something new and strange. They were ashamed of this and silence was unbearable. (17)

The narrator's prose textures the implicit themes of the novel--motionless flight, sound held in stasis, the relentless if beautiful flow of process, the yearning for some vision of another kind of life, the

potent silence of wordless thoughts. The first section of Faulkner's novel closes with two speakers, Gilligan and Lowe, musing in "unbearable" silence, "believing too that lying in wait for them was something new and strange." The lyric grace of the narrator hints at even finer tones of language lying in wait just beyond the limits of the word--tones, perhaps, of silence as pure as bell notes in arrested flight.

The train on which Gilligan and Lowe are riding throughout this opening chapter is really a static setting that allows Faulkner the opportunity to move fictive voices in and out of our hearing. In section II of this first chapter, the two discharged soldiers come upon a third --the wounded Donald Mahon. Gilligan is moved by Mahon's suffering, and by means of the barest minimum of verbal exchange, the actual tale teller and the potential tale teller strike up a form of wordless understanding: "The two of them sat in silent comradeship, the comradeship of those whose lives had become pointless through the sheer equivocation of events, of the sorry jade, Circumstance." (23)

Mrs. Powers' appearance on the train, and her spontaneous show of sympathy for the silent Mahon, provokes contrasting responses in the minds of Gilligan and Lowe: "(She is married, and about twenty-five, thought Gilligan) (She is about nineteen, and she is not in love, Lowe decided.)" (24) The contrast between their private surmises of Mrs. Powers suggests to us that her real nature perhaps will never be glimpsed by either Gilligan or Lowe; their words will continue to obfuscate rather than to illuminate the truth of her character. It is also apparent that Mrs. Powers is a new center of awareness in the fiction, superior in articulation to any of her observers. The language of Mrs. Powers is,

in fact, one of the original triumphs of the book. Although her situation is summarized initially in a rather stilted prose by the narrator ("She thought of her husband youngly dead in France . . ."), Faulkner makes a serious effort to render the verbal play of her mind. Much more so than Gilligan, who is an authentic tale teller, Mrs. Powers' voice is a rich repository of remembered voices. Her silent reverie while alone in bed illustrates Faulkner's most intricate blending of different kinds of voices resonating within a single intelligence thus far in the book:

> (Dick, Dick. Dead, ugly Dick. Once you were alive and young and passionate and ugly, after a time you were dead, dear Dick: that flesh, that body, which I loved and did not love; your beautiful, young, ugly body, dear Dick, become now a seething of worms, like new milk. Dear Dick.) (32)

The jarring contrast between "seething worms" and "new milk" is itself symbolic of the paradoxical nature of her mind, and the words enforce the polar tensions of her experience--the Dick she loved and did not love, her simultaneous attraction and revulsion from her husband's body, her present emptiness and her remembered gaiety, the dead Powers and the dying Mahon. Again and again her voice strains to articulate the broader thematic movements of the novel, and she does so from a position of paradox. Her language is more articulate than any fictive speaker in the book, yet her words imply that the deeper meanings of an experience are somehow unsayable.

In the opening chapter of his first novel Faulkner has succeeded in placing us within hearing of three distinct fictive speakers, each of whom has a different idiom and represents different possibilities of language. Lowe's language is composed of war-time clichés and fails to evoke anything more than self pity; Gilligan's voice is richer,

reflects a wider range of experience, and we suspect that his coarse, colloquial diction is a mask for his inner sensitivity; Mrs. Powers' language can reach the lyric qualities needed to articulate the finer implications of their common sadness and ennui. Only Mahon has no voice, and if for this reason his character represents the book's major flaw as some readers have asserted,[3] his role of frustrated speaker, like the pilot voice in Poem I of A Green Bough, draws our attention to the radical nature of his function: Mahon is a hypothetical voice, whose mode of expression is silence. Like Caddy in The Sound and the Fury, he exists in a state of potential speaking, and he represents a form of prophecy that is never reduced to the ambiguity of actual words.

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[3]Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), pp. 1-5. Waggoner claims that Mahon's silence and Gilligan's utterances are not enough to make us feel the pathos of their situation. Waggoner groups together Mahon and Gilligan as examples of returning soldier's who "tell us they are in despair, and tell us why, and the voice of the narrator underscores their explanations." But as a novel, continues Waggoner, the result is a failure. Waggoner does not discriminate, as I think one should, between the mode of telling represented by Gilligan and that of Mahon. Olga Vickery, in her article, "Faulkner's First Novel," Western Humanities Review, II (Summer, 1957), pp. 251-256, suggests that if the novel was meant to be built around the dramatic tension between the two figures of Jones and Mahon, "then it fails, for Donald's complete passivity is an insufficient foil for Jones's rampaging vitality." Richard P. Adams, in his book, William Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 35, sees a more positive side to Mahon's silence. "The opposition of his stasis to the dynamism of life that surrounds him in nature and other people establishes the technical strategy and the moral meaning of the book." Michael Millgate, in his The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 64-65, sees Mahon and Jones as polar opposites who generate meaning between them; Mahon's function is to represent the "terrible realities of war," in a kind of passive exemplum for the other characters to talk about. Few critics see Mahon as a successful character in his own right.

III

Chapter Two relies on the same basic rhetorical setting for its structure--two voices speaking to each other within a static framework, here a rose garden instead of the seats of a passenger train. But the exchange between Januarius Jones and the Rector displays a greater range of verbal talent than that of Gilligan and Lowe. The pagan amorality of Jones, "lately a fellow of Latin at a small college," and the good-willed if conventional morality of the older Rector find a surprising rapport in their mutual love of a language few can speak, Latin. Jones chants the opening and the Rector the concluding lines of a passage from Ovid, after which each silently regards the other with "genial enthusiasm." (41) Their knowledge of Latin takes on the implications of a private language used to isolate the speakers from other and perhaps more meaningful modes of speech. But aside from their genial enthusiasm about Latin, their respective languages are decidedly different. The garden in which we first hear them speaking is itself a point of reference that marks the range of their differing verbal response to experience. The Rector sees in a particular rose bush a symbol of his lost youth; the rose bush surrounds the essence of his youth "as wine is imprisoned in a wine jar"; the same bush to Jones is merely a reminder that "one does not become attached to things one has long known." (44) Their idioms are antithetical. The Rector sees in the word a substitute for action; Jones sees the word as a convenient disguise for action. Their conversation wanders through a variety of topics (anarchism, weakening of the white race, Providence) which act to expand the scope of the book beyond the more limited post-war

ruminations of Gilligan and Lowe. The rather verbose exchanges between the Rector and Jones about remote theoretical issues is Faulkner's way of rendering the sterility of the word when it is cut off from real experience, reverberating hollowly in the mouths of tellers who are afraid of truth.

Mason's arrival shocks the Rector into silence. The fact of his son's physical and psychic ruin is for the Rector simply unsayable. All the glittering words that had protected him from experience are reduced to nothing in the face of Mahon's grim return from the dead. The silent son confers silence on his father. But if the crisis of Mahon's sudden presence exposes the hollowness of the Rector's language, it signals a new growth in the language of Mrs. Powers. She is now the only fictive speaker qualified to register the manifold implications of this soldier's return, and she takes on some of the lyric force of the short poem that prefaces the book. Mrs. Powers's interior voice silently intuits with "instinctive perspicuity" (58) that the Rector is now without a language, that Cecily is masking her horror of Mahon behind clichés of love, that Jones is a letcher and will now direct his verbal skill toward seducing Cecily, and that she, Mrs. Powers, alone loves Mahon dispassionately for what he is, not for what he was. Mrs. Powers's silent interior voice becomes increasingly a sounding board for the inarticulate yearnings of the other characters.

Although Mahon has no voice capable of articulating more than a momentary glimmering of his real situation, his silence initially acts as a catalyst for a host of voices several removes from the level of awareness of Mrs. Powers, all of whom, by assuming the role of expressing

the significance of his sudden appearance, reveal the outer edges of the fictional world for which Mahon's return is the central event. Beginning with Cecily's family, the world of the town unfolds gradually until it reaches the anonymous loafers around the town hall. The physical details of the town are described by the omniscient narrator: "Charlestown, like numberless other towns throughout the south, had been built around a circle of tethered horses and mules." (78) Faulkner next attempts to render dramatically the corporate mind of Charlestown by means of a series of voices imagined as overheard by the reader but not by the rector or Gilligan, whose passing presence prompts these voices to speak:

> (One of them airy-plane fellers.)
> (S'what I say: if the Lord had intended for folks to fly around in the air He'd 'a' give 'em wings.)
> (Well, he's been closter to the Lord'n you'll ever git.) (78)

The passage catches the sound of the provincialism and tedium of small town life, but the disembodied, hanging-in-the-air quality of these voices again are too limited to evoke a response wider than their own indifference; when they fall silent, the narrator sketches in the final lyric touch for the scene: "And above all brooded early April sweetly pregnant with noon." (78) The counterpoint of town voice and the narrator's lyric voice calls our attention to the possibility that a given experience can generate a multiple verbal response, each failing, to one degree or another, to do justice to its real meaning.

The voice of Emmy articulates a special response to the presence of Mahon. The omniscient narrator first sketches in her past, making in the process a surprising appeal to the reader for imaginative

cooperation: "There was something wild about Emmy's face; you knew that she out-ran, out-fought, out-climbed her brothers: you could imagine her developing like a small but sturdy greenness on a dunghill." (84) But once the rhetorical setting is established--Emmy and Mrs. Powers are alone together where "heedless rain" fills the room with "hushed monotonous sound"--Emmy is free to tell "her brief story." The vigorous colloquialism of her language finds its natural counterpart in the silent listening of Mrs. Powers, who by her silence modulates the flow of Emmy's words.

The rhetorical structure in which all this takes place is what I would like to term the first dialetic vision in the novel. Unlike the prose sketch "Frankie and Johnny," we hear two voices speaking to each other in turn, and each makes an effort to grope for the sequence of words which would articulate best the meaning of an experience. The best rendering of words will permit a momentary passing over from the limits of words to a wordless language with which the two speaker-hearers commune in silence. What happens between Emmy and Mrs. Powers prefigures the extensive dialetic exchange between Rosa and Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!; on a much vaster scale, they also move past the need for words into the realms of silent vision. Here Emmy first evokes in the listening Mrs. Powers an image of the Donald Mahon of the past: "Sometimes he used to walk home from school with me. He wouldn't never have a hat or coat, and his face was like--it was like he ought to live in the woods." (87) Emmy appeals to Mrs. Powers (as Faulkner does to us as readers) for a mutual sharing in the task of probing for meaning: "You know: not like he ought to went to school or had to dress up."

Mrs. Powers in turn adjusts the flow of Emmy's voice so that their two voices together become the mode of expression for the total significance of this one night of Mahon's past: "Aren't you going too fast? . . . But *you are going too fast.*" Emmy continues:

> 'I couldn't see his eyes, but I could feel them somehow like things touching me. When he looks at you--you feel like a bird, kind of: like you was going swooping right away from the ground or something. But now there was something different, too. I could hear him panting from running, and I could feel something inside me panting, too. I was afraid and I wasn't afraid. It was like everything was dead except us. . . .' (88-89)

The final effect of the dialectic exchange between Emmy and Mrs. Powers, the element that merits the term "vision," occurs when an epiphany-like response in each mind unites them temporarily in silent communion. When Emmy ceases her story her face is "calmed, purged" for the first time, and Mrs. Powers, visibly affected, no longer feels "superior" to Emmy--their fate is one after all: both mourn war-destroyed lovers. The sense of communion between the two is felt most intensely when the actual words cease being spoken. Silence is a condition of this communion; words draw the speaker-hearers to a point where words can be dispensed with. The scene closes on Mrs. Powers's gradual realization that "the rain had ceased and long lances of sunlight" now pierce "the washed immaculate air." (90) The unifying grace of silent communion reached by a dialectic exchange of words is enforced by the sequence of rain to sunlight within which it has functioned; the long outpouring of words by Emmy and Mrs. Powers has its counterpart in the unfolding of seasonal process itself.

In the same section of Chapter II Faulkner next arranges a chorus

of voices, none of which single voice is heard by another fictional listener:

The Town:
War Hero Returns . . .
His face . . . the way that girl goes on with that Farr boy . . .

Young Robert Saunders:
I just want to see his scar . . .

Cecily:
And now I'm not a good woman any more. Oh, well, it had to be sometime, I guess . . .

George Farr:
Yes! Yes! She was a virgin! But if she won't see me, it means somebody else. Her body in another's arms . . . Why must you? What do you want? Tell me: I will do anything, anything . . .

Margaret Powers:
Can nothing at all move me again? Nothing to desire? Nothing to stir me, to move me, save pity? . . . (105)

And so on. There is no speaker-hearer frame here; all are merely speakers. This chorus of isolated voices is rapidly followed by another letter from the absent Julian Lowe to Mrs. Powers, the effect of which is to chart further the irony of his diminishing significance. Again, the intention of both chorus and letter is to increase the range of vocal response within the fiction to Mahon's return. Taken together, these disembodied forces us to make some leaps of language ourselves. The long parade of characters who are unable to marshall the right words is a test of our empathic powers--we have to listen for the words they are trying to say in addition to those they are actually saying.

IV

Section IV of Chapter IV contains another version of the dialectic search for a language that communicates wordlessly. Here Mrs. Powers and

Gilligan, the two most gifted truth tellers, engage in a lengthy verbal exchange that results in a new sense of communion between them. First the narrator sets the scene for their dialectic by means of a prose which hints at language that is shading into silence: "The sun was almost down. Only the tips of trees were yet dipped in fading light and where they sat the shadow became a violet substance in which the thrush sang and then fell still." (112) Like Keats's nightingale, the bird's song seems most intensely heard as it passes into silence. Mrs. Powers then opens the exchange with Gilligan by recalling a past in which Gilligan can participate. The proliferation of the phrase "you see" and "you know" reveals both her sense of urgency at being understood and her confidence in Gilligan's empathy: "You remember how it was then--everybody excited and hysterical, like a big circus. . . . You know how it was: all soldiers talking of dying gloriously in battle without really believing it or knowing very much about it. . . ." (112) She touches next on her brief life as Dick Powers's wife: "He called for me and we went to his hotel. You see, Joe, it was like when you are a child in the dark and you keep on saying, It isn't dark, it isn't dark. We were together for three days and then his boat sailed." (113) After the inevitable feeling of disillusion set in, she continues, she wrote to Powers to end their marriage, but "He died believing everything was the same between us." (113) The narrator's voice closes off the scene with an appropriate mood of wordless peace: "The sun was completely gone and they walked through a violet silence soft as milk." (114) The violet silence they walk through we sense is the threshold of words itself, and whatever vision they now share we know does not need words to sustain it.

Up to this point in the novel, Faulkner has clearly been experimenting with certain rhetorical strategies that would illuminate the complexities of the human voice in the act of speaking while at the same time would fulfill needed tasks for the novel as a whole. He wants a fictive voice that is interesting to hear in itself and which also advances the action, says something about another character, fills in the reader about the past, increments the significance of certain motifs, and so on. Here, with the voice of Mrs. Powers engaged with another voice in a dialectic search for a richer mode of saying, he has struck on a technique that answers these needs.

Faulkner next attempts in section IV of Chapter V his most ambitious experiment with rendering multiple verbal responses to a single experience--the bedside visit with Mahon by several characters. As Mrs. Burney, who has lost a son in the war, is presented to the sick Mahon, we hear a flow of voices both silent and aloud from Mrs. Burney and Mrs. Powers, the narrator, and even the dead Dick Powers--all are speaking simultaneously from within a single moment of suspended time. The words pile up around the central core of silence that is Mahon, and each word we feel fails to cope with the implications of that silence:

> (Oh, the poor man, the poor man. And your scarred face! Madden didn't tell me your face was scarred, Donald.)
>
> Pigeons like slow sleep, afternoon passing away, dying. Mrs. Burney, in her tight, hot black, the rector, huge and black and shapeless, Mrs. Burney with an unhealed sorrow, Mrs. Powers--(Dick, Dick . . . My body flowing away from me, dividing. How ugly men are, naked. Don't leave me! Don't leave me! No! No! We don't love each other! we don't! we don't! Hold me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken, unseeing. Thank God my body cannot see. Your body is so ugly, Dick! Dear Dick. Your bones, your mouth hard and shaped as bone: rigid. My body flows away: you cannot hold it. Why do you sleep, Dick? My body flows on and on. You

> cannot hold it for yours is so ugly, dear Dick. . . . "You may not hear from me for some time. I will write when I can. . . ."") (126)

The moment of stasis flows back into normal sequential time when the narrative shifts to Mahon, who is sitting "hearing voices," although it is clear he has only heard sound without meaning: "He felt substance he could not see, heard what did not move him at all." Yet his passive silence somehow seems the wiser way. His toneless "Carry on, Joe" functions as a systole with the pulsing diastole of the lyric voice: "Sucking silver sound of pigeons slanting to and from the spire like smears of soft paint on a cloudless sky." (127) The implication of Mahon's silence and the lyric voice work together to create a rhythmic chant that fuses human death with the beauty of mindless nature.

V

When Faulkner arrests the chronological flow of events to scrutinize the workings of human speech as he does in the collocation of voices just discussed, he brings another dimension to his twin concern with the act of human literacy and the problem of the word as a vital element in truth telling. From this point on in both Soldier's Pay and his succeeding fiction, the grand quests for a superior form of statement that we see embodied in Quentin Compson, Darl and Addie Bundren, Rosa Coldfield, Shreve MacKenzie, and others of Faulkner's more memorable fictive speakers, are also so many confrontations with the phenomenon of process itself. The act of speaking becomes a way of dealing with the enigma of time.

Whenever two speaker-hearers come together in Soldier's Pay

for some form of verbal exchange, the condition of language is an implicit concern which we feel hovering around the edges of what they are trying to say. This self-consciousness about language manifest in both the inarticulate cries of the several characters and in the lush, dreamy prose of the narrator is itself a condition of paradox. When words are deliberately arranged for the purpose of holding them up against the light, for stretching out upon the table all their overtones and undertones, we are in the presence of paradox as a form of expression. One of the forms paradox assumes in Soldier's Pay is satire. In the hands--or better, in the mouths--of characters who are not committed to truth telling in the way Mrs. Powers and Gilligan are, the search for the word turns back against itself and we see the telling process as a parody. In Januarius Jones, for instance, we witness the spectacle of language used to undermine its special powers; Jones offers us perversion of the word instead of grapplings with the word's enigmatic nature. His verbose posturing is an ironic commentary on the reverence for the most compelling way of saying that marks the exchange between Mrs. Powers and Emmy.

Faulkner's tendency to step back from the Mahon story and generalize about human nature increases toward the conclusion of the book, especially after the marriage of Mahon and Mrs. Powers. Section II of Chapter VIII, for example, reveals a breezy if not flippant attitude toward his characters. With Mahon's marriage over, the detached narrator confides, the town has other topics of conversation: ". . . this was the lying-in period of the K.K.K. and the lying-out period of Mr. Wilson, a democratish gentleman living in Washington, D.C." (194) The pseudo-

sophisticated tone of such language parallels the general relaxation of tension that occurs between the moments of Mahon's marriage and his ensuing death. The plight of the dying Mahon, partly because of the passive nature of his potential telling, is simply too remote a demand on our sympathy. As a result, for much of Chapter VIII, Faulkner relies on the comic burlesque of Jones's pursuit of Emmy. Comedy alternates with the narrator's lushly rhapsodic descriptions of seasonal process:

> . . . when earth, like a fat woman, recklessly trying giddy hat after hat, trying a trimming of apple and pear and peach, threw it away; tried narcissi and jonquil and flag: threw it away--so early flowers bloomed and passed and later flowers bloomed to fade and fall, giving place to yet later ones. (195)

To some extent the narrator's lyricism does succeed here in setting the cycle of the season as an appropriate background for the human tragedy; the reader senses by implication that the blind Mahon is approaching his end unaware of such beauty. But because the narrator's perspective is so detached in these nature rhapsodies, only the most general notion of his tragedy is suggested.

Perhaps to compensate for our growing sense of remoteness from Mahon, the narrator focuses in on Mahon's final silent wrestlings with the potential words that would say all. In section VIII of Chapter VIII, the narrator gives us some glimpses at Mahon's attempts to articulate his dream of death. And by the end of the section we know that the dream is true. Mahon's death represents the extinction of a potential teller, the failure of a hypothesis of a language without words spoken on this side of the threshold of death, and in this sense Mahon prefigures two other tellers in Faulkner's fiction whose words come to us from just such a borderline existence between life and death--Quentin in The Sound and

the Fury and Addie, who has passed beyond that border, in As I Lay Dying. Here, in Soldier's Pay, Mahon is suddenly conscious that he is passing beyond the claims of process, leaving behind his own life and the life of language:

> Donald Mahon lay quietly conscious of unseen forgotten spring, of greenness neither recalled nor forgot. After a time the nothingness in which he lived took him wholly again, but restlessly. It was like a sea into which he could neither completely pass nor completely go away from. Day became afternoon, became dusk and imminent evening: evening like a ship, with twilight-colored sails, dreamed down the world darkly toward darkness. And suddenly he found that he was passing from the dark world in which he had lived for a time he could not remember, again into a day that had long passed, that had already been spent by those who lived and wept and died, and so remembering it, this day was his alone: the one trophy he had reft of Time and Space. (202-203)

Mahon dies dreaming of gliding out on "an immeasurable sea" in a boat with "twilight-colored sails," fusing together the images of water and twilight that form so much of Quentin Compson's silent thoughts. And as with Quentin's verbal style, Mahon's syntax is paradoxical; his dying is like a sea "into which he could neither completely pass nor completely go away from," and he moves into a new day that has already long since passed.

VI

The final chapter, Chapter IX, works out the ramifications of the death of Mahon for the remaining characters while intensifying the mood of dissolution and death. But voice experiments decrease. Instead, one character after another is treated merely as a focal point for the increasingly dominating tone of the narrator's voice. Mahon's death becomes the occasion for a litany of the universal experience

of death.[4] The first paragraph of section I, for example, sums up the major themes of the book in language that is patterned, abstract, and phrased as definition, exclamation, and rhetorical question:

> Sex and Death: the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us! In youth they lift us out of the flesh, in old age they reduce us again to the flesh; one to fatten us, the other to flay us, for the worm. When are sexual compulsions more readily answered than in war or famine or flood or fire? (204)

What the narrator's voice is doing here, in effect, is stating directly the manifold implications for human life of that nature-cycle so effectively rendered through rhapsody in the previous chapter. The passage illustrates the tendency in the final chapter to "explain" what had already been suggested. The effect is to undermine the rationale for the nature-cycle sections completely. Faulkner is so concerned with ordering the proper elegiac mood that he works against some of the techniques used before with some success--meaning groped for and articulated by a voice in the fiction, moods of a character enforced by parallel moods in nature, mis-matched speaker-hearers, voice within a voice, and so on. Indeed, for these last sections of Soldier's Pay, the rhythm and diction of the narrator's language remind us more and more of a prose gloss of the poem "Soldier."

In the final pages of the book Gilligan and the much-changed Rector walk into the night, talking. The Rector has lost his son, Gilligan has failed to win Mrs. Powers. Both speakers constitute another

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[4]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 64. Millgate also sees Mahon as embodying universal concerns. "The point about Mahon seems to be that he is in large measure conceived in abstract terms as the Wounded Hero, a figure of myth."

antithetical pairing--one is old, cultured, the other young, with little formal education--but here their common suffering confers a new urgency to their words. The Rector's final utterances to Gilligan, for example, epitomize the book's broader concerns in a language that seems stripped of adornment, compressed in syntax, and dramatically unlike the flowery diction of the Rector's speech before his son's return: "God is circumstance, Joe. God is in this life. We know nothing about the next. . . . We make our heaven or hell in this world." (220) The resigned pessimism of the Rector's words contrasts with Gilligan's reluctance to accept their implications. The whole last scene looks forward to the same kind of dialectic exchange between Mr. Compson and Quentin in The Sound and the Fury, especially in terms of the Rector's insistence on the transience of human experience and the erosion of meaning because of process:

> The divine put his heavy arm across Gilligan's shoulder. "You are suffering from disappointment. But this will pass away. The saddest thing about love, Joe, is that not only the love cannot last forever, but even the heartbreak is soon forgotten. How does it go? 'Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' No, no," as Gilligan would have interrupted, "I know that is an unbearable belief, but all truth is unbearable. Do we not suffer at this moment from the facts of division and death?" (220)

As the two fall silent, they walk closer to a mysterious new sound--a sound unheard as yet in the experience of the two men, and which suggests to us that the book itself is laboring to approach the illusive nature of another mode of speaking: "The road dropped on again descending between reddish gashes, and across a level, moon-lit space, broken by a clump of saplings, came a pure quivering chord of music wordless and far away." (220) The prose seems to be collecting its energy for one last plunge through the barrier of words to reach a "pure," "wordless"

language. The sound the two men hear is unseen Negro voices singing in a distant church, and that sound is inscrutable ("No one knows why they do that," says the Rector) and paradoxical:

> Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. The voices rose full and soft. There was no organ; no organ was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds. They stood together in the dust, the rector in his shapeless black, and Gilligan in his new hard serge, listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad. Then the singing died, fading away along the mooned land inevitable with to-morrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation; and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust in their shoes. (221)

The sound of these baritone and soprano voices that fly like heavenly birds moves past the range of the Rector's and Gilligan's hearing, leaving them behind; when the song dies, we ourselves are left listening for that language of silence that hovers just beyond their hearing.

VII

Stepping back for a moment from the book, we can see significant developments in Faulkner's style and attitudes toward the word that were implicit in his earlier work as a poet. As in The Marble Faun, seasonal process counterpoints human behavior, and the claims of process assume the function of a private, non-verbal language that parallels the utterances of the human word. Contrast and juxtaposition of voices and languages is perhaps Faulkner's most characteristic technique, and in Soldier's Pay we can see that the narrative opens in the coldness of the North on a train that is passing through a city, and ends in the ripe fullness of a summer field in the South. Moreover, all the action between these two polar points of time and space is patterned after the

cycle of day-to-night. George Farr and Jones, for instance, wait for night to meet Cecily, then fight in darkness, then wait for dawn. Particular hours of the day are either specifically recorded (George Farr's obsession for Cecily is described in a separate vignette for each half hour between 9:30 and 11:30 p.m.) or evoked by one of the narrator's many mood pieces for certain hours--the Negroes sleeping at noon, the many images of birds awakening at dawn, the noon as a blissfully sleeping woman.

As he did in The Marble Faun, moreover, Faulkner uses highly alliterative diction and sentence patterns that are consciously rhythmic: "Sucking silver sounds of pigeons slanting to and from the spire like smears of soft paint on a cloudless sky." (127) The tendency to link capitalized abstractions with elaborately artificial similes is another carryover from his work as a poet: "Sex and Death; the front door and the back door of the world." (204) Finally, Soldier's Pay shows Faulkner's attraction to static, self-contained settings like the rose garden, the train, the hotel room, the Rectory and so on for the locus of verbal exchanges by pairs of fictive speakers.

Faulkner's next novel relies heavily on such static settings for lengthy and often tedious dialectic exchanges between a variety of speakers who verbalize about the relation between the word and the experience, and the role of the word in the creation of art. If Mosquitoes has its dull moments, it tells us much about Faulkner's increasingly complex interest in the telling process as both theme and organizing principle of his fiction. Mosquitoes also represents an advance in his ability to relate the life of language with the phenomenon of process.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SILENT MOSQUITOES

> In the strictest sense, all the contents of consciousness are ineffable. Even the simplest sensation is, in its totality, indescribable. Every work of art, therefore, needs to be understood not only as something rendered, but also as a certain handling of the ineffable. In the greatest art, one is always aware of things that cannot be said (rules of "decorum"), of the contradiction between expression and the presence of the inexpressible. Stylistic devices are also techniques of avoidance. The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences.
>
> --Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation

I

The potency of Mahon's silence and the impotency of the actual words of the other main characters raised some problems for Faulkner about the implications of trying to say the unsayable. Mahon's function is clearly hovering at the outer reaches of what language can state, and the paradox he represents is a challenge to Faulkner as an artist. Faulkner cannot afford to articulate too well the quality of Mahon's silence, or he will reduce that quality, a concern he voiced many years later when he talked about Caddy. His second novel, Mosquitoes (1927),[1] shares some of the themes and experiments in style of Soldier's Pay, but explores more intensely and explicitly the paradox of language--the simultaneous energy and restriction of the word. Faulkner takes more risks in Mosquitoes. He tries to render that quality of silence in more experimental and evocative prose. Gordon the artist takes on the role of Mahon, but it has now become a more demanding one. Gordon speaks to other characters much more than Mahon, yet he disdains what he calls "talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words." (153) His real language is not words at all, but the malleable forms he sculptures in silence. It is this creative silence that Faulkner must suggest to us by means of words, and this goal is more daring than the

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[1]William Faulkner, Mosquitoes (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1927, reprinted by Dell Publishing Company, Laurel Edition, 1965).

rendering of Mahon's passive silence, which for the most part we simply inferred, relying on hypothesis more than the eloquence of Faulkner's language.

Faulkner's second novel is daring in other ways. Mosquitoes is a satire on his literary acquaintances and experiences in New Orleans, and represents a conscious turning away from the cultural milieu in which he wrote Soldier's Pay.[2] The act of rejection is a major theme in the novel, and as such Mosquitoes is a watershed for Faulkner as a writer. Thirty years later he said that he was not ashamed of the book, that he regarded it as the "chips, the badly sawn planks that the carpenter produces while he's learning to be a first-rate carpenter. . . ."[3] The analogy suggests that after Mosquitoes he learned to write with more skill (which he did), sawing the planks cleanly rather than badly. What really happened is that Faulkner the carpenter--to stay with the analogy --threw away the blueprints right in the middle of Mosquitoes, and concentrated not so much on sawing better but on creating a more imaginative design. Perhaps Faulkner needed the momentum generated by sawing first and looking at the blueprints later.

At any rate, the form of Mosquitoes is a search for form. Each of the main characters, Gordon, Wiseman, and Fairchild, has a creative energy that is looking for the proper form to give it lasting life. The

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[2]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 68. Millgate lists possible real persons whom Faulkner knew and might be satirizing in certain characters.

[3]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 257.

setting in which most of these searches take place is modelled on the theatre; several characters take turns talking to each other on the deck of the yacht Nausikaa, and the open-ended nature of this floating forum gives us the initial impression that the search for form will be endless, that the continuing dialectical exchanges on the value of art, poetry, and life will come to no fruition. Near the end of the book, in the ninth section of the epilogue to be exact, the static, stage-like setting of the Nausikaa is replaced by the sudden forward movement of a journey through the darkened streets of New Orleans. With it the novel's structure changes from a stage to a quest, one in which the three main characters seek and find the holy grail that is the essence of art. The quest is the design that gives form to the aimless multiple searches that compose nearly all of Mosquitoes. But it is not at all evident that Faulkner had this design in mind when he began the book, and indeed the quest takes up only the ninth section. The tenth and last section in the book returns to a static setting and fruitless verbalization between characters that marked all the writing in Mosquitoes up until this ninth section of the Epilogue. Faulkner's fondness in this second novel for the rhetorical structure of sets of fictive speakers engaged in spontaneous dialectical arguments can be attributed to his growing need to work out the philosophical implications of the act of utterance, the life of the word, the possibility of relating the transience of language to the timelessness of art. To some extent these issues were raised by his friend Sherwood Anderson in both is fiction, which Faulkner read and admired, and in his conversations with the young and virtually unknown Faulkner.

One way of looking at the rhetorical structure that dominates Mosquitoes before the Epilogue, in fact, is to look again at Faulkner's reminiscence of Anderson's telling of his dream about the horse. In this essay of 1954, Faulkner analyzes his initial fascination with his friend's fumbling efforts to channel the life of his dream into the form of the spoken word, an effort which itself takes on the form of a quest.[4] Reading the essay we hear two different voices: Faulkner's highly perceptive critical voice, and Faulkner's rendition of Anderson's voice engaged painstakingly in the act of telling the dream of the horse. Much of the narrative of his second novel, written so close in time to the actual telling of the dream on the bench, is structured the same way. Dawson Fairchild, story teller and sometime novelist (obviously based on Anderson) tells one tale after another to a sympathetic but critical listening intelligence, Julius Wiseman, who is just as obviously a wise man. Fairchild's voice renders to us the complexity of the living word as it is brought into our hearing by the act of telling; his painful efforts to bring forth the right word remind us of the pangs of birth itself. The simple diction and baffled, sincere tone of Fairchild's tales--we think of the Al Jackson stories, his adventure in an outhouse, his recollections of boyhood--are generally successful imitations of Anderson's story telling technique. Wiseman's comments on his friend's laborious acts of word making display the same curiosity and insight into the art of telling as Faulkner's analysis of Anderson's telling of

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[4]William Faulkner, Essays, Speeches and Public Letters (New York: Random House, 1965), edited by James B. Meriwether, "A Note on Sherwood Anderson," pp. 3-10.

the dream. Both novel and essay, moreover have a static setting that is surrounded by fertile and noisy forms of life--a quiet bench in the middle of Jackson square and the deck of a yacht grounded in the center of an impenetrable swamp.

After Fairchild's tale about his boyhood discovery in the outhouse, to cite an example of Mosquitoes's most characteristic structural device, Wiseman analyzes aloud to another listener the limits of Fairchild's art of telling. The tone and drift of Wiseman's remarks prefigure Faulkner's opinion of Anderson in the essay written twenty five years later:

> His writing seems fumbling, not because life is unclear to him, but because of his innate humorless belief that, though it bewilder him at times, life at bottom is sound and admirable and fine; . . . He need only let himself go, let himself forget all this fetish of culture and education which his upbringing and the ghosts of those whom circumstances permitted to reside longer at college than himself, and whom despite himself he regards with awe, assure him that he lacks. For by getting himself and his own bewilderment and inhibitions out of the way by describing, in a manner that even translation cannot injure (as Balzac did) American life as American life is, it will become eternal and timeless despite him. (200-201)

What Wiseman has glimpsed here is that Fairchild's reticence with words, his deliberate "fumbling" for the exact word, inhibits his growth as an artist. Instead of using words to transcend the limitations of the word, to pass over into the "eternal and timeless" realm of art, Fairchild uses the word to dramatize the inadequacy of the word. Wiseman's criticism of Fairchild's style hints at the direction Faulkner himself would take as a writer, and indeed, was taking in this very novel. With Mosquitoes, Faulkner was already letting go. The range of styles, the variety of characters, voice experiments, satiric thrusts at the supporters

of the arts, and the virtuosity of the narrator in Mosquitoes are all remarkable. We think of Steiner's phrase again: "Faulkner is not afraid of words even where they submerge him."[5] Anderson was afraid of words, and Mosquitoes is the young Faulkner's exorcision of the influence and assumptions about language that characterized the older and celebrated novelist.

II

The sculpture and the poem

As he did with Soldier's Pay, Faulkner prefaced Mosquitoes with an epigraph--in this case a prose poem--that acts to set up our response to the novel as a whole. The poem "Soldier" asked us to consider if silence were not the best response to the soldier's return. The epigraph to Mosquitoes suggests the intolerable presence of mosquitoes without using the actual word "mosquitoes," and represents an attempt to make language transcend itself, bypassing the limits of the spoken word by means of the silent, imagined word. The implication of the epigraph is that the energy of the unheard word is dissipated by the act of utterance, and this notion, so important to Faulkner's attitude toward language, anticipates the rhetoric of Caddy's actual silence and potential telling, and Addie Bundren's definition of the word "virgin" as a blank space, a total silence. The epigraph shows simultaneously Faulkner's prolixity and reticence with words:

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[5]George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 32.

> In spring, the sweet young spring, decked out with little green, necklaced, braceleted with the song of idiotic birds, spurious and sweet and tawdry as a shopgirl in her cheap finery, like an idiot with money and no taste; they were little and young and trusting, you could kill them sometimes. But now, as August like a languorous replete bird winged slowly through the pale summer toward the moon of decay and death, they were bigger, vicious; ubiquitous as undertakers, cunning as pawnbrokers, confident and unavoidable as politicians. . . . a biblical plague seen through the wrong end of a binocular: the majesty of Fate become contemptuous through ubiquity and sheer repetition. (8)

The prose chants of birds, spring, and biblical plagues--definite verbal concepts--but shies away from uttering the actual word for the insect. At the end of the epigraph we are looking beyond the limits of the actual words, towards some more compelling mode of expression, of which the silence of the unnamed "mosquitoes" is a partial glimpse. The lyric quality of the narrator's voice--so apparent here in the epigraph--in fact acts throughout the novel to release our imagination from the restrictions of the word. Gordon, the taciturn but passionate sculptor, is, for instance, the special concern of the narrator's lyricism. Gordon's language is action, his vocabulary consists of mauls, chisels, and malleable substances. He looks at the spoken word as a barrier to meaning, and we guess his silence is superior to the inane witty talk that he hears from the admirers of the arts who gather around him. Yet he presents a problem to the novel. His voice is incapable of suggesting to us the significance of his art. The paradoxical nature of his position resembles that of Mahon in Soldier's Pay, whose own voice is powerless to say that his silence is superior to the words of the other speakers. Gordon is also like Caddy in that his potential telling is more significant than the few words he actually says.

As a result, the narrator marshalls the same lush, rhythmical prose to imply the silent strength of Gordon's vision as he does in the epigraph without uttering the actual word "mosquitoes."

In the first section of the Prologue, for example, the narrator represents Gordon in the act of speaking his language. We see him moving his "rhythmic maul" with "mute flashing," and gradually the form of a female torso emerges from the block of marble he is carving. The narrator's lyricism strains to articulate the rich and paradoxical significance of Gordon's sculpture, which is also a wordless code of meaning:

> As you entered the room the thing drew your eyes: you turned sharply as to a sound, expecting movement. But it was marble, it could not move. And when you tore your eyes away and turned your back on it at last, you got again untarnished and high and clean that sense of swiftness, of space encompassed; but on looking again it was as before: motionless and passionately eternal--the virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed yet passionate still for escape, passionate and simple and eternal in the equivocal derisive darkness of the world. (10-11)

Like the urn in Keats's "Grecian Urn," Gordon's sculpture assumes life by transcending momentarily the bounds of process and escaping into the "eternal." The narrator's prose chants the meaning of Gordon's language, directing our response to some deeper and silent meaning beyond the reach of the narrator's actual words. The word in Mosquitoes is continually in a state of passing over to the realm of silence in which Gordon's sculpture generates meaning wordlessly; we read the book as if the prose were laboring to be born into silence. The "passionately eternal" nature of Gordon's sculpture is for the narrator its most significant statement; escape from process is the goal of art, even more so than the creation of beauty. The female torso, which appears in varying

stages of metamorphosis throughout Mosquitoes, symbolizes the book's concern with language: the word becomes art at the moment when it seems to free itself from the confines of process. Years later Faulkner referred to his aspirations as a writer in terms of the same metaphor of passing over into another mode of being, through, as he put it, "the wall of oblivion":

> But probably that's what he [the writer] wants, that really the writer doesn't want success, that he knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall--Kilroy was here--that somebody a hundred, a thousand years later will see.[6]

Language is that scratch on the wall, the opening to the timeless, "passionately eternal" world of art. Yet language can also be a barrier to the timeless, a killer of time rather than an escape through the wall that is process. And this pulsation between the word as promise of the eternal and the word as threat to life, between the talisman and the cliché, gives a rhythmic ebb and flow to the narrative of Mosquitoes. We hear the word oscillate between fulfillment and perversion.

If Gordon is the tragic hero in the stage-like portion of Mosquitoes, Fairchild and Wiseman play the role of Witness, interpreting and commenting on Gordon's silent actions.[7] The long verbal ex-

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[6]Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 61.

[7]Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style." In William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 151. Although he is not referring specifically to Mosquitoes, Beck makes this pertinent comment about Faulkner's style in general: "It is interesting to note that Faulkner's full style somewhat resembles older literary uses, such as the dramatic chorus, the prologue and epilogue, and the dramatis personae themselves in soliloquy and extended speech."

changes between the two men are choruses that confer meaning on Gordon's sufferings, which would otherwise be impenetrable silence to us. The lyric skill of the narrator is also a kind of choral voice, chanting the meanings that surround Gordon's marble torso, deftly implying that there are deeper meanings beyond the reach even of lyricism.

Mosquitoes, moreover, reveals Faulkner's changing priorities about voice and point of view. As in Soldier's Pay, the lyricism of the narrator in Mosquitoes articulates a great part of the book's theme, mood, and symbols--the marble torso's meaning is an example--but Faulkner is obviously more interested in presenting the phenomenon of the act of utterance itself, however fumbling or groping. The rendering of dialogue between fictive speakers composes a much greater percentage of the narrative in Mosquitoes than in his first novel. Thus the role of Gordon is important--he is the embodiment of the artist everyone is talking about--but the role of Witness is more important, because the hero's way is the pure act and the Witness's way is the word. Wiseman and Fairchild, the collective witnesses for Mosquitoes, take more of a risk than does Gordon. They are more prone to ridicule, to parody, to misunderstanding because they depend on the word to coax meaning from experience. When we hear the narrator's voice articulate the significance of Gordon's sculpture, we are confident we have the book's central symbol; when we hear Wiseman and Fairchild grope for the best word, fight off incoherence, switch topics in mid-sentence, wrestle with definitions of abstract subjects like art, we sense there is more at stake. We are in the presence of the living word struggling to be born, and it is painful and marvelous to watch.

The concrete form of Gordon's silence is the marble torso, his heroic act. The word is the medium of art for Wiseman and Fairchild, and they test its energy by probing its most sculptured form, the poem. At the heart of their lengthy dialectical exchange on the nature of art lie two poems that act as verbal counterparts to Gordon's sculpture. Fairchild reads both poems aloud, savoring the sounds of the words. The first is an obvious parody of T. S. Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," and its fusion of the images of "droppings" and "scented mouths" suggests some savage perversion of the act of utterance, like Melville's sharks bent like bows, devouring their own entrails "to be oppositely voided by the gaping wound."[8]

> "The Raven bleak and Philomel
> Amid the bleeding trees were fixed,
> His hoarse cry and hers were mixed
> And through the dark their droppings fell
>
> "Upon the red erupted rose,
> Upon the broken branch of peach
> Blurred with scented mouths, that each
> To another sing, and close--" (204)

Fairchild finishes reading and asks for a reaction. Wiseman sees the poem as a stillborn utterance, and calls it "Mostly words." (204) But Fairchild feels a "dark thing," and inscrutable power in the poem that speaks to him outside the syntax of the actual words he just read. "It's a kind of dark thing. It's kind of like somebody brings you to a dark door. Will you enter that room or not?" (205) The "dark thing" is the mysterious origins of language. Fairchild is more sensitive than

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[8]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or, The Whale, edited by Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. 395.

Wiseman to poetry's primitive roots in ritual, even magic, and his metaphor of the door as choice reveals his awareness of the poet's divine but dangerous gift, his choice of salvation or destruction. We think of Steiner's vision of the poet hammering on the door of the gods. To speak is dangerous, Steiner says, but to speak "with the utmost strength of the word, which is the poet's, supremely so."[9]

Fairchild knows that love of words is the divine fire, and his reading aloud of the poem is his act of faith in the primacy of the word: "That's when you hammer out good poetry, great poetry. A kind of singing rhythm in the world that you get into without knowing it, like a swimmer gets into a current." (205) Fairchild admits he is a failed poet, that the lyric grace, the "singing rhythm" is gone: "Words . . . that sheer infatuation with and marveling over the beauty and power of words. That has gone out of me." (205-206) Now the word inhibits him, and instead of love, the "sheer infatuation," there is only suspicion, the linguistic skepticism that Olga Vickery remarked on.[10] But his nostalgia for that lost grace is strong:

> "It's a kind of childlike faith in the efficacy of words, you see, a kind of belief that circumstance somehow will invest the veriest platitude with magic. And, darn it, it does happen at times, let it be historically or grammatically incorrect or physically impossible; let it even be trite: there comes a time when it will be invested with a something not of this life, this world, at all. It's a kind of fire, you know. . . ." He fumbled himself among words, . . . (206)

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[9]Steiner, Language and Silence, p. 39.

[10]Olga Vickery, "Faulkner's Mosquitoes," The University of Kansas City Review (Spring, 1958), pp. 219-220.

Fairchild fumbles the way Anderson fumbled with words on the bench with Faulkner, but Fairchild's voice--caught so well in the act of fumbling --manages to carry off the illusion of the immediacy of speech, of the pain behind every utterance that attempts to escape "the veriest platitude" and invest itself with "something not of this life." This is the paradox of Fairchild's position; he wants the word to escape the platitude, but the platitude itself is composed of words. The word in the act of escaping the limits of the word becomes both Fairchild's obsession and the widening concern of the novel as it approaches the Epigraph.

Fairchild then turns to the second poem which he feels has "something not of this life." It is a sonnet called "Hermaphroditus," and its Keatsian diction and suspension of polar opposites recalls the richness of the Romantic poetry of the past. As a sonnet, it looks backward to an older, and perhaps atrophied poetic form, and its reliance on mouth imagery--the organ of utterance--continues the first poem's concern with the possibility of the perversion of language. Fairchild reads the entire sonnet, of which the following is the concluding sextet:

> "Weary thy mouth with smiling; canst thou bride
> Thyself with thee and thine own kissing slake?
> Thy virgin's waking doth itself deride
> With sleep's sharp absence, coming so awake,
> And near thy mouth thy twinned heart's grief doth hide
> For there's no breast between: it cannot break." (208)

These two scenes--poetry readings, really--are like Chinese boxes; we hear the narrator analyzing Fairchild's analysis of the poem's voice, which is itself an echo of the voice of Keats. With these poetry readings, the word is called up to probe the possibility of escaping from the word. Language is turning back upon itself, which is the theme of

the poem Fairchild is reading. "'Hermaphroditus,'" says Fairchild. "That's what it's about. It's a kind of dark perversion. Like a fire that don't need any fuel, that lives on its own heat. I mean, all modern verse is a kind of perversion." (208) The word feeding on itself as it does in "Hermaphroditus" he calls a dark perversion, an attempt to escape process. There is present in this insight by Fairchild an incipient metaphor of incest which is a similar perversion that seeks to stop the natural flow of process. In an article entitled "Faulkner and the Exiled Generation," M. Rabi points out that incest "is associated with the joys of childhood, the innocence of the first days, the flight beyond the boundaries of time, and the escape from the world of suffering."[11] Fairchild's image of the perversion of the word in terms of fire unnaturally feeding itself looks forward to Quentin Compson's cherished fantasy of conjoining with Caddy in the "clean flame" of hell. That flame would burn eternally as a witness to the incest that provided his escape into the no-time of hell.

The two poetry readings and their concomitant questionings of the role of language in the creation of art appear in the center of the book's first long movement, the voyage of the Nausikaa. Fairchild's attempt to articulate the power of the word from the two poems occur at the nadir of the physical movement of the yacht, when it is aground on a sandbar. The two men's discussion--wandering at first--has assumed the form of a search for the source of the power of the word. Fairchild's

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[11]M. Rabi, "Faulkner and the Exiled Generation," in William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951), p. 136.

insight about the dark perversion of intensely imagined literature is the climax of a series of insights that have generated the illusion of intellectual progression precisely when the book's action is at a standstill, and when the talk that has been going on among the rest of the Nausikaa's passengers has conferred sterility on the word.

III

The silence before the word

This counterpoint between the sterility and fertility of language is one of the recurrent rhythms of Mosquitoes. All the while that Wiseman and Fairchild have been on their joint odyssey for the life of the word, two other characters, younger and less articulate, have been wandering through the swamp that surrounds the yacht in an abortive attempt to escape the social constrictions that abound there. David, the yacht's steward, and Pat, the niece of Mrs. Maurier, owner of the Nausikaa, return to the yacht, but not before their act of rejection has assumed the character of an unconscious journey to the origins of the life of language. As they wander deeper into the swamp and further from the sophisticated life style of the yacht, they unwittingly approach the primordial heart beat of creation itself. The great swamp, the womb of both animal and human life, is also the provenance of language. Here is the home of the unnamed mosquitoes, which we know from the epigraph are already "ubiquitous" and "monstrous" and have metamorphosed into a into a ripe silence for which the word that would name them is inadequate.

David and Pat confront the silent power of the mosquitoes, and then the power of silence itself. Without intending to, they stumble

into the primordial silence of the Word as it was in the beginning. The whole scene resembles Mrs. Moore's unwilling witness to the sound of the Mirabar caves in Forster's A Passage to India (1924), and what David and Pat see in the swamp is as central to the meaning of Mosquitoes as Mrs. Moore's perception of the meaningless "boum" she hears is to an understanding of Forster's classic.

> Trees heavy and ancient with moss loomed out of it hugely and grayly: the mist . . . might have been the first prehistoric morning of time itself; it might have been the very substance in which the seed of the beginning of things fecundated and these huge and silent trees might have been the first of living things, too recently born to know either fear or astonishment, dragging their sluggish umbilical cords from out the old miasmic womb of a nothingness latent and dreadful. She crowded against him, suddenly quiet and subdued, trembling a little like a puppy against the reassurance of his arm. "Gee," she said in a small voice.
>
> That small sound did not die away. It merely dissolved into the moist gray surrounding them, and it was as if at a movement of any sort the word might repeat itself somewhere between sky and ground as a pebble is shaken out of cotton batting. He put his arm across her shoulders and at his touch she turned quickly beneath his armpit, hiding her face. (139-140)

Pat and David's vision of the birth of language from the "old miasmic womb of a nothingness" overwhelms them, and they are driven out of this pre-Eden world as much by the frightening silence as the stings of the "needles of fire" that are the mosquitoes. (145) There is something sacred about the silence that confronts them in the swamp. The sound of their words seems a sacrilege, and the trees look down like "gods regarding without alarm this puny desecration of a silence of air and earth and water ancient when hoary old Time himself was a pink and dreadful miracle in his mother's arms." (143) When they return to the yacht we feel more strongly than ever that the redemption of the word

lies in its ability to divest itself of process, be born again into the ancient silence from which it sprang.

IV

The quest for the magic word

With the return to New Orleans, the journey to Lake Pontchartrain on the Nausikaa is over, but a new and more significant journey is about to begin. The second movement of Mosquitoes, much shorter than the Nausikaa episode, takes up the ninth section of the Epilogue, and it is here that we sense the great log jam of words that has thus far composed the book at last will break up, and that some statement about the role of language in the creation of art will be articulated. In this last part of the novel, moreover, Faulkner makes an attempt to integrate more successfully the act of human utterance and the image of human sexuality and reproduction. The metaphor of art and sexual fulfillment has been implicit throughout the sections dealing with Gordon's carving of a marble bust of a young female and his obsession with Pat. It is only in these later passages concerning Wiseman and Fairchild that Faulkner develops the symbol of the womb of time giving birth to language, with its ancillary image of the human mouth as a womb giving birth to the word. The implications of this rich symbol unfold with increasing complexity and imaginative power as Faulkner moves from novel to novel. Here in Mosquitoes, a decidedly inferior work to, say, The Sound and the Fury or Absalom, Absalom!, we can see that Faulkner regards the word in the act of being born as both part of the great wheel of process remorselessly turning, and an escape

from process, an immortal flight outside the wheel. To be born is to die, we know, but birth also confers a version of immortality on the progenitor, as every reader of Shakespeare's sonnets knows. The sonnets themselves urge the mysterious W.H. to beget progeny, but they also boast that the very words urging progeny are themselves eternal: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." Faulkner visualizes potential life and death in the power of language, and with Mosquitoes we are in a position to see that his fascination with creating a speaker in the act of articulation, suspended in a timeless moment like an embryo in a womb, is a quasi-religious act, his personal sacrament of the word. It is Faulkner's attempt to forestall the erosion of time while absorbing himself in the pulse of life.

To return to the quest motif that structures part of the Epigraph of Mosquitoes, we see Wiseman, Fairchild and Gordon wandering through the streets of New Orleans on a collective pursuit for a superior mode of expression, one that would bestow lasting life to their turbulent and inchoate imaginative energy. Somewhat like the wanderings of Bloom and Dedalus in Joyce's Ulysses, the journey takes place at night, they are drinking heavily, confront prostitutes, sense the hidden underworld life around them, and come to a series of doors that seem to promise some meaningful discovery. Gordon is the leader through these narrow "canyons of shadow," and it is his silence that grants him this authority. (277) But the quest is also a search for the right words to define the nature of art, and Gordon can only point silently to what he feels is its essence. Fairchild and Wiseman must

articulate the vision Gordon comes to experience, and they are thus both chorus and participants in the action. The witness evolves into the hero.

Gordon is like a torch bearer, throwing light on the "dark side" of the word that Fairchild had always felt was there. When Gordon jerks open a door on the street he lets a "sheet of light fall outward across the pavement;" when he shuts the door it "snatches the sheet of light again." (278) Gordon is Fairchild's eyes. His wordless actions resemble eyelids blinking open and shut, casting sharp outlines for Fairchild's imagination to sketch in. Still another door opens and shuts, and Gordon leads the revels carrying now a new bottle of liquor, which he shares with his two friends. The whole episode begins to resemble a Dionysian frenzy, a peeling away of inhibition so that the word can regain its naked power:

> (In a doorway slightly ajar were women, their faces in the starlight flat and pallid and rife, odorous and exciting and unchaste. Gordon hello dempsey loomed hatless above his two companions. He strode on, paying the women no heed. Fairchild lagged, the Semitic man perforce also. A woman laughed, rife and hushed and rich in the odorous dark come in boys lots of girls cool you off come in boys. The Semitic man drew Fairchild onward, babbling excitedly.)
>
> That's it, that's it! You walk along a dark street, in the dark. The dark is close and intimate about you, holding all things, anything--you need only put out your hand to touch life to feel the beating heart of life. Beauty: a thing unseen, suggested: natural and fecund and foul--you don't stop for it; you pass on. (277)

Beauty is the beating heart of life, Wiseman sees, and the way to beauty, which is an "unseen thing," is to "pass on," to move past the threshold that is process, which is "natural and fecund and foul." While Wiseman comes to the insight about passing on, Gordon continues his silent acts that test out possibilities of form. He seizes one of

the prostitutes and raises her against the "mad stars." (280) As he holds her there, both are silhouetted against still another open door, creating a vision of passing on which Wiseman sees as an "instant moment," and which the lyricism of the narrator strains to capture: "Then voices and sounds, shadows and echoes change form swirling, become the headless, armless, legless torso of a girl, motionless and virginal and passionately eternal before the shadows and echoes whirl away." (280) Gordon's final gesture is the culmination of his quest as an artist. The female torso that has metamorphosed into so many forms becomes for an instant of time-out-of-time the ideal form of art, Gordon's personal vision of the passing over to the timeless. As the door shuts behind Gordon and the street darkens, Fairchild and Wiseman are left alone for the task of articulating the role of the word in the creation of the art that Gordon's vision has given life to. Fairchild's statement is the verbal counterpart to Gordon's silent gesture, just as the two poems were to Gordon's marble sculpture. "Genius," says Fairchild, is "that Passion Week of the heart . . . with which the mind, the brain, has nothing to do at all, in which the hackneyed accidents which make up this world--love and life and death and sex and sorrow--brought together by chance in perfect proportions, take on a kind of splendid and timeless beauty." (281)

The Passion Week of the heart. Fairchild intuits the religious nature of the word "passion" which Gordon has so dramatically embodied in his own passionate gesture with the prostitute, raising her against the mad stars. While Fairchild ponders the goal of art--timeless beauty --Wiseman illuminates the problem of technique for the potential artist. Wiseman has been chanting to himself, at various moments in the ninth

section, three words which he "loves"--"gold, marble, and purple." (279) The three words combine to suggest a matrix of basic elements for the potential artist. After Fairchild finishes his Passion Week of the heart statement, Wiseman feels he has at last stumbled onto the "magic Word," a phrase used by a minor character, Mr. Talliaferro, in his own fruitless quest for meaning. (253) Wiseman's "Word" is really three words which he fuses together in his own syntactical arrangement: "form solidity color." The phrase acts as a kind of Open Sesame; it is Wiseman's final epiphany about the nature of art, and what he sees and how he says it are one. With Wiseman's magic Word--form solidity color--the quest ends.

Among the signs that indicate Faulkner's growing command of a full-length novel, we would want to number the dialectic exchanges between sets of fictive speakers, the counterpoint between sterile and fertile modes of expression, and the overall structure of a quest for the holy grail of art. But the book's silences--especially that of Gordon the artist--are its most potent elements, and the incipient quest for silence that we see in Mosquitoes looks forward more than does any other technique to Faulkner's major triumph to come--Quentin Compson's quest for silence in The Sound and the Fury.

CHAPTER THREE

QUENTIN AND THE QUEST FOR SILENCE

> O lovely green dragon of the new day,
> the undawned day, come, come in touch,
> and release us from the horrid grip
> of the evil-smelling old Logos! Come
> in silence, and say nothing.
>
> --D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse

I

Shortly after his stay in New Orleans, a period during which, as we have seen, he produced the New Orleans sketches and the first draft of Soldier's Pay, Faulkner began to write longer and more complicated prose fictions, each of which suggests a fresh assault on the restricted nature of the medium of literary art--words themselves. Partly because of his friend Anderson's pronounced skepticism with his medium, but more because of his own growing dissatisfaction with one genre of writing after another, Faulkner increasingly set up within the fiction a character who voices misgivings about the behavior of words. Whether these fictive speakers are merely eccentrics, like Dawson Fairchild in Mosquitoes, or potential suicides, like Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury, they come alive to the reader because of their special mode of inquiry into fundamental philosophic assumptions about the nature of language, especially the assumption that the spoken word is a viable medium for the communication of truth from one human mind to another. Their misgivings with the word express their need to communicate perfectly, to speak the "absolutely impeccable" language that Faulkner's ideal poet speaks. They feel only this ideal form of language would not betray experience.

Some of these fictive speakers make elaborate efforts to compensate for the limitations of verbal language by seeking alternate modes

of expression. Such efforts are inherently paradoxical in that the speaker would use words to create a mode of telling that would be free from the ambiguity, instability, and dissolution, to use Kenneth Burke's phrase again, that constitute part of the energy of the word. Paradox is the natural idiom of such speakers, and their quests are for some form of linguistic stasis in which they can speak the absolutely impeccable language, a language that is free from the sin (pecca) of words.

The voice of Quentin in The Sound and the Fury represents Faulkner's most ambitious attempt to push language beyond the threshold of its normal limits.[1] Apart from its important position in the novel as a whole, Section II is a monologue spoken by a character who expends his energy railing against the frustrating way that words behave. Quentin seeks a language safe from the erosion of process, just as the speaker in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" seeks an insight into the meaning of process by momentarily freezing its flow. The speaker of that poem is aware that his initiation into this moment of stasis--a moment in which the natural laws of sound are suspended so that a melodist may forever pipe songs forever new--depends on his ability to speak a new language, one that is not directed to the "sensual ear" but to the "spirit ditties of no tone." In his own strange way, Quentin feels compelled to undertake the quest for an unattainable grail--a language free from process whose linguistic properties would be sweeter precisely because they are "unheard," a language I am terming, after George Steiner, the language of silence.[2]

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[1]William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929, reprinted by Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1956).

[2]George Steiner, The Language of Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 46.

Steiner, speaking of various modes of transcendence of language, describes that moment when language "simply ceases, and the motion of spirit gives no further outward manifestation of its being." At such times, he continues, the poet "enters into silence. Here the word borders not on radiance or music, but on night."[3]

We hear Quentin's voice at just such a moment. His language, aspiring as it does to silence, borders on the night, in that indefinite twilight zone between living speech and the poet's wordless silence. Twilight, moreover, is an important symbol for both the novel as a whole and for the character of Quentin,[4] whose consciousness on this last day resides in a twilight already darkening into the long night of death: ". . . I could see the twilight again, that quality of light as if time really had stopped for a while, with the sun hanging just under the horizon, and then we passed . . . the road going on under the twilight, into twilight and the sense of water peaceful and swift beyond." (209-210)

II

Quentin and the wisdom of the "still tongue"

Because Caddy herself is not "reduced," we recall, to the act of telling, her language exists only as a possibility, a pure form of hypothesis. She is an ideal speaker--a "poet" in the sense of Faulkner's

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[3]Steiner, p. 46.

[4]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), p. 86. Millgate says that the "single most arresting fact about the manuscript of The Sound and the Fury is that the first page bears the undeleted title, 'Twilight.'" Millgate suggests that "Twilight" could easily substitute for the title of the whole book.

definition--and her absolutely perfect language is silence. Quentin's voice, on the other hand, is not a hypothetical one. It is actual; we hear it. But what we also hear in this long lyric cry which is his voice is the sound of words being arranged and rearranged by Quentin in the hope that a certain word or phrase might become the talisman that would carry his consciousness away from the realm of actual sounds, of pain, of words for pain, and into the realm of possibility where he could fulfill the role of ideal teller and speak that hypothetical language of silence. Quentin is very much aware that he has been "reduced" to the actual role of teller, and he seeks to escape from both his suffering and the compulsive need to verbalize about that suffering. His monologue is a voice in search of a surrogate language as much as it is the voice of a surrogate teller. We hear Quentin's voice hovering on the threshold of silence, and then it passes beyond the range of our hearing.

In section IV of the novel another masterful speaker, the Reverend Shegog, articulates so magical an arrangement of words that for a few short moments it seems he has the gift of tongues. He is like the ancient bard speaking to the tribe, and his utterance, the Easter Sunday sermon, succeeds in establishing a wordless communication with his hearers, a communion based on forgiveness and communal belief, while Quentin, solitary and unforgiving, fails. If Caddy is a hypothetical poet, the Reverend Shegog is an actual one; he loves both the Word and the word.

The Reverend Shegog's Easter Sunday sermon begins on a note of confusion of identity. His monkey-like appearance initially alienates all of his potential hearers except the perceptive Dilsey, who whispers to her daughter, Frony, "'I've knowed de Lawd to use cuiser tools dan

dat,'" (366) striking on a metaphor of voice as a tool that anticipates the way Faulkner would later talk about the creation of Dilsey herself.

The Reverend Shegog conceals his identity behind a mask of white man's speech. As the "sonorous echoes" of his voice increase, the mask comes off, revealing first a "negroid" voice and then an utterly new voice of wordless speech. At this instant of unmasking the hearts of the Reverend and the congregation speak silently to one another with a spiritual directness. The voice of Reverend Shegog consumes not only his own identity, but the identity of everyone within hearing: "the voice took them into itself." (368) At some point within the moment of stasis sustained by the unmasking, the Reverend Shegog's voice moves through two dialects of conventional language and then passes beyond the range of ordinary speech altogether:

> When the visitor rose to speak he sounded like a white man. His voice was level and cold. It sounded too big to have come from him and they listened at first through curiosity, as they would have to a monkey talking. (366)
> . . . . . .
>
> It was different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes. (367)
> . . . . . .
>
> With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words. . . . (367)

The sermon over, Dilsey silently hears other members of the congregation define the nature of Reverend Shegog's power in terms of vision: "He

seed de power en de glory." (371) Because his heart is open to the possibility of vision--to private glimpses of the power and the glory --the Reverend Shegog can lay claim to his own version of the gift of tongues. He sees into the life of things and so is privileged to speak the language of wordless communion. This quality of speech is what Quentin is looking for; he calls it the wisdom of the "still tongue." (146) But Quentin never speaks the language of the still tongue because he deliberately narrows his perceptive powers so as to exclude the possibility of vision. Quentin refuses to see; he will only listen, and his language expresses that blindness and passivity.

III

Quentin and the language of his brothers

Quentin's mode of speaking echoes that of his brother Benjy in the way both of these tellers apprehend the common subject of their tales--Caddy. Their individual conceptions of Caddy float inadvertently into their telling rather than preside at the center of the tale. Each brother sees Caddy not in her totality but in a truncated version which is framed within a special time spot. The time spots themselves are apprehended as free from the ravages of process, and each of these moments of stasis represents a transitional phase in Caddy's inevitable growth to womanhood, whether or not the particular teller understands or accepts the significance of these changes in his sister. Quentin, moreover, shares some of the clairvoyance of his younger brother Benjy, and so is fully capable of superimposing disparate glimpses of the past as if they were versions of the actual present. With less of the rigid

consistency of Benjy, Quentin responds to an experience unfolding within the flow of this actual present as if it were an extension of a similar experience of the past, which is what happens when he finds himself fighting with Gerald Bland. If Benjy is unaware that Caddy is the center of his tale, Quentin has such painful associations with his many separate images of Caddy that he spends most of his conscious telling desperately talking about something else. We have, then, still another curious affinity between the modes of telling of these first two tellers of Caddy's tale: Benjy does not know he is telling Caddy's tale and Quentin does not want to. And these are the two brothers who mean the most to Caddy. Jason, the third teller of Caddy's tale, talks almost exclusively about himself, and seems to relish the speed with which he dispatches Caddy from his telling.

Yet for all the similarities between the special languages of Benjy and Quentin, Quentin's voice anticipates many of Jason's idiosyncracies of speech. Although he does not exploit it to the extent that Jason does, Quentin has his younger brother's flair for irreverent parody, and his own prejudices sometimes flash out in a phrase Jason would appreciate. As Quentin walks into the bakery, for example, he glances at the Italian girl and silently parodies a line from the national anthem: "Land of the kike home of the wop." (155) With this kind of language we are not far from the crude categorizing of Jason's remark about the Jews: "'I have nothing against jews as an individual,' I says. 'It's just the race.'" (237) When Quentin and Shreve watch the Deacon strut along in a parade, Shreve remarks humorously that Quentin's grandfather really should not have held the likes of the Deacon

in slavery. Quentin's reply to Shreve seems to come right out of the mouth of Jason. "'Now he can spend day after day marching in parades. If it hadn't been for my grandfather, he'd have to work like whitefolks.'" (101) This from Quentin, who apparently has not lifted a finger in work his entire life. Jason offers more biting comments on the Negro, but at least Jason works.

In addition to certain similarities of speech, many of the special gestures Quentin makes anticipate those of Jason. Like his younger brother, Quentin often gives outward form to his frustrations by engaging in frantic bursts of movement. We see Quentin running from one trolley car to the next, journeying back and forth several times across the Charles River, sprinting from the Italian girl only to circle back unwittingly to exactly where he started. His two formal gestures to the art of gentlemanly defense--the fights with Julio and Bland--are as self-consciously quixotic as Jason's own confrontation with the wiry old man with the hatchet.[5]

IV

Quentin and the search for another language

The complexity of Quentin's voice goes beyond its structural function as a synthesis of two radically different modes of telling represented by Benjy and Jason. Section II is Faulkner's most sustained rendering thus far of a fictional speaker whose tale-telling is both an

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[5]Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 43. Miss Vickery sees Jason as a "modern Sancho Panza" and Quentin, by implication, as a Don Quixote.

analysis of the limitations of language and a conscious pursuit of a purer mode of speaking. Quentin is the successor to a line of fictive speakers who embody the paradox of the telling process, who would call on the word to escape from its restrictions--the pilot in "The Lilacs," Johnny in "Frankie and Johnny," Donald Mahon in Soldier's Pay, and the main speakers of Mosquitoes.[6]

Quentin's tale can be regarded as a search for another voice. In Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Marlow journies up the river and deeper into moral darkness, relentlessly driving himself onward in his own private search for another voice, the voice of Kurtz. "The man presented himself as a voice," says Marlow years later. Quentin's own search for a voice takes him across a river several times until he confronts the illusion of Dalton Ames's voice embodied in Gerald Bland. But Quentin's search is not nearly as successful as Marlow's. Quentin gives up the search in the Harvard bedroom where it began. His attempt to escape process by articulating a language which itself escapes process is a failure. While he is alive throughout his last day, his voice can only test out in one hypothesis after another the possibility of such a language of silence. He must confront the fluidity of words, concepts, meanings with the only weapon he has, words themselves. But then Quentin is one of the most skillful manipulators of words in all of Faulkner's fiction, and even if his quest is doomed from the start, his single-

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[6]A case could be made for Bayard Sartoris in Sartoris (1929), who, like Mahon, returns from the war unable to speak about his experiences. Bayard seeks an alternate language in the silent and mindless action of violence. He is as self-destructive as Quentin, but without the latter's cerebral energy.

handed battle with words is a splendid spectacle.

The range of Quentin's voice, first of all, is remarkable. Unlike Jason, who quotes only himself--"Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say"--Quentin's voice acts like an echo chamber within which an immense variety of voice reverberates. When we listen to Quentin's long sustained cry we hear present conversations merge with past conversations, real voices and voices imagined by Quentin, scattered phrases from Negro lore ("Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time"), fragments from the Bible ("Benjamin the child of mine old age held hostage in Egypt"), clichés ("I'll give you until sundown to leave town"), garbled formulas (the "reductio absurdum is equal to the something of the something"), wordless sounds ("WhoOoooo. WhoOoooooooooo"), abstract definitions ("man is the sum of his misfortunes"), bits of legend (". . . and Washington not telling lies"), formal, Latinate diction ("Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth . . . Liquid putrefaction"), colloquial idiomatic phrases ("the sparrow quit swapping eyes . . ."), proverbs, tall tales, parodies, and so on.[7] Quentin's voice is a formidable instrument with which to attempt to structure a hypothetical language, and his act of telling, like Anderson's telling of the dream, is more significant than the actual tale.

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[7]Olga Vickery, p. 31. Miss Vickery confers on these literary echoes the status of a ritual by which Quentin attempts to "conjure experience into conformity with his wishes."

V

Quentin's identity and the power of the word

From the first sound of his voice we sense that Quentin has staked the preservation of his identity on his ability to restrict the meaning of certain abstract words so that the particular word's multiple connotations will not inadvertently comment on his own precarious personal life. He is convinced that to survive from moment to moment he must prevent the word "virginity," for example, from stirring up again in his consciousness all the disastrous memories of Caddy's loss of virginity. If Quentin accidentally hears the word "virginity" either in conversation or within one of his many flashbacks to past conversations, his first reaction is to cut off the spreading connotations of the word by deliberately opening himself to other sounds. If there are no sounds immediately available, then he will conjure up sounds--a remembered conversation, a dog howling, a quotation from the Bible, any sound at all, as long as it blocks out for the moment the painful personal references Quentin feels have been accreting around this word ever since the Dalton Ames episode.

Quentin is both a moral and linguistic absolutist. His plight is in part revealed by his single-minded demand that the word for the concept of virginity have a strict, rigid meaning, and that the word itself should signify the presence of an equally unambiguous form of moral behavior. When Quentin returns to Mrs. Bland's car after escaping the clutches of Anse the sheriff, for example, he sees Gerald's girlfriends in the car and senses that behind the veils that hide their identity they breathe in that mysterious atmosphere of non-virginity. The realiz-

ation that these intriguing embodiments of femininity can flourish indifferent to the concept of virginity forces Quentin to ponder on the extent he has constructed his own sense of himself on the shifting sands of that concept and the word that stands for it:

> But still I couldnt stop it and then I knew that if I tried too hard to stop it I'd be crying and I thought about how I'd thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldnt be anything and if it wasnt anything, what was I and then Mrs Bland said, "Quentin? Is he sick, Mr MacKenzie?" (183)

If virginity is nothing but a word, and signals no identifiable life style, Quentin can justly question as he does here the implications for his own identity. Perhaps his identity is as fragile as a word.

There are other words that Quentin regards as vital to his notion of himself. "Harvard," like "virginity," has special significance; he regards the word as a surrogate for his own name. Just as little Maury was renamed Benjamin by his mother, with all the symbolic rejection that act implies, Quentin is called by Mrs. Compson "My Harvard boy," (114) a re-christening that virtually assures that Quentin will select Harvard as the setting for his own ultimate rejection.

"Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard harvard. . . ." (114) The phrase floats in and out of his thoughts, continually reminding him that his identity shares the same condition of flux that words do, and that he cannot bear this condition much longer. On one occasion a voice outside of his consciousness harshly underscores the fluid nature of his name: "'Go on away, Harvard!,'" cries one of the boys swimming in the creek. (171) Finally, the fact that Herbert Head, Quentin's hated rival for

Caddy's love, is also a Harvard man, and has succeeded in winning Mrs. Compson's enthusiastic approval, intensifies Quentin's reaction against the word "Harvard." When he eventually makes that leap from the bridge he is just as determined to drown the multiple connotations of the word "Harvard" as he is to freeze the normal flow of his own life. "I can be dead in Harvard," he says to himself just before his monologue ceases; the word "Harvard" he thinks is "such a fine sound" for the act of suicide itself. "A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound." (217) By the end of Section II we come to perceive Quentin himself as little more than a fine dead sound just before dissolving into a fine dead silence.

All this frantic manipulation of words like "virginity" and "Harvard" takes place behind the serene, gentlemanly exterior of Quentin's mask, which is his public voice. To the boys fishing in the creek this public voice sounds like a "coloured man," but it is really Quentin's own rendition of his father's voice--courtly, detached, ironic. Except for the reader, no one knows what inner turmoil this public voice hides, even Shreve. But the private voice speaking to itself behind the public mask we know is desperately trying to do many things at once. Quentin's private voice is compulsion itself, driven to fill up the vacuum of silence with some form of sound, to propose elaborate hypothetical escapes from his obsessions, to create entire conversations in his mind that never took place anywhere else.[8] The cumulative effect of all this--his

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[8]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 262. Faulkner insists rather strongly that Quentin's conversations with his father were "imaginary." "He said, If I were brave, I would--I might say this to my father, maybe he would answer back the magic word which would relieve me of this anguish and agony which I live with."

frustration with all forms of flux, for which language itself is a symbol--compells Quentin to seek a language free from flux entirely, and this search takes him beyond life itself.

VI

Quentin and the Bascombe-Compson voice

Much has been written about Quentin's "problem"--his fixation with death, his refusal to accept change, his fear of sex, his quixotic sense of honor and gentlemanly behavior. Those critics who stress the negative influence of each of his parents on the developing character of Quentin are surely correct. But the way in which we come to sense the influence of his parents on Quentin's character is not easily charted because both Mr. and Mrs. Compson exist in the monologue only as remembered voices conjured up by Quentin. As such they are facets of the same hallucinatory mind that is capable of reacting wildly with physical violence to the sound of a single phrase about sisters. Quentin's father and mother cannot be detached from the context in which they appear and held up as a case history of unwholesome parental behavior. It is clear, nevertheless, that Quentin defines his own situation by reacting to the two different voices of his parents. Quentin sees himself occupying a middle ground between their conflicting voices, compelled to engage in a dialectic that pits his voice against their collective voice. His father's voice is different from his mother's, of course, but both together represent threats to Quentin, and he feels he must raise his own voice against

each of theirs--the Bascombe voice and the Compson voice.[9]

Quentin recognizes in each of his parents an attraction to the finality of experience and an aversion to the ongoing ramifications of experience. His mother's ability to regard experience, especially painful experience, as an aspect of a closed past Quentin epitomizes in the word "finished," which she utters on several occasions, and which represents the antithesis of Quentin's conviction that the implications of certain moments of experience are never finished. Quentin chooses the word "was" to epitomize his father's categorizing of experience as if contained in separate blocks of time, each block cancelling out the meaning of the previous experience, each becoming something that merely was.

When Quentin confronts the remembered voice of his mother, the sheer flow of her words into his consciousness seems to Quentin to drone on without beginning or end. The long lyric wail of the Bascombe voice makes verbal response nearly impossible:

> what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough and now for her to have no more regard for me her own mother I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed I went down into the valley yet never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me I

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[9]Beverly Gross, "Form and Fulfillment in The Sound and the Fury," Modern Language Quarterly, XXIX (1968), p. 441. Miss Gross sees as part of the novel's overall movement a clash between the "Bascombe" and the "Compson" strains of family behavior. "We see the 'Bascombe' in the family triumphing more and more over the 'Compson.'"

> dont complain I loved him above all of them because of it because my duty though Jason pulling at my heart all the while but I see now that I have not suffered enough. . . . (127)

Mrs. Compson's voice as it is here imagined by Quentin needs no listener; it speaks only to itself, and excludes a potential answer from Quentin as effectively as Mrs. Compson excluded her oldest son from her life. Quentin has nothing to say to this endlessly whining Bascombe voice, just as he had nothing to say to his mother throughout his years at home. Mrs. Compson's attitude toward Caddy's loss of virginity marks the great difference between the ways mother and son evaluate experience. Unlike Quentin, Mrs. Compson is capable of "finishing" her response to Caddy's disgrace: "Done in mother's mind though. Finished, Finished," Quentin thinks. (125) He knows also that he himself is "done" in his mother's mind, and he hears again the Bascombe voice slipping into his consciousness, praying now that Jason "may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were." (128) The "others" are Jason's two brothers and Caddy. His mother's voiced wish that Quentin never were born sets off a complicated pattern of self-analysis in his mind: if his mother wishes he never was, then who is he?

Quentin never directly answers the Bascombe voice. Instead, he probes the implications of her words by constructing a series of word games in which he can test out--from a perspective of detachment and even of humor--what it would be like never to have been. He sees a hat on a man walking by, notes that the hat becomes bleached as it moves through process, and that he, Quentin, is no less subject to process than the hat. Thus the game of hat versus non-hat can be a safe way to talk about Quentin and non-Quentin: "Hats not unbleached and not hats. In

three years I can not wear a hat. I could not. Was. Will there be hats then since I was not and not Harvard then." (117)

If the sound of the Bascombe voice echoing in Quentin's mind provokes a desperately ingenious word game, the sound of the Compson voice calls Quentin to direct verbal confrontation. While the passiveness of the Bascombe voice precludes a listener, the Compson voice is naturally dynamic and argumentative; each represents a dissenting view from Quentin's own way of defining the nature of his identity in the context of time. In a more fragmented form than the Bascombe voice, the Compson voice intrudes into Quentin's consciousness even while he is listening to another sound. When he is looking at the street lights in Cambridge, for example, Quentin is really "feeling Father behind me beyond the rasping darkness of summer and August the street lamps." (119)

So persistent is Mr. Compson's verbal presence in Quentin's mind that a large portion of Quentin's monologue is composed of fragments that Quentin either imagines or remembers that "Father said." "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said." (129) The natural idiom of Mr. Compson's voice is an abstract definition that reduces the complexity of human experience to a mathematical equation. For the Compson voice, man is the "sum of his misfortunes," time is the "reducto absurdum of all human experience," (93) man is "the sum of his climactic experiences Father said. Man the sum of what have you. A problem in impure properties carried tediously to an unvarying nil." (153) The Bascombe voice deliberately excludes

pain from private memory; the Compson voice just as deliberately transfers private hurt to the safety of public, universal concepts. Mr. Compson, for instance, regards the disintegration of his family as a microcosom of that remorseless nihilism that he feels permeates all of human experience. Thus his provocative definitions represent dynamic points of verbal contact for Quentin's musings; long after the initial exchanges between himself and his father have taken place, Quentin is still answering, retorting, mulling over new responses to the implications of his father's words. Quentin is so determined to respond to certain of these implications that on occasion he will deliberately compose a hypothetical Compson voice in order to argue with it. It is at such times that we hear Quentin's private voice conjuring up a verbal dialectic that is not a flashback to a real conversation with his father in the past, but a completely hypothetical exchange. In this kind of controlled dialectic with an imagined form of the Compson voice, Quentin satisfies his need for vigorous retort; whole fragments of Section II are nothing more than fantasies of aggressive word play that the hapless Quentin was never capable of in real life.[10]

In the first few of these hypothetical dialectics, the Compson voice reveals itself as a formidable opponent, perhaps even a deliberately superior voice to Quentin's own. Quentin's ability to construct in his mind a voice with more argumentative force than his own seems consistent with his outwardly masochistic behavior: he has already provoked

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[10]Gwynn and Blotner, Faulkner in the University, p. 262. Again, Faulkner's insistence on Quentin's imaginary conversations is significant.

physical encounters with Ames and Julio, and here, within the scope of his imagination he seems to provoke the most damaging retorts from this Compson voice. Quentin often makes the Compson voice throw verbal darts at his own most cherished obsessions.

Quentin makes his initial contact with this hypothetical version of the Compson voice while he lies in bed listening to the Harvard chimes:

> . . . Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If he could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today and I said, You can shirk all things and he said, Ah can you. . . . (98)

Quentin's retort to the assertion that no meaning can survive the fatal corrosions of time, that nothing can remain very dreadful, seems rather lame. "You can shirk all things," he says to the Compson voice, meaning, probably, that a person has the choice of withdrawing from and thus shirking the consequences of the flow of time, thereby preventing the steady erosion of significance from a given act. "Ah can you," responds the Compson voice, and Quentin has nothing to say.

A more sustained encounter with this hypothetical version of the Compson voice involves the meaning of virginity in the context of process. The immediate outcome of this particular exchange for Quentin is a rapid crystallization of what Caddy means to him:

> Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it's like death: only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity, and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it, . . ." (96)

Quentin is confronting here the implication that his personal concept of virginity, around which he has constructed his own and Caddy's identity ("her who is unvirgin") is based on nothing more substantial than a word. "But to believe" in the concept, Quentin retorts, "it doesn't matter" if men did invent the state of virginity. Virginity, and by implication, the word for it, insists Quentin, is still a valuable reference point for the mapping of one's identity. Quentin shows here that he will not give up his hold on the notion that some words can mould experience, and even halt process. But again, the Compson voice seems more incisive.

Under the pressure of this dialectical clash with the Compson voice, Quentin gradually defines his identity. One exchange prompts another, and each opens up for us a new facet of Quentin's highly complicated personality. Later on in the day, when Quentin reaches the small bridge under which the uncatchable trout swims, he continues to probe at the meaning of virginity--and the virginity of words--by confronting once more a hypothetical form of the Compson voice:

> And Father said it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you dont know. You cant know and he said Yes. On the instant when we come to realize that tragedy is second-hand. (143)

To the challenge that nature--normal growth from childhood to adulthood--is "hurting" him, Quentin's response is "That's just words." Quentin's dismissal of the challenge is "just words" seems on the surface mere posturing by Quentin, a kind of intellectual whistling in the dark. But his dismissal of the power of words is really another

one of Quentin's masks; like the Yeatsian anti-self, his words create a polar identity to mask--and hence to define--his real self. And his real self, as we know, is very much aware of the power of words. On several occasions Quentin shows himself so much impressed by the power of words that he convinces himself that the saying of the word will automatically create the reality the word describes. When he learns from Caddy that she is "unvirgin," for instance, he threatens Caddy with telling their father that they have committed incest: ". . . we did how can you not know it if youll just wait I'll tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid . . . I'll tell Father then itll have to be. . . ." (185) If he mouths the word "incest" to his father, thinks Quentin, it will have to be; the word will transform verbalized hypothesis into accomplished fact. By retorting to the Compson voice that words are without power Quentin sets up the mask of his counter-self: a confident, aggressive Quentin, a Quentin who never was.

VII

Quentin and the language of hypothesis

Quentin's conviction that the saying of the word "incest" will induce actuality from hypothesis is a symptom of his ambivalent attitude toward language itself. Quentin is appalled at the way the meaning of certain words is just as subject to process as the particular experiences the words describe. At the same time he is fascinated by the way words can circumvent the erosion of process by positing a hypothetical realm of stasis. Like many of Faulkner's fictive speakers, Quentin's rhetorical posture is paradoxical. He is aware that voice is a dynamic,

ongoing phenomenon, yet he would attempt to freeze words under some form of stasis, of silence and no sound, of "conflict tempered silence reconciled." (211) The result of this paradox is Quentin's reliance on the language of hypothesis, a language aptly suited for probing the borderline between possibility and actuality, stasis and process, sound and silence. "Perhaps," "maybe," "if only"--these recurring phrases signal Quentin's absorption with the hypothetical. Quentin's voice is a prolific creator of possibilities, and each new hypothesis establishes a temporary sanctuary that provides his consciousness with escape from process, especially from the simultaneous erosion of the meaning of the word and the experience the word describes.

Quentin's analysis of the Deacon's use of the language of hypothesis illuminates for the reader Quentin's own understanding of its function. When Quentin finally meets the Deacon on the streets of Cambridge he silently recalls the Deacon's habit of asserting to everyone that he graduated from Harvard Divinity School: "And when he came to understand what it meant he was so taken with it that he began to retail the story himself, until at last he must come to believe he really had." (120) What initiated in Deacon's mind as a hypothesis, assumed for the purpose of increasing his sense of self importance, gradually evolved--by means of Deacon's continual telling--into an actual belief, a truth for the teller. Quentin's condescension toward the Deacon fails to conceal real envy of the Deacon's ability to use the telling process to create a truth; Quentin himself would like to "tell" a hypothesis until it became a truth he could believe in.

Quentin's preference for the language of hypothesis results in

some "truths" far more bizarre than the Deacon's graduation from Harvard Divinity School. When Quentin listens to the Harvard chimes from his bedroom, for instance, his thoughts take the form of a series of conditional sentences. "If things just finished themselves," Quentin muses, thinking of the continuing reverberations of Caddy's loss of virginity. "Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames." (97) We see here Quentin's imagination rapidly structuring a tentative reality from a sequence of hypotheses. First he posits a static mode of existence in which he and Caddy could remain forever safe from process; when the tension from these multiple "ifs" builds to a peak, he calls on the shock power of the word "incest" to obliterate the actual reality of Caddy's affair with Dalton Ames, replacing that hated actuality with the wish fulfillment of hypothetical incest.

The thought of Dalton Ames then triggers still another hypothesis, this one an hypothesis of ultimate denial: if only, Quentin thinks, he could have been Dalton Ames's mother . . . he not only would destroy Ames, he would interfere with Ames's own conception, making Ames a person who never was--the very wish Mrs. Compson once made about Quentin. "If I could have been his mother lying with open body lifted laughing, holding his father with my hand refraining, seeing, watching him die before he lived." (98) Quentin's powerfully imagined gesture of female denial prefigures a similar confrontation between Ike McCaslin and his wife in

"The Bear," when Ike's wife holds him back with one hand, offering her body and Ike's potential children in exchange for a promise from Ike. In both scenes Faulkner visualizes the female body as an incarnation of hypothesis. As Ames's hypothetical mother, Quentin can prevent the possibility of Ames's ever coming into existence. The whole weird sequence begins and ends in Quentin's mind with the phrase "if only," creating a circular pattern that epitomizes the progression of his thoughts. Like a pet hamster racing inside a wire wheel, Quentin's mind runs faster and faster but always ends up just where he started, speaking the language of hypothesis and living with the consequences of process.

Although Quentin is often capable of the kind of verbal self-hypnosis he displays in his role as Dalton Ames's mother, he can at times be detached and critical of the art of transforming hypothesis into a truth. One of the more fascinating aspects of his voice is the skill with which he can coolly analyze his own verbal extravaganzas in order to deduce rules about the behavior of voice in general. We have seen how Quentin analyzes the Deacon's own talent for transforming the possible into the actual by means of his role of teller. At a later time after the meeting with the Deacon Quentin is attracted to the shrill voices of a group of boys on a bridge fishing for that uncatchable trout. Quentin is an acute listener, and he soon perceives that the drift of their talk about the fish follows the same pattern he saw in the voice of the Deacon: a hypothesis told over and over will assume a reality that the teller accepts as truth. "They all talked at once," Quentin notes of the boys, "their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible

fact, as people will when their desires become words." (145) Quentin's generalization about people transforming possibility by putting their desires into words sounds so much like a remark his father would make that we can regard this assumed posture of detached skepticism as another one of Quentin's masks. The impersonal tone of Quentin's words shields him from the private implications of his own generalization, namely, that he more than anyone attempts to make of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then a fact, a truth, and that he believes he can transform hypothesis into actuality by bestowing to his inchoate desires the life-giving power of the word.

VIII

Quentin and the search for the language of silence

If we choose to join Quentin on the odyssey that forms his last day of life, we can accompany him only as a listener in complete communion with his remarkable voice. Quentin's voice flows on without cognizance of our presence, but the cumulative effect of his words creates a relationship between us and his voice that is similar to that between the Reverend Shegog and his congregation. Like the Reverend Shegog, Quentin's identity is "consumed" by the sound of his own voice, and at times he seems to be chanting to us "beyond the need for words." (367) This sense of communion is really the sign of the language Quentin is searching for--the language that has no need for words. But Quentin never fulfills his quest because he experiences no sense of communion, no visionary glimpse of "de power en de glory."

Quentin's quest for a new language is a failure just as his attempt

to tell Caddy's tale is a failure. To tell Caddy's story adequately, Quentin or any other surrogate teller would have to emulate the vantage point of her potential telling, a point which is poised on the threshold of sound and silence, somewhat like--recalling Keats's ode again--the piper who pipes ceaselessly to the ditties of no tone. But if the quest is not fulfilled, the imaginative power generated by Quentin's special mode of searching is its own success. Quentin's own act of telling--the entire monologue--is an attempt to fabricate a synthetic language out of the fragments of certain words, phrases, remembered or imagined conversations, hypothetical statements, definitions, and so on, and his sustained act of telling is more significant than the realization of such a language. However quixotic the gesture, we at least must concede that Quentin is conspicuously qualified to launch such a linguistic odyssey. We have seen the range of inner voices he can conjure up. Moreover, he is a keen listener to voices outside of his consciousness. As a Mississippian living in Massachusetts and hearing daily the voices of a Canadian, a Kentuckian, various Cambridge townspeople, and a Northern Negro among others, Quentin is keenly aware of the wide range of sound possible for even a single word. When he looks at an elm tree, for instance, he muses on the sound of the word, "Elm" and then adjusts his own pronunciation so that it mimics the idiom of a New Englander: "Elm. No: ellum. Ellum." (154) He savors the alien New England accent as if it were an exotic fruit. The incident is one of many signs of Quentin's acute sensitivity to the nuances of the spoken word.

Quentin's inner odyssey of linguistic discovery is paralleled by his outward journey along the roads, bridges, and trolley tracks of

Cambridge and Boston. His movements through Harvard Square and across these bridges provide a sequence of reference points that allow us to chart the various stages of his quest for the language of silence. That part of his quest that we actually hear--the complete monologue--begins and ends in Quentin's Harvard bedroom, and the first words we hear from Quentin as he lies in bed suggest that he is attempting to train his mind to apprehend reality almost exclusively in terms of voice. We see him initially so deeply concentrating on the act of hearing that he will not allow his eyes to register visual experience, especially the sight of the movement of time. Quentin may be an intense listener to the sound of clocks, chimes, and whistles, but he refuses to look at these artificial measurers of time. Quentin wakes up in his bedroom "in time again, hearing the watch," and then turns his back on the sight of the watch. His gesture of rejection prompts a nice discrimination in his mind between the act of listening and that of hearing: listening, he muses, involves a conscious, coherent effort; for the act of hearing, "You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it [the sound of the watch] can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear." (94) The act of hearing, in the sense Quentin is using it, is an intuitive, almost unconscious power of perception that can "create in the mind" a sudden illumination by means of sound--a kind of auditory insight that condenses into a new wholeness a specific period in the "long diminishing parade of time." Thus Quentin listens to the sound of his watch ticking in the present while he is hearing the sound of voices speaking from a point in that long parade of time:

> It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. (93)

Quentin is, of course, doing precisely what this remembered voice of his father warned against--spending all his breath and all his verbal skill trying to conquer the consequences of process. To Quentin, process has its own language. The sound of chimes, the ticking of clocks, the blowing of whistles are utterances without words. To escape process he must shut his ears to these voices of process, unlearn its language. Thus Quentin will hear voices from the past, like his father's voice, but he will only listen to the voice of process. Quentin's careful distinction between two kinds of auditory powers gives us a glimpse at the way he anticipates striking on that language which would be free from process. Throughout his quest we see him offering only surface attention to those perceptions that come to him by way of his "sensual ear," in Keats's phrase. Quentin directs his serious attention to his inner ear, waiting hopefully for the possibility of an auditory insight to flash in his mind, creating "in a second" the "unbroken" epiphany--the parade of time he never heard before.

We can participate in Quentin's quest, then, by seeing him not as one who tests out new ways of saying but new ways of hearing. Quentin looks to some form of sound for the talisman that would take him beyond the threshold of ordinary speech. The quest itself takes him from one

adventure perceived as sound to another, and Quentin confronts in rapid order the voices of time in the form of his watch, the Harvard chimes, the voices of the Deacon and of the boys fishing, the sound of the bees, the silent gestures of the Italian girl, and the voice of Dalton Ames embodied in the physical presence of Gerald Bland. After this last Proteus-like encounter, Quentin journies back across the river to his Harvard bedroom where it all began.

Quentin's quest is already underway when we see him listening to the ticking of his watch and hearing the voice of his father speaking in a remembered version of a past moment. Quentin then removes the hands from his watch. Shorn of its distracting visual power, his watch now speaks a more concentrated form of voice; it does not have the "contradictory assurance" that those lying watches in the jeweller's shop have. (104) After eating breakfast at Parker's, Quentin buys two six pound flatirons and takes a trolley to a bridge over the Charles River. As he gazes at the water beneath the bridge, he sees his shadow looking back at him. But he refuses to perceive this Narcissus-like image as a visual object, choosing instead, as he did with his watch, to regard the shadow as a form of voice. The shadow speaks in the idiom of Negro folklore: "Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time." (111)

Quentin then walks off the bridge and returns to Harvard by trolley to continue his search for the Deacon, whom Quentin thinks of as a speaker of oracles. Quentin is especially fascinated by the Deacon's ability to assume any accent of speech ranging from Northern to Southern, white to Negro; moreover, the Deacon, like Quentin, is a keen listener

to voices himself: ". . . once he had heard you speak, he could name your state." (119) When Quentin finally does speak with the Deacon, he senses that the old man has a public voice that masks his identity very much like his own mask, and that the Deacon's public voice is composed of "whitefolk's claptrap." But behind the mask, Quentin recognizes the real Deacon as a "secret, inarticulate, and sad" person. (123) Because of the Deacon's hidden inner core of inarticulateness, Quentin concludes that this black caricature of the ancient Nestor has little wisdom to pass on to him, and he begins again his quest.

Quentin boards another trolley and rides to the countryside, where the coolness and quiet of a shaded walk create for him a special atmosphere of silence. "Even sound seemed to fail in this air, like the air was worn out with carrying sounds so long," he muses. (140) The silence he experiences as almost tangible extends to a nearby bridge, and the sanctity of the place appeals to Quentin. The bridge will be the setting for his actual jump to death and for his symbolic attempt to thrust himself beyond the reach of process. It is here that he decides to hide the flatirons. He then peers down into the water and sees--if we may return briefly to that scene in which the boys fish for the uncatchable old trout--still another shadow in the water: ". . . a fat arrow stemming into the current." (144) Quentin perceives the trout as an apotheosis of himself. The trout hangs "delicate and motionless" in its watery element, the way that Quentin would like to suspend himself in the "clean flame" of another mode of being, free from change. "If it could just be a hell beyond that, Quentin muses, "the clean flame the two of us more than dead." (144) The fat arrow points the way to

the possibility of another mode of being and another mode of language. Silence and wordlessness preside in these cooling waters below the bridge, and the life force of the trout beckons Quentin to leave behind the world of process completely.

Quentin is not the only person who is teased out of thought by the possibilities the trout seems to suggest. As we have seen, several boys are also eyeing the same motionless shadow in the water. At first Quentin hears only discord and conflict in their voices. But the "contradictory" and "impatient" strains of their individual voices quickly move toward a synthesis; their collective voice transforms unreality to possibility, to probability, and then to fact. Because their words create a truth out of mere hypothesis, their individual voices establish a communion in which all conflicts of sound, all contradictory strains are harmonized into silence--for an instant, their voices achieve the wisdom of the "still tongue." Quentin sees that in this moment of speechless communion ". . . the acrimony, the conflict, was gone from their voices, as if to them too it was as though he had captured the fish. . . ." (146) Quentin ponders the efficacy of the language of hypothesis he has just witnessed in these young, uninhibited speakers. As he was with the Deacon, Quentin is condescending but also envious: "I suppose that people, using themselves and each other so much by words, are at least consistent in attributing wisdom to a still tongue. . . ." (146) It is just this wisdom of the still tongue that Quentin himself seeks and the stilling of his tongue in death, he thinks, will be his watery initiation to the wisdom of the language of silence.

After the voices of the boys fade away, Quentin is drawn to a new sound. "In the orchard the bees sounded like a wind getting up, a sound caught by a spell just under crescendo and sustained." (151) The sound of the bees is to Quentin another auditory insight. The wordless buzz "just under crescendo" and seemingly without end or beginning seems to prefigure the way he expects the language of silence to function. The sound of the bees is paradoxical--it seems to increase and diminish simultaneously, forever buzzing tones forever new. "The sound of the bees diminished, sustained yet, as though instead of sinking into silence, silence merely increased between us, as water rises." (153) Silence increases as water rises. Like the trout-arrow pointing to the watery veil beyond which lies the possibility of a new mode of speaking, the sound of the bees becomes to Quentin an audible sign that the hypothesis of wordless speech can be made a truth, and that the initiatory rite for the speaker of such a language would be water.

Quentin takes a tentative step closer to the kind of wordless communion he saw--from a detached perspective--evolving among the boys fishing from the bridge when he strikes a temporary alliance with the silent Italian girl whom he meets in a bakery. Between Quentin and this small waif there is a minimal exchange of conventional language. Quentin asks her several questions about her identity but she returns only silent stares. Nonetheless Quentin is attracted to her silence as much as any quality, and he quickly identifies with her situation--they are both, at least, outsiders wandering far from their respective homes. Quentin characteristically seeks an audible symbol for their unspoken rapport, and he tells the skeptical woman in charge of the bakery that

the bell over the door "rang once for both of us." (156) The quality of sound from this bell seems to Quentin to promise a meaning hidden just beyond the range of his hearing. He senses that the bell is trying to toll him away from his sole self: "When you opened the door a bell tinkled, but just once, high and clear and small in the neat obscurity above the door, as though it were gauged and tempered to make that single clear small sound so as not to wear the bell out nor to require the expenditure of too much silence in restoring it when the door opened upon the recent warm scent of baking." (155) The bell, like the sound of the bees, is another hypothesis about language; its ringing is a paradox, its sound gauged as if to preserve and expend silence simultaneously.

We can see Quentin at this stage of his quest attempting to preserve an equilibrium between sound and silence. He seeks an auditory insight, yet one which does not expend too much silence. As he walks along with his silent companion hoping to return her to her home, he fears increasingly that too much silence is being expended. The girl says nothing to his questions about where she came from, and she remains nameless throughout their sojourn together. Quentin brings her to a house with "no movement" apparent, only a garment hanging from an upper window in "no wind." He signals his presence by means of a "bell pull with a porcelain knob," but it makes no sound. (163) The woman who does answer can only say that her language is inadequate: "'No spika.'" Quentin views this aimless search for the girl's home with increasing anxiety. He fears that the equilibrium between sound and silence is in danger of being upset, and his next hypothesis has

an air of desperation about it:

> We went on. The houses all seemed empty. Not a soul in sight. A sort of breathlessness that empty houses have. Yet they couldnt all be empty. All the different rooms, if you could just slice the walls away all of a sudden Madam, your daughter, if you please. No. Madam, for God's sake, your daughter. (164)

Quentin interrupts his hypothesis about slicing walls away to engage in an uncharacteristic burst of action. He runs away from the girl, frantically climbing walls and running down empty streets, only to find himself precisely where he started--facing the silent girl still chewing her bread, as if there had been no flight at all. With a new awareness of the futility of his situation, Quentin walks together with the girl once more in silence. "We went on in the thin dust, our feet silent as rubber in the thin dust." (167)

Shortly after Quentin's abortive flight, the girl's brother, Julio, pounces on Quentin. The instant of the attack triggers a cluster of auditory insights for Quentin: the girl can speak, after all, and speak English. "'There's Julio,'" she cries. (172) Moreover, Quentin learns that he, the seeker, has himself been sought for as the abductor of the girl. Finally, the sheriff, Anse, orders Quentin to "make that gal shut up that noise," when all along he had been trying unsuccessfully to make her speak. (174) Quentin's only vocal response to these accumulated ironies, like Darl's response in As I Lay Dying, is a paroxysm of laughter.

After Quentin is cleared of the abduction charges, he returns to Mrs. Bland's car, where, as we have seen, the "unvirgin" girls hide their identity behind veils, just as their real natures are effectively clouded

by Quentin's rigid concept of the word "virginity." As he listens to Mrs. Bland's voice drone on about her son's conquests of various virgins, Quentin begins to hear a more compelling voice--the voice of Caddy, and then of Dalton Ames, the conquerer of Caddy's virginity. The gradual blurring of syntax in Mrs. Bland's voice signals Quentin's growing absorption by these voices from his past. ". . . what book did you read," he barely listens to her say, "that in the one where Geralds rowing suit of wine was a necessary part of any gentlemen's picnic basket. . . ." (185) Quentin perceives Mrs. Bland's voice as an indistinguishable monotone because he is at this moment hearing Caddy say to him of her lovers, "When they touched me I died." (185) In this most sustained flashback to a time in his past, Quentin makes two utterly futile gestures: he demands of Caddy that she deny her attraction to Dalton Ames, and he demands of Ames himself that he behave according to Quentin's own rigid concept of honor. He is rebuffed on both counts. But it is typical of Quentin's fascination with voice that he remembers both scenes of rejection--the first with Caddy by the creek, the second with Ames on a small bridge--solely in terms of verbal exchange. Many moments in the novel, in fact, are patterned after these two scenes--the sound of words in some dialectic clash juxtaposed to the silence of water. Language, Faulkner seems to be saying, is at its most intense level of vitality just as it is brought to the verge of a plunge into silence.

When Ames gives his cynical reply to Quentin's request that he respect Caddy's honor, Quentin impulsively strikes at Ames, and it is at this moment in the present that he begins to fight Gerald Bland.

Quentin is beaten physically by Bland while his consciousness suffers all over again the emotional beating he received from Ames's phrase, "theyre all bitches." All the details from that scene on the bridge with Ames now float into his awareness, and each detail Quentin perceives as a sound. He recalls regaining consciousness after fainting in his opponent's arms: ". . . I could hear my blood. . . ." (200) Then he hears again the sound of Caddy riding to his rescue, in an ironic reversal of roles: "I heard the horse coming fast I sat there with my eyes closed and heard its feet bunch scuttering the hissing sand and feet running and her hard running hands fool fool are you hurt. . . ." (201) But when he opens his eyes, he sees not Caddy but Shreve, who unknowingly repeats Caddy's gesture by helping Quentin to his feet. At this point he can see that his past humiliation at the hands of Ames has just been duplicated by the physical thrashing he received from Bland, and that both confrontations further underscore the futility of his situation.

Quentin now sees his quest as a complete failure. The series of auditory insights have resulted in tentative promises--especially as realized in the sound of the bees and the tinkling of the bakery bell--but no actual breakthrough into the possibility of speaking another mode of language. Quentin then begins to complete the circular movement of his quest by returning to his Harvard bedroom, and boards a trolley that will take him across the Charles River again. "We crossed the river. The bridge, that is, arching slow and high into space, between silence and nothingness. . . ." (212) He senses that the momentum of his journey is repetitive rather than progressive;

even the lights on the bridge seem to be "repeating themselves" in yellow and red and green. When he enters his bedroom it is already dark, and the significance of his last trip over the bridge flashes into his mind in a radically concentrated form of syntax:

> seeing on the rushing darkness only his own face . . . when out of darkness two lighted windows in rigid fleeing crash gone his face and mine just I see saw did I see not goodbye the marquee empty of eating the road empty in darkness in silence the bridge arching into silence darkness sleep the water peaceful and swift not goodbye (214)

The syntactical pattern of this passage tells us something about the state of Quentin's mind. It is open-ended, having no formal beginning or ending, no commas or periods. The words evoke fluidity without a corresponding sense of progress. His mind is moving, in short, but getting nowhere. The passage has verbals ("seeing," "rushing," "going," "fleeing") but no complete verbs except those arranged to cancel each other out: ". . . I see saw did I see. . . ." The verbals hold in check the natural forward movement of a sentence just as effectively as the several oxymorons, like "rigid fleeing," relegate the nouns to a state of paralysis. It is clear that Quentin sees the bridge as a symbol of his mind, which he imagines as arching away from process, like the bridge, toward "silence darkness sleep the water." The bridge, we know, is also the outward form of his upcoming escape from process. But Quentin's syntax suggests both an approach and an avoidance of that silence on the other side of the bridge. His syntax is a paradigm of his static life-style; instead of moving across the bridge, he jumps from it.

Once inside his darkened bedroom, Quentin forms his mental im-

pressions from primal impulses like his sense of smell and touch. He says he can "see" the gasoline odor on his vest, and "see" the door with his hands. He then walks down a dark and empty corridor to the bathroom, and recalls how he used to feel his way down the dark hall of his home: ". . . I would have to get up and feel my way like when I was a little boy hands can see touching in the mind shaping unseen door Door now nothing hands can see. (215) The image suggests that Quentin feels himself on the verge of some illumination, some opening to another mode of being which would release him from darkness. Quentin is the archetypal blindman here, seeing with his hands, shaping in his mind an unseen door. He is the antithesis of the Reverend Shegog, whose ability to transcend verbal language by words is dependent on his visual power: "I sees de light en I sees de word, po sinner!" (368) Quentin sees only darkness; he averts his eyes from the glare of "de word."

As Quentin returns to his room along the same corridor, he thinks of the unseen Door in terms of death itself. As a child he had always imagined death as a familiar and friendly voice emanating from a darkened room in his home--the room of his dead grandfather. The condition for opening the door to this room to hear the friendly voice is silence:

> It used to be I thought of death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a kind of private and particular friend like we used to think of Grandfather's desk not to touch it not even to talk loud in the room where it was I always thought of them as being together somewhere all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them waiting on a high place beyond cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking out across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right. (218-219)

Quentin wants to speak the same language that his grandfather is "always talking," and the unseen Door of death is the entrance to that mode of speaking.

At this point Quentin feels he has the relentless flow of process under his control because he knows exactly how much longer he will be a captive of process. "A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be." (216) As the Harvard chimes begin to measure out the last moments of his life, Quentin experiences the last and most significant of his auditory insights, this one coming to him in the form of his final dialectical encounter with the Compson voice. The dialectic movement here is toward some illumination, and the exchanges by both the Compson voice and Quentin's dissenting voice are sprinkled by phrases like "that's it" and "now were getting at it" which contribute to the illusion that Quentin is coming closer to a final discovery, a last opening of the unseen Door. The dialectic itself Faulkner writes in a style that reminds us of the Molly Bloom section of Ulysses;[11] only the phrases "and he" and "and i" indicate the difference between the Compson voice and the voice Quentin adopts to dissent from that voice:

> and i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldnt have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you have committed incest otherwise and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been (219-220)

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[11]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner, p. 97. Millgate sees other affinities with Joyce's Ulysses; Quentin, he suggests, is a version of the artist, "or at least the aesthete, as hero."

Under the pressure of this imaginary encounter with the Compson voice, Quentin lays bare his unique notion of his existence. The entire monologue can be read as an attempt by Quentin to isolate Caddy out of the loud world. Quentin's fury, in short, is aimed at sound. By so isolating Caddy, the sound of all that has hurt him, Ames's voice, his mother's voice, Herbert Head's voice, and so on, would be "as though it had never been." By evoking the language of silence Quentin had hoped to transform the "loud world" of <u>was</u> into a new and different <u>is</u>.

Quentin continues to confront the implications of the Compson voice. When that voice theorizes that ". . . you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead," Quentin can only retort with one word: "temporary." (220) Quentin is amazed that his father can so glibly characterize the state of his son's mind as "temporary," and Quentin can only repeat the word dully for each new statement by the Compson voice. He knows too well that his state of mind is anything but temporary, and that his entire quest on this last day has been an effort to deny the temporary. Quentin repeats the word "temporary" four more times, and each utterance of the word signals his deepening conviction that there is an immense gap between his own and his father's idea of himself. The dialectic comes to an end when the Compson voice defines Quentin's plight in terms of the word "was," varying a line from Whittier ("For of all sad words of tongue or pen,/ The saddest are these: It might have been!"). The word "was" is even sadder to the Compson voice:

> and i temporary it will be better for me for all of us and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another mans wellbeing and i temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was (221-222)

The dialectic ends just as the last note of the Harvard chimes fades into silence. When the chimes finally stop vibrating, Quentin puts on his vest, brushes his teeth, and walks out of our hearing.

IX

A number of readers of The Sound and the Fury have seen in the many quixotic gestures of Quentin qualities of behavior generally associated with the dark, guilt-ridden heroes of Romantic literature. At least one critic has characterized Quentin as a "romantic," although she does so to support an interpretation of Quentin as a figure doomed to love a more "chivalric and aristocratic Southern past."[12] My own interest in Quentin as a romantic hero is based on different strains of the complex and illusive phenomenon we call Romanticism. Mario Praz offers a succinct definition of that aspect of Romanticism that I feel is conspicuously relevant to both Faulkner's conception of Quentin and his growing interest in the verbal artist's relation to his medium. "The essence of Romanticism," Praz says, "comes to consist in that which cannot be described. . . . The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his dreams--the poet ecstatic in front of a

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[12]Louise Dauner, "Quentin and the Walking Shadow: The Dilemma of Nature and Culture," Arizona Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1965), p. 160. See also Robert M. Slabey, "'The Romanticism' of The Sound and the Fury, Mississippi Quarterly, XVI (Summer, 1963), pp. 152-157.

forever blank page, the musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to translate them into notes. It is romantic to consider concrete expression as a decadence, a contamination."[13] If Praz's definition holds for the essence of Romanticism, then Quentin is indeed a romantic hero; Quentin may not be ecstatic in front of the blank page, but he is surely ecstatic on the threshold of speaking a language free from the constricting form of words.

Sartre once said that to speak is to act, and so everything that we name thereby loses its innocence, becomes part of our world, part of process.[14] Quentin sees his own plight in very much the same way; he feels that the words of things are just as contaminated by flux, by the terrifying sound of process, as the things themselves. But if Quentin sees the "concrete expression" of his telling as a "contamination," to some extent Faulkner does also. It was Faulkner, we recall, who felt that the nature of Caddy was "too beautiful" to be "reduced" to telling her story and thus be contaminated by the "concrete expression" of that telling.

Quentin, then, is Faulkner's most articulate spokesman for both his own dissatisfaction with classic forms of literature and for his fascination with, in Praz's phrase, "that which cannot be described"--the ineffable. Quentin can also be seen as a dramatized version of the plight of Faulkner's former master, Sherwood Anderson, who as an artist

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[13]Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (New York: Noonday Press, 1956), p. 14.

[14]Jean-Paul Sartre, What Is Literature?, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 38-65.

always felt that he could never--despite tortuous efforts--give material form to his dreams by means of words. The Sound and the Fury in general, and the Quentin section in particular, suggest that as a prolific user of words Faulkner himself does not aspire to silence; instead he creates consistently and with increasing complexity fictive speakers who themselves aspire to silence. How the next cluster of fictive speakers--especially Darl and Addie in As I Lay Dying and Quentin and Rosa in Absalom, Absalom!--represent new experiments by Faulkner with the phenomenon of language and the role of the verbal artist will be the subject of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SILENT COMMUNION BETWEEN DARL AND ADDIE IN AS I LAY DYING

The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.

--Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar"

The speaker listens while the hearer speaks.

--Walter J. Ong, S.J., The Barbarian Within, Chapter Four.

I

I have suggested that Quentin's private search for a way of uttering the ineffable without resorting to the constricting nature of words represents Faulkner's own version of the Romantic paradox in which the intensity of the artist's vision was felt to diminish with the act of articulation, like so many fading live coals, to use Shelley's analogy.[1] The generative tension within Quentin's voice, moreover, I attribute to the unspoken interdependence of his and Caddy's role as teller. Quentin's plight--especially his revulsion from process and the erosion of the word within process--comes alive for us as readers because of the stark contrast between Quentin's reluctant reliance on the word for his actual telling and his determination to pass over to another mode of telling, one in which a silent, wordless language could survive, and for which Caddy's hypothetical telling is a silent promise. The tension, moreover, between Quentin's actual words and the potentially purer form of telling represented by Caddy's silence is in a sense another version of the dialectical encounter between two characters who attempt to pass over to a mode of speaking which is purer than words.

We can say, then, that with the writing of The Sound and the Fury (1929), Faulkner saw rich possibilities for his art in the rendering

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[1]Percy Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in The Selected Poetry and Prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1951), p. 517. ". . . for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, . . ."

of pairs of fictive voices who speak not in the vacuum of a monologue, but within the context of a speaking and listening counterpart to that voice. Faulkner himself always regarded Quentin's voice actively confronting a listening presence. "Quentin was still trying to get God to tell him why, in Absalom, Absalom! as he was in The Sound and the Fury."[2] Although we may not feel that it is really God whom Quentin is addressing, God does exist outside the claims of process, and Faulkner's casual remark at least suggests the radically different realms of being Quentin is attempting to bridge by means of the word. My own inclination is to see Quentin trying to get Caddy to tell him why his language must be rooted in process and her language is not.

The act of human utterance, moreover, becomes after The Sound and the Fury the subject of increasingly subtle analysis in the fiction, sometimes reminding us of Proust's manner by the single-minded intensity with which Faulkner pursues each new perception of the way the human mind articulates words or hears words from another speaker. The problem of the power and the weakness of the word raised by Anderson on that bench in New Orleans years before becomes in the two novels, As I Lay Dying (1930) and Absalom, Absalom! (1936), the urgent concern of each major character. We can also say, to take a longer view for the moment, that Faulkner's most characteristic organizing principle for both these novels and The Sound and the Fury is a dialectic exchange between speakers who are paired in complex and constantly shifting relationships, in which the

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[2]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 275.

tension is generated not so much between the teller and his tale, as in "The Lilacs" and parts of Soldier's Pay and Mosquitoes, but between two speakers who share the burden of telling a tale whose nature perhaps neither teller understands, or between two speakers whose tale represents a possibility for telling rather than an actual tale. At this point we can note that the kind of human utterance that fascinates Faulkner the most is one replete with paradox--a speaker aspiring to silence, for example, is in effect attempting to cancel out his own utterance. That such an attempt represents a form of linguistic suicide suggests why, perhaps, Faulkner is so fond of speakers who imagine themselves on the edge of some kind of self-destructive act, like Darl Bundren and Quentin Compson, or who have already been released from the bonds of process, like Addie Bundren and Thomas Sutpen.

As I Lay Dying, Faulkner's next extended dramatization of the inadequacy of the word, is a book with so many "centers" that some have seen only confusion.[3] James Guetti calls its main flaw "structural disorder."[4] Walter Slatoff is the most articulate of those who despair of ever knowing "what the book is chiefly about."[5] Richard P. Adams says that "no single pattern or point of view dominates or governs the whole."[6]

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[3]William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930, reprinted by Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1957).

[4]James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 148.

[5]Walter Slatoff, Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 159.

[6]Richard P. Adams, William Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 82.

Most readers agree that the search for the precise center of interest in As I Lay Dying is frustrating because the center is so illusive. My own way of looking at the book's overall form is to regard its main structural principle not as "disorder" on the one hand or anything so clear cut as "linear" on the other (Olga Vickery's term),[7] but as rotating sets of communions between pairs of speaker-hearers, each of which forms a radial offshoot from the central axis which is the special communion between Addie and Darl. The relationship of intimate understanding between these two characters amounts to a private, wordless language. The book conveys simultaneously a sense of motion and stasis. Darl calls Addie the "rim" of a wheel, but she is also the axis, the unmoving center, and his ability to communicate with her silently places him in that center. Thus the journey to Jackson seems to be moving forward and going nowhere at the same time.

More than anything else, As I Lay Dying is a novel about language, and a passage spoken by one character, Vernon Tull, epitomizes the office of language in the narrative as a whole. As in The Sound and the Fury, a formal utterance by a preacher to his congregation sets up an ideal standard of language with which we can judge the verbal performance of each speaker. The funeral oration by the Reverend Whitfield, like the Reverend Shegog's Easter Sunday sermon, begins just as a hymn is ended, and his words seem to draw strength from the lyric grace of this dying song. His congregation initially hears his actual words, but gradually

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[7]Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959 and 1964), p. 55. Miss Vickery also sees the novel in terms of a "centrifugal as well as linear" progression.

each of his listeners seems to hear a silent language beyond those words. In the course of Tull's account of this collective passing over into the language of silence, he articulates a metaphor that circumscribes the problem of language in the book. The ideal speaker, we learn from Tull, is a paradox. He must fuse together two divergent forces--the life of the word and the living deed:

> The song ends; the voices quaver away with a rich and dying fall. Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad. Somebody in the house begins to cry. It sounds like her eyes and her voice were turned back inside her, listening; we move, shifting to the other leg, meeting one another's eye and making like they hadn't touched. (86)

Reverend Whitfield's voice is "bigger than him" (again we are reminded of the Reverend Shegog's voice, which consumed his identity), and the power of his language permits him to ride the two horses as if on one saddle, fusing word and deed.

Addie's plight is that she attempts to ride this same metaphorical horse. When alive, she saw the word "go straight up in a thin line," while the deed, the living experience, went "along the earth, clinging to it." (165) Addie feels that the horse cannot be mounted: ". . . the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other." (165) But Whitfield does straddle them, at least for a moment, and his words act to carry other minds into the realm of wordless communion.

There is another complex analogy that Faulkner develops to direct our attention to the issue of language in As I Lay Dying.

Riding a horse has traditionally been an image of sexual union. The act of faith in language that we see the Reverend Whitfield make with his listening congregation, a sacrament, really, has also its sexual counterpart. The Reverend Whitfield is indeed a sexually powerful figure, and his union with Addie was a shedding not just of clothes, but of empty meaningless words. Their union was an affirmation of the naked force of language. The corollary to this deliberate fusion of sexual prowess and verbal grace is that the solitary speaker, like Darl, for example, whose voice seeks in vain verbal communion, is in some way sexually crippled. His language moves not toward sacrament but sacrilege.

Each of the major characters of As I Lay Dying is concerned in his own way with the notion of language, and each expresses some degree of dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the word when confronted with the immediacy of experience. Getting back to the two most articulate speakers in the book, Addie and Darl, we find that both imagine themselves on separate but parallel quests for new and more authentic ways of articulating meaning, and that both have on occasion spoken a language "without the words," in Dewey Dell's phrase. (26) Darl and Addie, then, although neither speaks to the other in direct dialogue, set up for us the most significant communion of voice because their mode of speaking is the purest. Their dialectic of silence relies for its strength on our ability to hear them speaking beyond the scope of the printed page we are actually reading. All the other communions, both verbal and silent, are modelled on this silent language between Addie and Darl, but each involves some concession to the word for its life, and so each is to some degree "reduced" (to use Faulkner's phrase again)

to the telling process, and therefore less pure than the silent language of Addie and Darl.

Part of the uniqueness of the private communion between Addie and Darl stems from the radically different nature of their respective postures of telling. The two are united in their skepticism toward the word; but Darl, like Quentin, bears the burden of the actual telling, and so claims the greater share of suffering. Addie's telling, on the other hand, is actual--we hear her spontaneous arrangement of words --but her voice emanates from the realm of hypothesis: Faulkner is saying if Addie could speak after her death she would say what she says in the monologue entitled "Addie." Darl's voice is in process; Addie's is free from process, and her words come to us from the silence of the grave.[8]

The paradoxical nature of Addie's telling reminds us of Caddy's special role as teller, poised on verge of telling what she sees through the window, but never doing so. The fact that Addie does speak actual words and Caddy does not is due perhaps to Faulkner's recognition of a serious flaw in The Sound and the Fury--Caddy, the "beautiful one," never really comes alive for us in the beautiful sense Faulkner meant. The three surrogate tellers of her tale fail to convey to us the feeling that she really is too beautiful to be "reduced" to telling her own story. Because Caddy exists in our minds forever poised in that pear tree, forever

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[8]Vickery, p. 53. I would, of course, disagree with Miss Vickery's assertion that the "Addie" monologue represents "Addie Bundren's dying thoughts." The timelessness of her syntax, the absence of any reference to the actual scene of her deathbed, and the coherence of her thoughts, all work against a realistic rendering of a dying woman's private reflections.

about to articulate what she alone can see, she lives as a hypothesis, an embodiment of the Romantic inspiration before it is contaminated by form. Caddy may be free from the restrictions of the word, but she is also inaccessible to us in a way that Quentin, however contaminated, is not. In The Sound and the Fury Caddy's voice is actually silent; in As I Lay Dying, Addie's voice aspires to silence while using words to do so.

II

Addie's and Quentin's troubles with the word

When Addie speaks, her voice sounds familiar. Her monologue is an assimilation of Quentin's revulsion from the word and Caddy's freedom from process. Addie speaks from a stance outside process to which Quentin is constantly striving, and her voice echoes some of Quentin's obsessions and concerns.[9] We sense that Addie's revolt against the word stems just as much from her hated participation in process as it does from her anguish with the inevitable decay of language within process--and this is surely Quentin's special angst. Like Quentin, moreover, Addie initially resists her body's growing demands for sexual union, and links her lonely battle with the process of the seasons. The coming of spring, with all its rampant fertility, Addie designates as the "worst" time for her:

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[9]Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), p. 106. Millgate sees Addie and Quentin related thematically by the concept of twilight. "Addie Bundren is herself at the twilight point, the poised moment, between life and death;. . ."

> In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring. (162)

Addie deliberately seeks escape from the ubiquitous presence of seasonal change in the sight of a quiet body of water, and in ways that remind us of Quentin, she stares at the shifting surface of a spring "with the water bubbling up and away" as if solace, freedom from process, and the redemption of silence were beckoning to her. Addie also feels that the integrity of her identity is challenged by the values of her dead father, whose voice is an active part of her consciousness. "I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time." (161) Her father's words are a threat because "living" for Addie is facing each day the knowledge that the human personality is hopelessly isolated, imprisoned within the circle of his own "secret and selfish thought," whose very blood is "strange to each other blood, and strange to mine." (161-162) With such the condition of human affairs, it is no wonder Addie thinks of her father as an enemy: "I would hate my father for having ever planted me." (162) Addie's disgust at being "planted" in the flow of process is an implicit accusation that Quentin makes of his father when he thinks of Mr. Compson as "philoprogenitive," the generative force responsible for placing Quentin "in time."

Addie, moreover, has some of Quentin's morbid wit. She tells Anse that she has "people" in Jefferson, but warns that these people will be "hard to talk to." (163) In this short tale of her people in Jefferson, Addie displays the mark of a skilled story teller; she knows how

to pause before delivering the punch line to Anse: "He was watching my face. 'They're in the cemetery.'" (163) But this kind of humor is lost on Anse, and she shares to a degree Quentin's awareness that verbal skill tends to isolate the speaker, making of himself his own best listener.

Addie and Quentin are most alike in their quests for another language, one purer than words. Addie is just as aware as Quentin of the paradoxical nature of her assault on the treachery of words. She knows that the word is her weapon for such an assault, and as a speaker she will have to bridge the gap between the word for the experience and the experience itself. Addie defies her plight in terms of trying to "straddle" this gap: "And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other." (165) Experience clings to the earth; words go straight up into the air.

This shock of recognition at the inability of verbal language to deal with the raw stuff of life comes to Addie the same way it came to Quentin--through the unexpected reality of a pregnancy. Quentin's crisis of words comes when he senses Caddy is pregnant; yet as long as Caddy refuses to utter the word that describes her condition and cries doom to Quentin's sense of honor, he refuses to believe. Quentin's linguistic extremism claims that the word transforms, even creates experience, and the reality of his sister's plight is spared some of its horror for Quentin because for a time it remains unnamed, wordless.

When Addie experiences her first pregnancy and then hears the word for it, she is jolted into a skepticism about words that is far more pervasive than Quentin's:

> And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. (163)

The passage demonstrates similarities between Addie's and Quentin's language. Both blame their revulsion with language on experiences in the past, and so both rely on "when" clauses with past tenses to illuminate the source of their anguish. There are strong negative phrases in the speech of both. But Addie rejects the promise of the word more decisively than does Quentin, and her syntax is consequently more coherent and disciplined. Not for her are the long rambling, open-ended sentences of Quentin. Her indictment of language is to the point: "That was when I learned that words are no good; . . ." Rather than spin out endless analyses of the limitations of language, Addie apparently sought and found another mode of expression, one based entirely on wordless action. Quentin tests out new words, new sounds, but Addie circumvents the pitfalls of language by the silence of an adulterous union with the local minister, an act which she would agree is perfectly unspeakable.

From this silent union Addie learns over again the energy of the word, and it is precisely the lack of this sort of communion that condemns Quentin to his lonely battle with the word divorced from experience. Addie knows that her union with Whitfield is a paradox;

it is by nature secretive, yet she can say, "I hid nothing. I tried to deceive no one." (167) She intends to force a silent act to revitalize the life of the word, and her acts of passion with Whitfield are attempts to force back into the empty vessels of words a new surge of life blood: "I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air." (167) Addie's silent acts with her lover are so many attempts to bring the word back down from the high air, back to where "doing goes along the earth, clinging to it." (165) Like Quentin, Addie's act of rejection of one kind of language is also a quest for another, and this illusion of reading words that seem to make us look beyond words is one of Faulkner's major rhetorical achievements in both this novel and in Absalom, Absalom!

Both Quentin and Addie come to focus all their chaotic disputes with the word in general on the slippery behavior of one specific word, "unvirgin," which epitomizes the virginity of language they seek. They see in this word, moreover, a tendency to dissolve into other meanings or into no meaning, and they sense that all verbal language behaves this way. Once, thinks Addie, she was "virgin," and now, after marrying Anse, she finds herself "unvirgin." The word "Anse," moreover, seems to her somehow responsible for her condition, and Addie ponders the way one word begets another word with the same finality and impersonality with which Anse begot Darl on Addie's body.

> Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name

> until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: the shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think Anse, couldn't remember Anse. It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now. (165)

The passage is rich with implications about the function of language. Addie sees the word making process as an extension of sexual reproduction. Before the act of speech, the word stands as a potential embryo, about to take shape in a vessel. With articulation, the word becomes incarnate, a "significant shape," yet also, paradoxically, a shape "profoundly without life." Anse's seed flows into Addie's body to come forth in the shape of Darl, who is "profoundly without life" in the sense that he shares some of Quentin's fascination with death and reluctance to participate in life. When Darl does become a shape, the word "Anse" ceases to exist in Addie's mind. She "couldn't think Anse, couldn't remember Anse," and indeed, Anse is dead to Addie from this point on in her life. And there are other deaths that stem from the verbal and biological conception of Darl. The word "virgin," which had defined Addie's identity and hence had been part of her notion of herself, is now dead, and Addie cannot remember the word "virgin" any more: "I would think: the shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a ."

Addie is "unvirgin" now, and so her definition of virgin must share the fate of her loss of virginity. "Virgin" is now the shape of a blank space on a page, and the death of this word cancels out its

form--letters arranged on a sheet of paper. Addie's definition of the word "virgin" in terms of complete silence is perhaps the closest point that the nature of her narrative approaches the pure silence of Caddy's hypothetical telling. But it also resembles Quentin's analysis of the meaning of the word "virgin," so important to his idea of honor, (of his idea of Caddy's honor, really), when he confronts Bland's girl friends, who are obviously not "virgin" but "unvirgin."

The word as a "shape, a vessel" is also a symbol of the spatial aspect of language. A word is more than letters marked on a page, but every word is at least that, and so language supports a physical existence--its spatial mode--independent of any meaning. That the "shape" of a word can survive independently of its meaning causes profound dismay to Addie, and language's spatial life becomes form without meaning, an empty door frame, a "significant shape profoundly without life." For Quentin, the word is often a talisman; for Addie, it is an empty jar.

Both Quentin and Addie see the remorseless flow of process as a personal rebuke. It is process that changes the nature of our identity from virgin to unvirgin, from lover to mother, from living to dead. Process distorts the meaning of words, and so both characters seek some purer language free from process's power to erode. Somewhat like Quentin, Addie's disgust with the way people use words to "fill a lack" is offset by her conviction that a real communion can be found if only language could escape the spatial restrictions of the word, restrictions which she sees in terms of empty door frames and jars. It is to the sounds of process, ironically, that Addie listens for some hint of the source of such wordless communion. Just as Quentin

concentrated all his auditory powers on the sound of the bees in hopes of the same hint, Addie listens intently to the sound of the "dark land." During certain moments when she feels she has successfully torn away the veil of words that hides truth, especially in her encounters with her lover, Addie is priviledged to hear "the dark land talking the voiceless speech." (167) When she does hear the dark land talking, the "dark voicelessness" creates a condition "in which the words are the deeds." (166) Addie's communion with the dark land, a completely silent communion, restores life to the word for her. Now word and deed are fused in a union that is temporal and spatial; the jar is full, profoundly with life. Form and content, the word and the experience are dynamically related.

Addie's rejection of the word brings about a rebirth of faith in the word. She can see the word as a necessary condition that permits us to hear the voiceless speech that lies beyond the word's frontier. When we finally hear her, she is already, in a sense, voiceless because she speaks to us from beyond process.[10]

III

Darl and Addie: the silent communion

The voice in "Addie"--because of the quality of voicelessness that Addie has won--is one of Faulkner's most complex illusions in the book. Addie speaks the kind of language that Quentin always wanted to

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[10]See Eric Larsen's article, "The Barrier of Language: The Irony of Language in Faulkner," Modern Fiction Studies, XIII (Spring, 1967), pp. 19-31. Mr. Larsen also sees Addie somehow outside process at the point that we hear her: "Her burial is symbolically almost a final action, a final fulfillment of her life--she does, after all, still speak even though ostensibly dead."

speak, but cannot, because, as he is well aware, he is a part of process as long as he lives. When she speaks, the tenses of her verbs reflect her condition--she is outside process and so has no present. Her reliance on past tenses with the conditional "would," indicating habitual, even endless action, itself speaks of her escape from time: "I would go down to the hill . . . It would be quiet there . . . I could just remember . . . I would think . . ." and so on. Addie's language in her monologue succeeds in dispelling a sense of the present moment as if it were so much dust; she has cleaned her house, as she says, and her syntax is as scrubbed of the taint of process as is the house that is her conscience. The "Addie" monologue, moreover, appears at the center of the book, and if we imagine her voice as truly silent--and I think Faulkner wants us to imagine this--then at the heart of the novel we hear the deep throb of silence. Addie's silence is a version of Mahon's in Soldier's Pay after he passed over to that "twilight sea." In As I Lay Dying, Addie's silent language gives us the form of the book. She is the point to which Darl is aspiring, and since Darl is in direct verbal touch with all the significant speakers, the whole marvelous collection of voices acts to make us look forward and backward to its structural center of silence.

If Addie speaks from the same vantage point outside of process that Quentin aspires to, Addie's most literate son, Darl, by consciously arranging his words to escape from the burden of telling within the intolerable context of the present, directs his language toward his mother's mode of speaking. The two speakers sustain a special relationship throughout the book which we can imagine as a communion of silent understanding.

Darl is Addie's word incarnate; he is the significant shape that once filled the "jar" of her body, and his conception also brought to Addie the death of the word "Anse." Darl's birth, not Cash's, destroys the word "virgin" for Addie, and kills a part of herself, forcing her, we recall, to learn a new word--"unvirgin." Darl's conception signals the death of Anse as a person in Addie's life, and defines Darl's doom. When Addie senses Darl's growing life within her, she strikes out at the treachery of the word: "It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it." (164) By attacking the word "love" with still another word--Anse's word that he will bury her in Jackson--Addie insures that the ambiguity of language will be Darl's birthright, and that Darl's final quest for a superior kind of language will also be his journey to a madhouse. "And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died. . . ." (164-165) Anse keeps his word to Addie and buries her in Jefferson, but he also consigns his only articulate son to a living burial, and by doing so, Anse destroys his most fertile expression of himself, his best articulation. Anse's progeny, the result of his "chapping," as he puts it, is really his only meaningful language.

Darl and Addie are closest in their common search for a language without words and for a life outside the erosion of process. Both share similar powers of intuition and even clairvoyance. Addie senses that the possibility of a "voiceless speech" is linked somehow with the "dark land," an image of seasonal process. Darl's own gift of perception is also rooted in an intimacy with the land. Anse complains that Darl has "got his eyes full of the land all the time," (35) and Dewey Dell feels

threatened by Darl's intuitive powers, which she sees drawing its mysterious strength from the land: "The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pinpoints." (115) Darl and Addie both have the habit of gazing at the flow of the seasons and the changing land, seeing the promise of a realm of stasis beyond, in which words would be irrelevant.

IV

Darl's quest for a new language

The "Addie" monologue, although the informing center of the novel, composes only a few pages. It is Darl's voice and his battle with the behavior of words that makes up most of the book. Addie has gained her quest, but Darl must suffer through his, and the increasing pressure of new suffering each day of the grim journey to Jefferson forces continual testings of the relevance of one vocabulary over another. The crisis of language in the face of what is becoming an unspeakable experience prompts a dramatic growth in Darl's command of words (and, to a lesser degree, in Vardaman's) and his deliberate discarding of one vocabulary for another amounts to a search for a mode of speaking commensurate to his growing need for silence. When we first hear Darl's voice, his vocabulary is composed of literal fact--planes, angles, feet, plumb-lines--and his monotonous sequence of verbs in the present tense gives us experience at its starkest level:

> The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laid-by cotton, to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision. (3)

The words are monosyllables shorn of connotations, yet we feel his compulsive literalism is only an attempt to control his growing inner turmoil. He even verbalizes the sound of Cash's tool: "Chuck. Chuck. Chuck." (4) His language, in fact, closely resembles the vocabulary of Cash, which is made up of tools, angles, and solid substances. But while Cash's vocabulary of tools remains unchanged almost to the end of the book, by his second monologue, Darl uses past tenses and begins to formulate rich, complex metaphors:

> I used to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round oriface in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. (10-11)

Like Addie, Darl seeks some solace in the sight of water, whose mercurial surface seems to promise some redeeming life force ("I stirred it awake") ready to reveal itself, and an uncompromising nihilism ("a round orifice in nothingness") at the same time. Darl is beginning to reveal some of his visionary powers--he describes events around him from a viewpoint of detached skepticism. Yet is is clear that he regards these as so many veils to be torn away in much the same way Addie saw the word as a mask. Darl, we know, can be both clairvoyant and literal in the same statement. He describes the way the breeze draws through the hall of their tilting house "upslanting," then compares the breeze to the phenomenon of voice: ". . . so with voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out the air about your head." (19) Darl seems to be probing the intricacies of the act of human utterance in order to transcend its limits.

Darl's ability to hear voices "speaking out of the air" makes him the proper teller of Addie's death. That he is many miles from her bedside when she dies does not disqualify his telling--he simply listens to those voices speaking out of the air:

> Pa stands beside the bed. From behind his leg Vardaman peers, with his round head and his eyes round and his mouth beginning to open. She looks at pa; all her failing life appears to drain into her eyes, urgent, irremediable. "It's Jewel she wants," Dewey Dell says. (46)

But Jewel is not at the bedside. He is with Darl, who forced Jewel to accompany him to fetch some lumber. Jewel's absence from his mother's deathbed is Darl's revenge on Addie for her love of Jewel and indifference to him. Darl had always resented the way Addie had "whipped him and petted him more." (17) Addie's revenge on Anse for giving her Darl is his word that he will bury her in Jefferson; Darl's revenge on Addie for rejecting him is just as final.

The bedroom scene of Addie's last breath continues to unfold in Darl's mind. He sees the light in her eyes go out "as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them." (47) But her death does not silence her powers of communication--Darl imagines that even in death she is speaking to Cash, whose relentless sawing, accompanied by his wordless and deliberate measurings, smoothings, and cuttings, begins to take on the life of a surrogate language: "The sound of the saw is steady, competent, unhurried, stirring the dying light so that at each stroke her face seems to wake a little into an expression of listening and of waiting, as though she were counting the strokes." (49) Addie's "waking" after her death is a resurrection into the life of the

language of silence, and if she seems to Darl to be counting the strokes of Cash's saw, it is Darl who is beginning to sound like Addie's monologue.

With Addie's death, Darl's voice splits in two; his language oscillates between the literal and the symbolic modes of speech, and his efforts to link the two represent another "straddling" of divergent forces. Darl, for example, describes in a dull monotone and in the simplest diction possible how the lantern sits on a stump, how Cash places the planks, and what the air smells like--sulphur, while at the same time his mind labors to make sense of the whole rapidly disintegrating situation. Darl sees an outrageous blasting of meaning behind the logic and order of Cash's planks and beveled edges, and so his voice calmly begins to pattern in syntax and logic the madness he envisions. Word games, parodies of the syllogism, and nonsense statements replace the communal life of verbal language.

> In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. . . . And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are <u>was</u>, it is not. Yet the wagon <u>is</u>, because when the wagon is <u>was</u>, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel <u>is</u>, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am <u>is</u>. (76)

Darl, in the process of emptying himself of the burden of words, inverts language. He is losing his sense of identity because he is shedding himself of the words that once made up that identity. Addie lost part of herself when she lost the word "virgin"; Darl loses a whole way of speaking, and so he loses his sanity. The language of madness

silences the language of fact. Just as Addie felt that from her telling posture in "Addie" she had escaped process, had cleaned her house, Darl is moving rapidly to her kind of telling. Already the pseudo-logic of his syntax, the upsidedown syllogisms, echoes the language Addie uses when she describes her own retreat from the word: "I did not even ask him for what he could have given me: not-Anse. That was my duty to him, to not ask that, and that duty I fulfilled. I would be I; I would let him be the shape and echo of his word." (166) Darl is becoming the echo of his own word.

When Cash, Jewel, Anse, and Darl lift the coffin and stagger to the wagon, Darl's vocabulary strains to embrace (another straddling) two additional realms of being--the actual and the hypothetical. His voice darts back and forth between descriptions of the actual lifting ("He stoops among us above it, two of the eight hands") (91) and elaborate hypotheses about the nature of Addie's persistent communications with the living, which Darl is convinced he is hearing more intensely with each new hint of her body's decay:

> For an instant it [the coffin] resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. (91)

With the wagon finally in motion, it is clear that Darl's language has also moved far beyond the literalism of his speech when we first heard his voice. Tools are still tools for Cash, but now Darl sees tools as metaphors. When he looks at Dewey Dells's legs, he sees "that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life." (97-98) The road they are

taking is not simply a "red scoriation curving away into the pines," but it is "like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim." (102) Darl's diction creates the impression that he is setting the word against the word: Anglo-Saxon monosyllables clashing against erudite, Latinate polysyllabic words. The motion of the wagon, Darl says, is "soporific," "uniferant of progress," and road signs have a "profound desolation," a "tranquil assertion." (102) But when Jewel gallops by, "a gout of mud . . . plops onto the box." (102)

More and more, Darl's voice sounds like Addie. He acts as if the present experience of sitting in the wagon that is moving his mother's rotting body is itself unfolding outside of chronocity, "dreamlike," and static. His voice sounds as if he were already dead, and privileged to speak from the silence of the grave. Darl, for instance, recalls Jewel's nightly absences from home, and how it led to Darl's prophetic glimpse into Addie's nature:

> And that may have been when I first found it out, that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. And at times when I went in to go to bed, she would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit. (123)

Darl's flashback begins with Jewel but inevitably focuses in on Addie's betrayal of her word. Addie looked on the conception and birth of her second son, Darl, as a deceit by Anse, who "tricked" her, "hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it." But Darl sees his mother in precisely such terms. And Darl's perception of the dark side of his mother's character precipitates a sudden vision

of her past life--Darl intuits that Jewel is the offspring of an adulterous laison, that Darl's father is not Jewel's father: "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day." (129) Darl's knowledge of his mother's guilt and his jealousy of Jewel suggest that a powerful if unspoken bond had flourished between mother and son up until Addie's death. The bond was a communion of hate. "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother." (89) But now that Addie is dead, Darl wants not Addie's love, or recognition, or even forgiveness, but Addie's silence.

By the time the family reaches the flooded river, Darl's language has reached the level of symbolic speech, a kind of linguistic crest of his own. The flood itself becomes a paradigm of the act of utterance. It has a "plaintive sound, a musing sound," and it talks to Darl. (134) Its changing yet static surface seems to promise some form of silent communion lying in wait for the speaker to pass through it.

> It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myraid, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again. (134)

The flood "clucks and murmurs" to Darl in a language that is "profoundly significant" because its powerful life force, "huge and alive," is untrammelled by the confines of frozen form. The flood, we might say, is the opposite of Addie's jar. The flood moves powerfully outside the rigidity of the riverbed; it transcends its form and thus gains a "profoundly significant" vitality. The flood, moreover, beckons to Darl the way the river did to Quentin. When Darl plunges into the flood, he sheds

a way of speaking, accelerating the painful process of discarding words in favor of silence that occupies Darl until the end of the book. Like Addie, Darl is cleaning his house. He gains the river bank, drenched, cleansed, and speaking a purer language, but one which isolates him further. Before his jump into the river, Darl and Cash had spoken silently to each other; their communion itself prefigured the immersion into water they would both soon experience: ". . . he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror. . . ." (135) But when Darl reaches the other side of the river, the unspoken communion with Cash is lost. Darl's language has passed beyond Cash's range of comprehension, and he has nothing to say to Cash now. He refuses to go back to the injured Cash to ask him what tools he lost in the flood: "'Pa's there,' I say." (151) Cash loses for the moment his tools in the flood; Darl loses for all time his hold on the vocabulary of tools.

Darl's quest for silence is accelerating. The quality of his language suggests that his sanity has been left behind on the far bank of the river. He pays lip service to basic gestures between family members (he holds the rope, pours cement on Cash, intercedes on behalf of Jewel in an impending fight), but his language, inverting back to himself as his only listener, becomes further contorted by repetitions, multiple negatives, and incoherent syntax:

> How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls. Cash broke his

> leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death is Cash. (196-197)

Darl now sees Cash as a doll, a container, another jar. His "sawdust is running out," says Darl, and indeed, Cash's vitality does seem to be trickling away as he lies with his leg encased (still another container) in concrete, his natural dynamism neutralized. Here in life, Darl says, our lives are not even real sounds--they are "echoes of old compulsions." The sound of no-hand on no-strings, like the Zen proverb that speculates about the sound of one hand clapping, asks us to think of the tones of silence that resonate beyond process.

After formulating this perception of Cash as an emptying container, a doll whose form-giving sawdust is running out, Darl directs his energies toward stopping his own ravelling out into the no-wind, no-sound. He sets fire to the barn in which Addie's coffin lies, hoping, perhaps, to bring an end at least to the journey to Jefferson, a journey which has become to him symbolic of the unravelling power of process. The element of fire, moreover, has a timeless life force that is attractive to Darl, and he imagines that the flames are offering him a vocal counterpart to the voice of the flood. "The sound of it [the fire] has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did." (211) But Jewel's rescue of Addie's coffin from the burning barn insures that the journey and the flow of process will continue to unravel. For a single instant before the barn collapsed in flames, Addie's coffin was framed by "the dissolving proscenium of the doorway." (211) Poised on the edge of passing out of physical existence entirely, Addie's coffin is snatched from the flames by Jewel, restoring her body to its place

in the midst of her family, where her physical decay continues to mirror the increasing disintegration of any sense of family unity in her surviving offspring. To Darl's despair, the journey goes on.

As Darl approaches the moment of Addie's burial, which is at once the end of the journey and the beginning of his own interment, he gradually perceives human sexuality as a symbol of the act of utterance, an insight which reveals the similarity of his and his mother's play of mind. In an earlier exchange with Vardaman, who shares with him a common vocabulary of nonsense, Darl had linked Addie's child bearing and word making capacity. Her fertility, he sensed, was a form of language, her offspring so many verbs: "That's why I am not is. Are is too many for one woman to foal." (95) Darl told Vardaman that he considered himself an "are." Now, with the burial ceremony underway in the Jefferson cemetery, Darl's voice articulates a new sense of outrage at the violation of the wholeness of his identity. Trapped like an animal by his family, Darl reacts against this dismembering of his word making faculty as if it were a perversion of normal sexual union. Instead of verbs as offspring, Darl's language on the train to Jackson engenders a frightening image of incest in the beast with two backs, a variation of the image of sexual outrage that haunted Quentin. Darl's beast undergoes a bizarre metamorphosis as he articulates it:

> One of them [the attendants taking Darl to the Jackson madhouse] had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money, which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I dont know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is. (244)

Darl talks of himself as if he were another person outside of himself, the logical extension of his concept of himself as an "are" rather than an "is." He sees the state and his family cooperating in an incestuous arrangement to cripple his sexual and verbal strength. Darl also feels that his own language has been forced into an incestuous laison; his words mate with nothing but themselves, producing not progeny but perversions, unspeakable linkings between animal and human forms. Darl's voice has been its only listener for too long. Voice echoing itself is sterile, perverting the communal purpose of language. The Reverend Whitfield's voice confers a sense of communion on its listeners, and together they enact the sacrament of language. But Darl's voice speaks in solitary confinement of monstrous acts, and his conscious obscenity is his final gesture of verbal defiance before the pure silence that awaits the conclusion of his scream "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes." (244) Darl's voice ends in sacrilege.

V

Addie's jar takes dominion if not everywhere then at least over a significant portion of the novel. The jar is the basic symbol for Faulkner's concern in As I Lay Dying with the relationship between form and content. Versions of the jar, as we have seen, support the narrative throughout: the flooded river, the concrete cast on Cash's leg, the doll and its sawdust, and finally, the coffin itself. This persistent pressure of contents against container is an anology, moreover, of the office of language in the book. The word, Faulkner is perhaps saying, can be a coffin encasing a corpse, an empty door frame, or an unfilled jar . . . each profoundly without life. But the word can also be an

overflowing river, the dark voicelessness of the land, or a jar profoundly full of life. When the jar is filling up, language is dynamic, ongoing, a process in the state of becoming rather than a static phenomenon. It is precisely this choice between the word as a "shape to fill a lack" and the word as a crystal of meaning in one's inchoate experience that confronts each character in the novel.

The filling of the jar, we can say, is also a paradigm of the narrative's momentum, which oscillates between emptiness and fullness of form. The relationships between certain characters, for example, are modelled on the jar in the process of being emptied or filled. Cash's capacity to think expands throughout the narrative as Darl's capacity contracts. Darl gradually abandons the contemplative mode in favor of direct action. He becomes a pourer of cement, a burner of barns, a peacemaker between Jewel and an enraged stranger. We first see Cash actively constructing a coffin, and we see him last lying inert in a wagon. The respective life styles of Darl and Cash, in short, flow out of the one and into the other.

Language also flows from one receptacle to another. The idiom of madness that becomes Darl's dominant mode of expression--his endless distinctions between being and non-being, his anti-syllogisms, inverted logic--gradually flow into the consciousness of Vardaman, until this youngest of Addie's sons assumes completely the contours of Darl's speech. As Darl is being taken away to Jackson by train, he babbles of trains, being, and non-being, and at just this moment Darl sees Vardaman through the window, who is now babbling about trains, being, and non-being: "He had to get on the train to go to Jackson. I have

not been on the train, but Darl has been on the train. Darl. Darl is my brother. Darl. Darl [.]" (242) No punctuation follows this last word uttered by Vardaman, whose syntax has taken on the same open-ended, disconnected quality of Darl's. Darl's language seems to empty itself of words until we hear only silence. But the special flavor of Darl's language also seems to flow into the open jar of Vardaman's mind.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROSA COLDFIELD: THE DOLL IN THE NIGHTMARE, MAKING NO SOUND; POETRY AND SILENCE IN ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

> But the operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents. It is the joint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others.
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> --Jean-Paul Sartre

I

Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! is his most ambitious attempt to push the word beyond its conventional limits.[1] As we read the novel we sense that the "experience" of the book is continually dissolving into hypothesis, ambiguity, and paradox, but what we read nevertheless assumes a timelessness, the illusion of an eternal present unfolding before our eyes. In directing itself so relentlessly to process we feel that the book escapes it. There is no formula or key to this novel. But its form does resemble the very act of searching for such a key. All is illusive, hypothetical, explorative. The book's real drama presents the word turning back on itself, the word marshalled by one speaker after another for the express purpose of exploring the possibilities of language, of testing ways of telling, of questioning the whole act of telling. In Absalom, Absalom! language talks about itself, and characters embody versions of telling; if they tell us about an experience, a glimpse of Thomas Sutpen, say, they also hold up the act of utterance for rigorous analysis, and end up by undermining their faith that they can tell anything at all. But they speak so eloquently of their disbelief in the power of language, they scrutinize so closely the words they use, that we believe them all the more. The words of Rosa and Quentin and the other characters create the illusion

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[1]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, Inc., 1936, reprinted by Modern Library, 1951).

for us as readers that we all share in momentary glimpses of the unsayable.

Faulkner lets his speakers reveal themselves at various moments of their own metamorphosis from one kind of teller into another. Their telling is suspended at certain crucial points in their own awakening recognition of the power and limits of the word. Like multiple Andersons on the bench, we see them waking from the dream, determined to tell about the dream even as they demonstrate that its real significance is lost, and that the word is a barrier to the telling. We see them being born again; their acts of utterance they know are failures, yet it is because of these failures that they live for us. To be born in the book is to speak, to break out of the "velvet silence of the womb," as Rosa says. (145) Articulation is painful, Faulkner implies in Absalom, Absalom!, but that act marks our aliveness, and in the end our articulation is the only way we can reach the eternal.

II

Language, sexuality, and time

Glancing backward for a moment at the novels that are the subject of this study, we can see that the implications of prophecy embodied in the silence of Donald Mahon and in the reticence of the artist Gordon evolved, with the creation of Quentin's voice in The Sound and the Fury, and the voices of Darl and Addie in As I Lay Dying, into more complex rhetorical situations which allowed Faulkner better opportunities to analyze the meaning of silence, to dramatize more convincingly the philosophical ramifications of the act of human utterance, and to

integrate more fully his findings with the action of the novel. The rhetorical strategies that structure these last two novels and Absalom, Absalom! are dialectic pairings of male and female voices in which the special relationship between the two speakers is either inferred by us as an hypothesis (like the exchange between Quentin and Caddy or between Darl and Addie), or openly discussed by the two speakers, as it is done by Rosa and Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! One explanation for Faulkner's continuing fascination with male-female sets of voices is that the intimacy of these verbal encounters most aptly suggests and mirrors the complex affinities he sees between language and human reproduction. In each of these pairings of voices the separate quests for a superior mode of speaking, one purer than words, depend for their success on the possibility of some mutual over-passing, a collective thrust past the barrier to understanding that language can often become, to a realm of being that can support a wordless and perfect communion. The interaction of these male-female thrusts past the limits of the word have obvious analogies with the act of intercourse; indeed, Faulkner seems eager to remind us that intercourse means both sexual union and human discourse, communication as well as physical communion.

The relationship between language and human sexuality, moreover, is defined negatively in Absalom, Absalom! Incest and virginity, which are negations of human reproduction, underlie a concept of selfhood that shapes the way language is used in the novel. Rosa's notion of herself, for example, is rooted in her awareness of the paradox of virginity. Because she never tasted the "moment which only virgins know," time has stopped for her. Rosa loved a man who never was, gave him all she had,

she says, which was nothing. Rosa's condition of eternal virginity determines the paradoxical quality of her language. Quentin, on the other hand, is just as fascinated by the concept of incest, and his elaborate hypothesis about the nature of Henry's love for his sister is really Quentin's way of giving life to his own incestuous fantasies. Mr. Compson offers to Quentin an analysis of the linguistic ramifications of virginity and incest, and his explanation, coming as it does early in the story, alerts us to the fact that the behavior of language will be the deep concern of the major characters.

> [Henry's] sister's virginity was a false quantity which must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence, to have existed at all. In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. (96)

Language must also depend for its existence on its own "loss, absence." "The vocal performance of man," Walter Ong says, "has no permanence but alternates with silence."[2] When the word returns to the silence from whence, by an act of speech, it came forth, we then know its shape, its contour of meaning. Mr. Compson's metaphor for the relation between the energy of language and the need for its own absence (in the form of intervals of silence), an essentially paradoxical relation, is the concept of incest. Incest, says Mr. Compson, describes

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[2]Walter J. Ong, S.J., The Barbarian Within, and Other Fugitive Essays and Studies (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 9.

both the nature of Henry Sutpen's fantasy and the special use of language he employs to live momentarily in that fantasy. Henry saw his sister's virginity as a "false quantity," a negation, in need of a positive affirmation. Judith's virginity is for Henry a language barrier which can be overcome by manipulating words. To affirm the true "quality" of her virginity, Henry chooses--to continue Mr. Compson's analysis--to change the word "brother," which defines his public role in relation to his sister, to the word "lover," which defines a private, incestuous relationship with her. Henry's word juggling, his hope for verbal metamorphosis into another identity, begins as an act of affirmation of Judith's virginity and ends as an attempt of escape from his notion of himself. But Henry's hypothesis of himself as lover of rather than brother to Judith provides not escape but reinforcement of self; Henry's attempt to invert the communal function of language and to live momentarily in a verbal hypothesis of himself is a linguistic act that resembles the very incest he wishes to achieve with Judith.

Many speakers in Absalom, Absalom!, it should be said, are nothing more than hypothetical versions of one of the four main narrators. Mr. Compson's hypothesis of Judith Stupen, for instance, articulates a parallel but richer statement about the need for language's loss, absence, as a condition for language's meaningful survival. What she says, or more accurately, what Mr. Compson has her say about the transience of experience and the need for the word to rescue meaning, recapitulates what Mr. Compson said about the paradoxical relation between language and the silence ("absence") it depends on for its existence. Judith is talking

about her letter from Bon, and her hope for some "pass over" to the eternal by means of this present-absence rhythm of language.

> '. . . at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be is because it never can become was because it cant ever die or perish. . . .' (127-128)

Judith thinks that Bon's letter allows the word to "pass" from "one mind to another," and this passing on is both a static and dynamic phenomenon. It is a scratch making a mark, yet it is alive, it can even "die some day." Judith's perception of eternity is significant. The word is eternal precisely because it can perish--it is alive. But the block of stone, the tombstone on which Bon's name is inscribed, for instance, cannot be eternal--"cant be is"--because it cannot change, become "was." Eternity for Faulkner must be rooted in time passing, not in some frozen moment. The word in the act of utterance is eternal because it comes out of silence and returns to silence. It can become was, to paraphrase Judith. This act of passing over, which is a metaphor of eternity, applies not just to Bon's letter, or to Mr. Compson's hypothesis to Quentin about Judith and her letter, but to the way we read the novel itself: it is our reading which achieves the only timelessness, the only escape from "is" that is possible. The word in the act of utterance is Faulkner's elaborate escape from the inexorable flow of time. Judith's "scratch" is a miniature of the much deeper scratch that is Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner's most carefully carved "Kilroy was here."

The movement of the novel thrusts in several directions at once; we feel we are going forward as we learn more and more about Sutpen from the experiences of succeeding sets of speaker-hearer communions, a movement that perhaps can be characterized by the sensation of watching the dawn come up--first the dark, then, gradually, the light. As the narration proceeds, moreover, we also feel that we are going backwards into the past, until the reality of certain scenes that took place long before the birth of the speakers describing the scene seem to be more vibrant and "living" than the moment and context in which the teller is speaking--whether on the Compson porch in the summer or the chill bedroom of Shreve and Quentin at Harvard. At the same time that we sense these movements, we are also constantly backtracking over covered ground. At three different points in the novel we hear speakers offer their versions of Wash Jones's announcement to Rosa that Henry had just killed Charles Bon, and each version brings out a new detail, another nuance to the event.

The entire book oscillates between actual words being spoken and hypothetical words created by that speaking, between a given reality, and an imagined construct that attempts to explain that reality, or substitute for it, or even wish it away. We move from the word to the speechless vision beyond the word, and then back again, where it seems we just were.

Finally, cutting across these illusions of movement for the reader, we have the strong sensation of being suspended in a single core of time, in which it seems we are treading water very much like the four Sutpen members afloat in "sunny suspension," as Mr. Compson says. (74)

We are not getting anywhere so much as we are there from the first page "in the middest."[3] When we know that "listening" can "renege" --and we are listening--and "hearing-sense of self-confound," we know that our response to the book will have to be unconventional and highly empathic. Faulkner is asking us to accept the paradox of simultaneous movement and stasis as an initiation into an understanding of the book.

III

The marriage of speaking and hearing

Speaking and hearing are virtually functions of the same imaginative act in Absalom, Absalom!, so much so that at several points in the novel--usually at moments of deep insight by various speakers--Faulkner makes it clear that it does not matter who is speaking and who is listening--because both are; their voices have consumed each other's identity, somewhat like the way the Reverend Shegog's voice consumed his own. Their communion of speaking and listening creates, gives birth to, another identity into which their own voices flow, blurring all distinction between speaker and subject, teller and tale, the actual and the hypothetical word. Quentin and Shreve, for example, construct between them the hypothetical voices of Bon and Henry over such a period of time that all four voices--the actual and the two hypothetical--become fused into one "telling":

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[3]Frank Kermode, The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 8. I am comparing Rosa's use of the fictive structure of the tale with Kermode's penetrating analysis of the power of anticipated endings in fictions.

> Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking. So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry, the two of them both believing that Henry was thinking He (meaning his father) has destroyed us all, not for one moment thinking He (meaning Bon) must have known or at least suspected this all the time; . . . (333-334)

This interpenetration of voices, in which the hypothetical voice of Charles Bon springs from the union of the actual voices of Quentin and Shreve, is a rhetorical technique that has clear analogies with the process of birth and the nurturing of progeny, and both of these concepts are vital to the theme of Absalom, Absalom!--the rise and fall of the Sutpen dynasty. The long verbal exchange between Quentin and Shreve also resembles a courtship; both seem determined to reach an understanding of love by learning the language of courtship. Their discussions about love are formal, ceremonious, and their overtures to each other constitute what Faulkner calls marriages of "speaking and hearing." The "happy marriage" between Quentin's and Shreve's respective tellings of the Sutpen tale--a tale of unhappy marriages, and marriages that never were--bring about the only successful marriage in the novel.

> "And now," Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love." But he didn't need to say that either, any more than he had needed to specify which he meant by he, since neither of them had been thinking about anything else; all that had gone before just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always has to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire. That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it,

> performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other--faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived--in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault or false. (316)

"We're going to talk about love." The way in which Shreve and Quentin talk about love becomes a ritual that confers love; their happy marriage of speaking and hearing perfectly anticipates and fulfills the lover's needs before that lover even knows he has those needs. They forgive each other "before the demand to forgive," which is the kind of courtship by words that is needed "in order to overpass to love." Their long, loving exchange of words conserves "what seemed true" in "paradox and inconsistency" and discards the false. Shreve's and Quentin's happy marriage is the model for what Faulkner hopes will be still another happy marriage of speaking and hearing--between Faulkner's paradoxical and often inconsistent arrangement of words and our reading of those words. And it is the need to be loved, a need unsatisfied all her life, that finally makes Rosa turn to Quentin. Rosa's and Quentin's marriage of speaking and hearing--happy or not--is the closest Rosa ever comes to the real thing, his sympathetic listening her only courtship.

IV

The validity of the mouth-to-mouth tale

It is traditional in speaking about Absalom, Absalom! to begin by listing the main narrators of the Sutpen story--Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve--and then to comment on the book's central intelli-

gence, Quentin, whose own telling overlaps and to some extent appropriates that of the other three.[4] My own way of looking at this complex and intricately designed novel, the epitme of Faulkner's search for form as a novelist and his most penetrating analysis of the life of language, is to regard the illusive but compelling Sutpen story as a metaphor of the act of telling itself.[5] The novel dramatizes and embodies multiple ways of telling, and it is not peopled so much with characters as it divided up into possible ways of confronting the problem of telling. We do not hear single narrators speaking in sequence but rotating sets of speaking and hearing communions--like the "happy marriage" of Quentin and Shreve--one side of each set interlocking with still another set, so that all the speakers are linked by their tellings to each other. The Sutpen story is also a seed, an embryo planted in silence; it is a potential tale, needing only the elaborate and often loving midwifery of a speaker to bring its energy forth into the light of day, into the sound of living voices. The tellers themselves are linked to the embryo of this unborn tale, tied to it, whether they will or not, like so many umbilical cords, an image Faulkner is especially

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[4]Richard P. Adams, William Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 175. Adams stresses the importance of Quentin's role in the novel. "The 'history' in the book is perhaps more concerned with the fictional biography of Quentin than with that of Sutpen or, in any direct way, with the actual rise and fall of the plantation aristocracy of the South."

[5]James Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 101. Guetti's thesis, provocative and interesting throughout, sees the book denying the possibility of metaphor. "The vitality of the entire narrative of Absalom, Absalom! depends upon the inability to create a single, dominant metaphor. . . ."

fond of in this novel.

Absalom, Absalom!'s skillful arrangement of overlapping communions between pairs of speaker-hearers makes it misleading to talk about one set as if unrelated to another; all of them, we recall, are ultimately subsumed under the Quentin-Quentin communion, in which one facet of his intelligence is continually speaking to another facet in the language of "notpeople, in notlanguage." (9) The various exchanges between Rosa and Quentin, nevertheless, not only epitomize the novel's technique, but they represent the culmination of the series of increasingly subtle arrangements of male-female voices speaking in sustained dialectics that we saw in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying. Rosa's voice confers a special presence to the book.[6] Her language undergoes a more dramatic metamorphosis than does that of any other character. Of the four main narrators, Rosa is the only one who knew Sutpen personally, and for a short time she was a part of Sutpen's "design." Her voice structures the beginning, middle, and ending of the novel. In Chapter I, for example, we hear Rosa's voice speaking in an airless room in the South on a September afternoon; in Chapter V, the exact center of the novel's nine chapters, we hear her speaking in the same room later in the evening. Faulkner here italicizes her words to indicate a "pass over" from the kind of language she spoke in Chapter I. In Chapter IX Rosa's voice comes to us in the form of a recollection by Quentin, who lies in bed talking to his Harvard room-

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[6]Guetti, p. 98. Guetti attributes to Rosa a high degree of awareness of the futility of language in the face of the mystery of Sutpen. Rosa, he asserts, "questions her own metaphors more thoroughly."

mate, Shreve, on a winter evening in the North. Quentin is the surrogate for Rosa's voice, speaking on behalf of her about that last journey they made to the Sutpen mansion. She is dead, but her telling goes on, spanning North and South, time past and time present, life and death.

The tale Rosa tells, moreover, epitomizes the role of language in Absalom, Absalom![7] Her telling is a quest for a superior mode of expression, an exhaustive attempt to escape the limits of the word, to abdicate, in fact, the role of teller. Eventually Rosa abandons telling altogether, choosing silent action over words. Her determination to slash through the "arras-veil" of the Sutpen mystery climaxes in her silent confrontation with Henry Sutpen in the decaying shell of Sutpen's Hundred. What they say to each other--if anything--remains unknown to us, and represents one of the more momentous cores of pure silence that appear throughout the novel. Rosa's quest began with words and ends in silence. Shortly after her encounter with Henry Sutpen she is dead, leaving Quentin as the designated heir to whatever meaning she achieved. Quentin's listening consciousness is Rosa's stage; she enters, declaims for a while, and makes her final exit, leaving him with the need to play her role over again. He must now declaim on his own stage, speaking the language of notpeople to himself. Rosa passes on to Quentin the burden of her words and the compulsion to tell, somewhat like the way Addie passed beyond the range of words, leaving Darl to suffer through his telling. After Rosa's death Quentin's anguished listening is precisely

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[7]Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959 and 1962), p. 86. Miss Vickery sees Rosa's style epitomizing the novel's.

his state of mind when we first hear him in Section II of The Sound and the Fury, compulsively refining further his distinctions between hearing and listening:

> Now the chimes began, ringing for one oclock. Shreve ceased, as if he were waiting for them to cease or perhaps were even listening to them. Quentin lay still too, as if he were listening too, though he was not; he just heard them without listening as he heard Shreve without listening or answering, until they ceased, died away into the icy air delicate and faint and musical as struck glass. (374)

V

Rosa's tale and the possibilities of form

Rosa's voice puts us in "the middest." When we hear her claim that she will tell her story to Quentin, we feel that her telling will gradually open up our understanding of the Sutpen saga, and that whatever is ineffable now will not remain indefinitely so. The orderly syntactical pattern that characterizes her language in the beginning of Chapter I stems from her conviction that the story "can be told," a claim she makes more than once. Rosa implies that her tale has an ending, that she will reveal some satisfying nexus between the origin of her story and the moment in time--the middest--when we first hear her speaking to Quentin in her home. Rosa's assurance that Quentin could someday tell her story, submitting it to a magazine, itself implies she has the traditional closed form of a story in mind:

> "So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines." (9-10)

Rosa carefully sustains the illusion that Quentin will be in a position to sketch in all the events of her tale up until this present moment in which he is listening to her, and this anticipation is also a part of our reading response. We know, in fact, that Rosa has been a prolific producer of conventional literary forms--"odes, eulogy, and epitaph"--and that she has been "the county's poetess laureate." (11) We would then expect a flowering of her literary talent in this verbal narrative of a dead man, Thomas Sutpen. Yet before we are very far into Chapter I, Rosa's telling begins to show the stress of choosing words commensurate with her sense of rage, a rage she did not hint at in her cool discussion of magazine writing. Her syntax becomes circular, repetitive. The people she lived among, Rosa says, "knew that we knew and we knew they knew we knew and we knew that they would have believed us. . . ." (17) Her image of Sutpen breaks up Rosa's attempts to articulate meaning, and her telling keeps returning to set phrases like "No: not even a gentleman" in order to get her bearings and start anew. Rosa, we soon see, is incapable of logical, self-contained units of thought. Her sentences are open-ended, tentative, as enigmatical, in fact, as her subject--Thomas Sutpen. Rosa rushes into this sentence, for example, but cannot finish it: "No; just the face of a man who . . . a man who so far . . . a man who rode into town out of nowhere . . . a man who fled here and hid. . . ." (16) The sequence of relative clauses hang suspended, waiting for a verb that never comes, just as the meaning of Sutpen continually eludes definitive articulation.

Rosa's voice in Chapter V demonstrates a dramatic sapping of her confidence that her tale can be told, that words can impose some

control on the shifting images of her memory of Thomas Sutpen. The possibility of a definitive statement seems increasingly more hopeless. Her prose is punctuated by confessions of her inability to conclude her tale: "That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is no all, no finish." (150) The notion of a magazine story recedes further into the distance until it serves as an antimodel for living form. When Rosa whispers to Quentin that there is something "living hidden in that house," (172) we know that her story cannot be told because it has not ended yet. Her tale is still open.

This erosion of Rosa's confidence that she is telling a tale of a closed experience modifies our own expectation of a conventional ending for Absalom, Absalom! We suspect that a condition of continuing crisis of language is replacing the conventional notion of an impending and all-revealing ending. We are not, it is clear at the conclusion of Chapter V, going to know Thomas Sutpen from Rosa's telling. Instead, the persistent mystery of Sutpen forces the metamorphosis of Rosa's language from logical syntax, to circular statement, to compulsive repetition, and eventually to silence. When she says to Quentin that there is something hidden in that house, her tale goes on but her telling ends.

Rosa is a powerful force in Chapter IX, but she exists as a part of Quentin's telling. She has been dead for months, but comes alive in Quentin's voice, just as Thomas Sutpen came alive in Rosa's voice when Quentin first heard it. As Quentin tells Shreve about his and Rosa's journey together to Sutpen's Hundred, he notes how far Rosa's language had evolved towards silent action on that night; she was "not talking,

not saying words." (366) Instead of hypotheses, Rosa arms herself with a hatchet, instead of intuition, she relies on a flashlight. With every step closer to the secret that lies hidden in the Sutpen mansion, Quentin assumes more of the burden of telling as Rosa discards it. Walking up the dead "tree-arched drive," Quentin finds himself "repeating her words" and "aping without knowing it" Rosa's obsessions. (366-367) When he passes through the mansion window, he becomes Rosa's knight-at-arms, reaching for a holy grail he neither believes in nor desires. "'I just don't want to know about whatever it is she keeps hidden in it.'" (366) But if Quentin enters through the window as Rosa's surrogate slasher of the "arras-veil," he also passes through a language barrier of his own making. Once inside the room, Quentin frees himself for the first time of "that something that he could not pass": Rosa's hypothetical articulation of Henry Sutpen's mad rush up the stairs to shout to Judith of the murder of Charles Bon. Quentin manages to "pass over" the emotional block of her hypothesis by means of wordless action. He is consciously repeating Henry's gesture, storming the same house, moving up the same stairs, toward the same bedroom, only to meet, not Judith, but the dying Henry himself. The scene epitomizes the mirror that is Quentin's mind. Quentin in talking to Henry is talking to himself. The conversation ends where it began, with a question:

> And you are---?
> Henry Sutpen.
> . . . . . .
> And you are---?
> Henry Sutpen. (373)

The hypothesis of Henry, living in Quentin's mind, fuses with the actual Henry, dying in the mansion. The word and the deed are one,

and a part of Quentin's mind is doomed to remain inside that room from this moment on. Henry's death-in-life existence prefigures Quentin's future. Now he will have to listen to himself talking in "notlanguage," telling about the need to tell. "Waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived." (373) Nevermore of peace, says Quentin. At the end of Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin has reached a state of mind similar to Rosa's at the opening of the novel--he must attempt to articulate a story that is not a story because it has not ended and cannot be reduced to words. Like Addie in As I Lay Dying, Rosa escapes Quentin's plight by her death. She gains, in the phrase Mr. Compson uses in his letter to Quentin, "that place or bourne where the objects of the outrage and of the commiseration also are no longer ghosts but are actual people to be actual recipients of the hatred and the pity." (377) Rosa passes over to a mode of being which Quentin will soon reach himself, once he can divest himself of the burden of words and of living.

Mr. Compson's written words about Rosa's burial strike Quentin's consciousness as if he were experiencing a vision, and his reading of the letter, coming at the end of the novel, brings our own anticipation to a peak. Here, it seems, is the illusive meaning, the final registering of the book's experience by Quentin, its central intelligence. Mr. Compson's words, which strain to articulate the nature of Rosa's escape from both telling and process, assume for Quentin symbolic form:

> The weather was beautiful though cold and they had to use picks to break the earth for the grave yet in one of the deeper clods I saw a redworm doubtless alive when the clod was thrown up though by afternoon it was frozen again. (377)

Rosa is that redworm, frozen but alive in the clod, her final metamorphosis. We see now that Rosa's entire life has been a series of metamorphoses, escaping in turn from one cocoon after another, passing through the brittle shell of her father's house into her sister's mansion, back to her own house, and into the shell of silence that is her coffin. The burden of language is her last shedding. Rosa's coffin becomes the "cocoon-casket marriage-bed of youth and grief," a phrase Rosa used once for Sutpen's Hundred. (136)

VI

Rosa: the witness who was not there

After Rosa reveals to Quentin that there is something hidden in the Sutpen mansion, Rosa forsakes the promise of the word for silent action. She ceases telling her tale, and, accompanied by Quentin, she storms the old house, knocking down Clytie with a blow "like a man would have," running up the very stairs that formed a barrier to her forty-three years before. (369) Rosa passes beyond the range of verbal language by that dash up the stairs. When she returns back down the stairs and out of the Sutpen house, she remains silent, as if what she saw could never be put into words. This final metamorphosis of Rosa from passive witness to active heroine, which we learn from Quentin's recollection of that night in Chapter IX, is the end of Rosa's long retreat from the word.

Our initial encounter with Rosa's voice--the Rosa of Chapter I--takes place at a much earlier stage of her continuing metamorphosis. In Chapter I we hear Rosa when she first breaks the silence of forty-three

years. Rosa's decision to speak out about her memory of Sutpen acts as a catalyst for the potential telling of the novel. Her words generate other words in other speakers, who in turn seek ways and vocabularies that would elicit meaning from the Sutpen mystery.

Rosa summons Quentin for the role of witness by a disciplined arrangement of words. Her "stiffly formal" note to him in "neat faded cramped script" is the first of three letters that help to structure the novel. The first and the third are addressed to Quentin, from Rosa and from his father. The second is Bon's letter to Judith, which Mr. Compson reads aloud to Quentin. Rosa's letter comes "out of another world, almost," which is the world of deliberate silence in which Rosa has dwelled all these years. (10) Rosa here is primarily a teller, and her summons to Quentin to her dark, airless, tomb-like home is a passing on of her tale, a kind of verbal laying on of hands. Quentin only partially guesses her motives: "She wants it told." (10) Actually, Rosa wants to escape the burden of words, the need to tell, which has weighed her down all these years. Rosa's telling is also an awakening for her. Like Anderson on the bench, the nature of what she wants to say is rooted in the subconscious, in the very stuff of dreams, and the word will be a barrier for her telling. By attempting to tell of the dream, she awakens from it; by imposing verbal form on the dream, she loses its power. It is just this paradoxical quality of her telling, its "reason-flouting" nature, that impresses Quentin the most.

> It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic-and-reason flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity--

> horror or pleasure or amazement--depends as complete upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. (22)

Quentin knows that as listener to this telling of a dream, he must recognize that the truth of the dream may be ineffable, but the telling creates another kind of truth, and that the word in the act of utterance, rooted in elapsed and yet-elapsing time, also escapes time the way music does. Quentin perceives that the act of telling is an attempt to escape process. His listening is in part a preparation for his own telling to Shreve, a telling which Quentin thinks of as an act of expiation, of unburdening, and, ultimately, of escape.

Rosa's telling to Quentin in Chapter I is the first "marriage" of speaking and hearing in the novel. The marriage begets an image of Sutpen which immediately begins to produce progeny in Quentin's mind as Sutpen once produced offspring in life. As "Miss Coldfield's voice went on," says the narrator, the image of the "ogre-shape" resolved "out of itself before Quentin's eyes the two half-ogre children, the three of them forming a shadowy background for the fourth one." (13) Rosa's voice had been as silent as the shuttered tomb of her house, but this first rupture of a forty-three year silence creates a stream of life where there once was only dust. We hear her voice "not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand." (8) Like Japanese paper flowers dropped in water, Rosa's words activate the ghostly voices of Quentin's memory, calling forth out of the silence their "sonorous defeated names." (12) Rosa manages to pass on to Quentin the burden of telling, but Quentin has no one else to pass his telling onto except

himself, and the language that he adopts to speak to himself, the language of "notlanguage," is based not on a marriage between two speaker-hearers, but on an act of linguistic inversion. Language without hope of communion in a "happy marriage" of speaking and hearing turns back on itself like the defiant obscenity of Darl or Quentin's lonely fantasies of incest.

Having broken so long a silence, Rosa is self-conscious about the possibilities of telling, and she views her adversary, Sutpen, as a language problem. Rosa attributes Sutpen's own unbroken silence about his past (unbroken to her--Sutpen does talk about part of his past to General Compson) to a conspicuous language failure. She sees Sutpen's sudden arrival in town "out of nowhere" as the result of an unspeakable act. What "he fled from," she says, "must have been some opposite of respectability too dark to talk about." (17) To a great extent, she is right. Sutpen's design, the nature of which she guesses with some accuracy, draws its strength from the Old Testament concept of fatherhood, with its attendant powers of naming offspring with the same authority that Adam invoked in naming the animals. Sutpen arrived in Jefferson because his design had failed, and what he had done is indeed too dark to talk about. We later know that Sutpen had fathered and named Charles Bon, only to disown him, retreating into the silence in which the Mississippi town of Jefferson finds him, seeking the "concealment," Rosa says, of respectability. In Soldier's Pay, the unexpected return home of the son precipitated a language crisis for Donald Mahon's father; in Absalom, Absalom!, the return of Bon to his father's door provokes a more serious language crisis--Sutpen's design, an important

part of which is the power of naming offspring, is shattered. Rosa does not know the reason for Sutpen's silence about his origins, but her suspicion that his identity hinges on the unsayable is perceptive. Later Rosa says that Sutpen "was not articulated in this world," (171) and she is using the word "articulate" in the sense of engendered, created; Rosa is also implying that to articulate is to unite, to join --one of the root meanings of the word--and that articulation is the act of fusing the word and the essence of the object described. Sutpen's essence defies articulation, eludes the form-giving and meaning-rendering word. And since Sutpen was not articulated in this world, he can never be. Rosa's phrase crisply epitomizes the problem that Sutpen presents to the other narrators of the story: Sutpen exists outside the claims of language because each narrator relegates the source of Sutpen's vitality outside the province of humanity itself. In the novel, language and Sutpen-ness are never fully joined or united, and so he is never articulated.

Perhaps this awareness of the intense vitality of Sutpen long after his physical death, of his mysterious energy thriving in the words of those who would attempt to articulate him, is what fascinates and compels each narrator to speak: Sutpen is beyond process, they are in process, and their talking of him permits a momentary escape from process. Sutpen, we could say, is to the speakers of Absalom, Absalom! as the nightingale is to the speaker in Keats's ode.

Rosa. The promise of her name--a rose in bloom--is never fulfilled by her sterile, virginal life. Yet Rosa herself is a prolific creator of names, and perhaps the fertile power of her naming is a

vicarious expression of the sexual blooming she never experienced. Her naming of Sutpen, at any rate, is an act of exorcism. She calls Sutpen "fiend blackguard and devil," (15) "evil's source and head," (18) "ogre or a djinn," (23) but it is clear that this kind of "demonizing," as Shreve later calls it, represents Rosa's attempt to exorcize from her soul Sutpen's ghostly presence. Rosa is trying to cast out the devils of her past by naming them. Nevertheless, it is not Sutpen's devilry that disturbs Rosa--to be insulted by a devil is impossible; we can be snatched away to the pit, perhaps, but not insulted--it is Sutpen's humanity (not humaneness) that hurts Rosa the most. Sutpen was a real person, who gave Rosa a real hurt. By calling Sutpen a devil, Rosa is casting him out by misnaming him. "One casts out demons by a vocabulary of conversion," says Kenneth Burke, "by an incongruous naming, by calling them the very thing in all the world they are not. . . ."[8] Rosa, in fact, is obsessed with calling Sutpen what he is not. She spends much of her first exchange with Quentin insisting that Sutpen was not a gentleman, had a name that "nobody ever heard before," "had no past at all," was not old enough (". . . he was too young . . ."), yet "was no younger son sent out from some old quiet country like Virginia," and that "nobody at all knew about" Sutpen's behavior prior to his marriage to Ellen Coldfield. (15-18) Rosa names Sutpen in terms of what he is not because she is afraid of the implications for herself if she named Sutpen for what he is, with all the terror of that naming--a mere man, whom she once "agreed to marry." (18)

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[8]Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose (Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1954), p. 130.

Rosa sees Sutpen's search for respectability in terms of a thicket, claiming that "he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briers and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought." (16) Her metaphor of the thicket is typical of the unique quality of her language. Her voice articulates images of dense, lush, impenetrable growth which themselves resemble the rich profusion of her tangled and winding sentences. Rosa's telling is a journey of discovery for herself. She wanders through the maze of her own sentences. Indeed, the climax of her telling in Chapter I--the terrifying image of Judith and Clytie watching their father fight with his slaves in the barn--Rosa approaches in fits and starts, as if hacking her way through another thicket, not only because she is not sure of its meaning, shocking as it is, but because she never saw it. Rosa breaks into the illusive clearing, only to find that she is not there: "But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time--once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her--looking down through the square entrance to the loft." (30) Rosa reserves her authority as witness for an event that she admits she did not see. The paradox of her telling is that her language is strongest--in her selection of details and command of suspense--precisely when it is composed, as it is here, of pure hypothesis. The credibility of her role of witness is based on what she never saw. Rosa's clairvoyance, if we can call it that, is a gift that she manages to pass on, along with the compulsion to tell, to her listener, Quentin, who comes to see the things he never saw better than anyone else in the novel. "If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain," Quentin says on one occasion. (190) It is Quentin,

moreover, who "sees" Rosa's final return to a burning Sutpen's Hundred, the blazing and dramatic ending of her tale.

VII

Rosa's language and the paralysis of flight

Rosa's voice in Chapter V is dramatically different from that of Chapter I. Faulkner italicizes her language to indicate the degree that her voice has evolved through another metamorphosis. When Quentin returns to Rosa's house after an absence of a few hours, he has heard his father's attempts to throw light on the Sutpen mystery, and Rosa knows this. Her language thus reflects an awareness that her role as teller must adapt itself to Quentin's knowledge of another telling, so her narration oscillates between what she knows Quentin has been told ("So they will have told you doubtless already . . .") and what she knows could not have been told ("But they cannot tell you how I went up the drive . . . "). (134) Rosa takes grim satisfaction in knowing that she alone is the possessor of certain aspects of the Sutpen story. Since she must now not only tell her tale, but correct a telling she never heard, Rosa is doubly conscious of the risks of language. Her choice of rhetoric is itself an obstacle to the telling. How shall she begin? More precisely, What medium can she use? Her need is for a rhetoric, a strategy of word arrangement, which would effect a dispensation from the words that compose that rhetoric.

> I will tell you what he did and let you be the judge. (Or try to tell you, because there are some things for which three words are three too many, and three thousand words that many too less, and this is one of them. It can be told; I could take that many sentences, repeat the bold blank naked and outrageous words just as he spoke them, and bequeath you

> only that same aghast and outraged unbelief I knew when I comprehended what he meant; or take three thousand sentences and leave you only that Why? Why? and Why? that I have asked and listened to for almost fifty years.) But I will let you be the judge and let you tell me if I was not right. (166-167)

Rosa's willingness to let Quentin "be the judge" carries with it the obligation for Quentin to "tell me if I was not right," which means that Quentin"s listening presence will modulate Rosa's telling, and that Rosa's telling, in turn, will structure Quentin's telling.

Rosa's hesitation at the choice of rhetorics--whether to use three thousand words or only three--indicates that her tale concerns an event so traumatic that it would defy any approach to it by means of words. There is, in short, an unspeakable act embeded within Rosa's tale, and she conceives her problem in terms of selection: she must choose words that would best bring her listener's imagination close to that unspeakable act, and hope that together they could overpass that block of unsayableness, and move on to the illusive ending. Words, she thinks, can carry her telling only so far. The moment of deepest meaning, the source of her "outrage" which has compelled her to speak out in the first place, lies beyond the limits of language. Her language claims to be dynamic, to narrate an action from origin to ending. But her telling is dynamic only as it approaches that unspeakable act; the forward motion of her narrative begins to "freeze" in front of these ineffable instants of time. At such moments Rosa's language becomes lyrical, chanting her sense of despair in arrested moments of stasis. Rosa wants to tell about the suspension of her life for forty-three years, and her telling assumes some of the static nature of the tale.

Actually there are two arrested moments, unspeakable acts, that hover in the midst of her tale, and each moment represents a brutal snipping of Rosa's blossoming into love. Her capacity to love was crushed not once but twice--by Bon's death and by Sutpen's proposal for a trial breeding before a formal marriage. Both traumatic moments she imagines as arrested motion, flights without escape, like our futile attempts to run in our dreams. Rosa's flight to Sutpen's Hundred at the news of Bon's murder ends with Clytie's damning touch; the flight away from Sutpen's Hundred after Sutpen's proposal has not ended yet at the time of her telling. How to find words for these unspeakable acts is a problem Rosa never solves; her groping attempts to solve them, however, make up the novel's richest prose. The drama of Rosa's search for words, we can say, is more significant than the tale she tells.

VIII

Rosa and Bon: the telling of the dream

Rosa's account of her running to the Sutpen House at the news that Henry killed Bon is a narrative that never approaches a sense of completion, although we do feel that she reveals all she can bear to say. Her words strain to say the unsayable, fail, and return to start over. Clytie stopped Rosa by touching her arm, but that touch crippled Rosa's ability to describe how it felt to be stopped. Rosa cannot pass over this moment in her tale; her words butt against the unspeakable act. "I was crying not to someone, something, but (trying to cry) through something, through that force, that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism which had stopped me--that presence,

that familiar coffee-colored face. . . ." (137) Rosa struggles to articulate her sense of rage not just at being addressed by Clytie by her first name, but by having to feel "that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh." (139) For Rosa, touching is a mode of expression that is more efficacious than words:

> . . . there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both--touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own: not spirit, soul; . . . (139)

Clytie's touch is traumatic for Rosa not just because, as she says, it pierced her "citadel of the central I-Am's private own," but because that touch was the only physical intimacy Rosa ever experienced with another person. (Sutpen's placing of his dead wife's wedding ring on Rosa's finger is something less than an act of intimacy.) Rosa's shocked recollection of Clytie's unwanted touch evokes an image of a touch she desired but never felt--the "imprint" of Charles Bon's "absent thighs." (148) Clytie's touch was actual; Bon's touch was potential, and these two touches--actual and hypothetical--mark the high points of Rosa's emotional life.

If Sutpen is Rosa's devil, exorcizing him by misnomer, Bon is her patron saint. Rosa enshrines Bon by a verbal ceremony of hypothesis, calling him "Charles Bon, Charles Good, Charles Husband soon-to-be," names that assure for Rosa his continuing life outside of process. (148) The Charles Bon of Rosa's imagination is her most poetic hypothesis, her most enduring "might-have-been which is the single rock," she says, "we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality." (149-150)

Nearly half a century after his death, Rosa still clings to this rock. Since she never saw Bon--only his photograph--her capacity to draw life from the energy of a name was never impaired by the actual presence of the real person, and Bon's existence in Rosa's imagination, outside the dimensions of time and space--is analogous to Faulkner's continuing affection for the character of Caddy, whose appeal for him depended precisely on his confessed inability to reduce his conception of her to a single, permanent form.

Rosa's hypothesis of Bon, her "vague inference of walking flesh," as she calls it, is an act of creation in which she is justly proud. "I do not even know of my own knowledge that Ellen ever saw it, that Judith ever loved it, that Henry slew it: so who will dispute me when I say, Why did I not invent, create it?" (147) Her powers of invention are fertile, and she thinks of her verbal prowess as a garden, with Bon her sensitive plant. When Bon passed by her door, Rosa tells Quentin, the seed for her hypothesis was placed in "this cellar earth of mine," causing "a child's vacant fairy-tale to come alive in the garden." (146) Bon's existence gives "substance to that shadow" of her girlish fantasies, and for a few months in that "vintage year of wisteria," Rosa lives a vicarious love affair by nurturing a vocabulary of courtship. While Judith walks with the real Bon in the Sutpen garden, Rosa walks with her "vague inference" of Bon in the garden of her imagination, worshipping the name "Charles Good."

> Oh no, I was not spying while I dreamed in the lurking harborage of my own shrub or vine as I believed she dreamed upon the nooky seat which held invisible imprint of his absent thighs just as the obliterating sand, the million finger-nerves of frond and leaf, the very sun and moony

> constellations which had looked down at him, the circum-ambient air, held somewhere yet his foot, his passing shape, his face, his speaking voice, his name: Charles Bon, Charles Good, Charles Husband-soon-to-be. (148)

Rosa's courtship with a name gave poetic form to her brief summer of joy, just as her prolific and varied naming of Sutpen gives poetic form to her life-long suffering. Bon is Rosa's dream love in the garden, forever walking beyond touch, and Clytie's touch wakens Rosa from her dream. Bon's burial insures the perpetuation of his bodiless, untouched existence in Rosa's mind. "One day he was not. Then he was. Then he was not." (152) Bon's disappearance did not even leave behind an "imprint of a body on a mattress," rounding out his existence for Rosa in terms of absent imprints, ghostly touches.

IX

Rosa's garden and Sutpen's swamp

The time between Bon's death and Sutpen's return home from the war is a period of neglect for Rosa's garden, her language capacity. The lives of the three women, Rosa, Judith, and Clytie, existed, Rosa says, "like that of the blind, unsentient earth itself which dreams after no flower's stalk nor bud. . . ." (155) Their hand-to-mouth existence cripples both sexual and verbal power for all three women; they speak "no language which the other understood," and "sex," Rosa says, was "some forgotten atrophy." (155) Rosa's verbal grace is like an unkempt garden, lying fallow, waiting for another seed, just as she waits for Sutpen's return. Shortly after Sutpen does come back to his ruined plantation Rosa finds him "looking at me," she says to Quentin, while she is tending her okra garden. Rosa reveals to Quentin that she

thought of herself at that moment as herself a garden, a potentially fertile clearing for Sutpen. My "presence," she says, "was to him only the absence of black morass and snarled vine and creeper to that man who had struggled through a swamp. . . ." (166) Rosa's capacity for love blossomed again, and she felt she could give to Sutpen, perhaps out of pity, a refuge--"dry solid ground and sun and air"--all the necessary components of a fertile garden. Indeed, it is precisely in these terms that Sutpen does regard this silent, nineteen year old Rosa--as a potentially fertile bearer of his seed.

When Rosa's telling approaches the second and final block of unsayableness--the "bold blank naked and outrageous words" of his proposal --her language, up to now so versatile and protean in imagery and diction, begins to falter. (167) Rosa now structures her telling by parodying other voices who talk of Rosa. "They will have told you how I came back home. Oh yes, I know: 'Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn't keep him'. . . ." (168) Rosa can thus talk of herself in the third person, "objectifying" her narrative to diminish somewhat the pain of telling about her pain. Rosa's narration circles around this core of unspeakableness the way she once prowled around the edge of her neighbor's garden fences. The outrageousness of Sutpen's words so violates Rosa's psyche that she is unable to repeat them to Quentin. She does manage to recall that she fled the sound of Sutpen's "outrageous words," retreating to the sunless, airless room--one more suitable for the growth of toad stools than of a rose--in which we find her forty-three years later. Her life in the Coldfield house seems to be a deliberate purgation of that metaphor of herself as a clearing, a potentially fertile

garden--Rosa as "dry solid ground and sun and air." (166) Rosa had only the "freshman year in gardening," she says, and for the years after her flight she sustained herself by "reaching through the garden fence and gathering vegetables" from her neighbor's gardens, "the reach of her unaided arm being the limit of brigandage which she never passed." (170-171)

This last metamorphosis of Rosa's actual telling, her shift from first to third person for her narrative, is accompanied by a new resignation with her failure to render her tale to Quentin in words. Rosa is humbler here for this final summing up of the last forty or so bleak years of her life; her image of herself changes from greviously wronged female to detached observer of the vagaries and ambiguities of human life. Her shrillness fades as she gradually sees the significance of her role in the Sutpen story fading. Rosa began her tale with at least provisional confidence in the truth of an experience, in this case, her experience with Sutpen. She was even willing to let Quentin judge whether hers was the "right" version or not. But after Rosa's many torturous and exhausting encounters with the barrier of language, she confesses that the subject of her tale, the true character of Thomas Sutpen, cannot be articulated. Sutpen, she says, was a "walking shadow." (171) Rosa's shift from confidence in words to linguistic skepticism mirrors an important movement of the novel as a whole. For Rosa, and for us as readers, there will be no versions to be judged right or wrong, no final clearing up of the enigma of Sutpen, but only the persistent vitality of new questions, new versions, only more of Rosa's "Why and Why and Why. . . ." (170)

X

The doll in the nightmare, making no sound

Rosa's reaching through the garden fences is a symbol of both the versatility and limitations of her language, which aspires to pass over to a more life-giving idiom, but which is doomed to stay within "the reach" of her unaided arm, which we can read as the limits of verbal language itself. Rosa's arm in the act of passing through the fence epitomizes the parodoxical energy of her speech. On one hand, a portion of her vocabulary strains toward a sense of growth, of organic fulfillment, a tendency which we can recognize in her reliance on the metaphor of flora--thickets, gardens, swamps, seeds, wisteria, plant, vine creeper, leaf and root. At the same time an opposite tendency manifests itself in her persistent use of words and phrases like shells, walls, cacoon, closed doors, "bedroom long-closed," (138) looking "through a piece of smoky glass," (145) and being left "immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed." (151) Like Absalom, Absalom! as a whole, Rosa's language encompasses flux and stasis simultaneously. Her assaults on the unspeakable, her slashes in the "arras-veil," are so many attempts to reach through the restraining "fence" of the word's limits to seize the fruit of the garden, fruit which we gradually realize is nothing less than a superior mode of language, so vital and life-giving that it is beyond the range of verbal speech entirely.

After Rosa's telling to Quentin we know she opts for silent action over the power of the word, assaulting with Quentin the silent secret of Sutpen's Hundred. And this conception of Rosa is the one-

Quentin is forced to live with--Rosa's metaphorsis into wordless act, Rosa as "furious creature making no sound at all," (375) writhing in helpless anguish as Sutpen's Hundred burns to the ground.

> . . . he (Quentin) could see her, them; he had not been there but he could see her, struggling and fighting like a doll in a nightmare, making no sound. . . . (376)

Rosa's tale of a dream that she attempts to tell to Quentin becomes a nightmare for the listener, conferring on him the need to tell his own dream which is about a silent speaker, a doll in a nightmare, making no sound.

SOME FINAL WORDS

The poem . . . does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been. Poetry can be recognized by this property, that it tends to get itself reproduced in its own form: it stimulates us to reconstruct it identically.

--Paul Valéry, The Art of Poetry

I

In Faulkner's best fiction, the artist struggles with his medium. In novels like The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!, the tension between artist and medium yields some of Faulkner's most poetic utterances, and these utterances frequently epitomize his attitude toward the nature of language, his own medium.

For the moment, we can review his first novels, Soldier's Pay and Mosquitoes, as preliminary studies of the artist and the purity--or "truth"--of his art, studies which opened up rich possibilities for his later fiction. In Soldier's Pay, Donald Mahon represents the artist as a potential truth-teller, so consumed by the intensity of his war-time experience that he is incapable of rendering its significance. Mahon is the artist deprived of his medium.

In Faulkner's second novel, Gordon the sculptor and Fairchild the novelist incorporate new and more complex tensions that Faulkner began to see in the person of the artist. Both Gordon and Fairchild feel compelled to scrutinize the purity of their respective media as they create. Gordon is an artist with an "impeccable" medium at his disposal--the tangible substance of wood and stone. But Fairchild, equally an artist, sees his medium threatened by the taint of corruption, even of--to use his word--"perversion." The individual words that Fairchild brings to bear on his imaginative fictions, his tales about the

outhouse, the man who turned into a shark, and so on, are the same words that are so mindlessly uttered by the pseudo-artists who surround him. Mosquitoes abounds with anti-artists like Mrs. Maurier and Mr. Talliaferro, whose verbose posturings as artists-of-life corrupt, in the mind of Fairchild, the purity of his medium. Fairchild's notion of the artist whose medium is words is really an impossibility: his artist would be a moral absolutist, a cleansing force, a redeemer of language from the taint of man. But it is precisely man's taint, his "peccable" touch, that gives meaning to language.

Perhaps Fairchild's frequently tiresome musings about the possibilities of verbal art parody some of the mannerisms that the sharp-eyed young Faulkner observed in the older Sherwood Anderson. But they also reflect Faulkner's own reservations with language as an art medium.

The high ideal Faulkner had of verbal expression led him to consider the phenomenon of language from different angles--from the dumbness of Benjy's idiocy, the strident incoherence of Quentin's obsessions, to the reticence of Cash, even to the eloquence of silence itself. Not surprisingly, Faulkner's linguistic skepticism brought him to focus on the plight and failures of the verbal artist, and this figure appears in one form or another in each of the three novels that compose the bulk of this study. Certain fictive speakers of these books--especially Quentin, Darl, Addie, and Rosa--are variations of the verbal maker caught up in the crisis of creation, and the unique ways that they confront the nature of the word provide us with glimpses of the philosophy of language that informs them. They are the word-makers, the poets, and their utterances are the sparks that fly up when Faulkner's conflict-

ing attitudes toward the word clash in his fiction.

Faulkner's philosophy of language is not an abstract theory. Important clues to his thinking are not likely to be explicit or dogmatic. Instead, his attitude comes to us quietly through allusion and character and of course form. Nor does his view of language come through unequivocally. Many of his "statements" are at war with one another. He is capable of embracing such dramatically polar positions as a simultaneous faith and skepticism in the creative energies of the word, a conviction that a literary artifice is equally timeless and transient, a reverence for the vitality of actual words and for the hypothetical purity of silence, and a belief that the word in the act of utterance is both a symbol of process and a mode of escape from the consequences of process. The conflicting nature of some of these statements should not surprise us since language itself is, in the phrase of Charles Feidelson, a "kind of protoplasm that is capable of falling into four principle shapes: the collocation of words, grammar, logic, and rhetoric," each of which thrives in a continual state of conflict with the others.[1] The warring components of language are a sign of its energy, and Faulkner groups these components under a wider frame of reference, one based on a recognition of the paradoxical life of language. If Faulkner's philosophy of language is a paradox, it is because he sees paradox in the behavior of words and paradox as a condition of the experience language expresses.

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[1]Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 61.

Faulkner's dynamic conception of the nature of the word confers on his best novels a linguistic self-consciousness of extraordinary intensity. The following are two ramifications of his philosophy of language that provide fields of force for novels like The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom!: (1) the tension between the poetry of silence and poetic prose; and (2) the dialectic between speaker-poets and the movement toward symbolic discourse. These two issues will structure some concluding remarks about the relationship between Faulkner's art and his life-long absorption with the verbal artist's attitude toward the illusive and mysterious phenomenon of human discourse, the only medium he has.

II

The poetry of silence and poetic prose

Throughout his career Faulkner paid lip-service to the notion that true poetry is superior to prose, and that the lyric poem provides the only norm for evaluating the art of poetry. When Faulkner began to write poems he looked to poets like Mallarmé and Verlaine for models, both of whom arranged words to suggest a superior mode of statement beyond those words, and Faulkner's most interesting poems manage to hint at a purer language outside the scope of the actual poem. By so regarding the verse form of his early imaginative writing as a kind of shackle to be shaken loose, Faulkner adopted some of the assumptions of the French Symbolists and the English Romantic poets, namely, the fascination with the purity of the artist's inspiration before it is adulterated by concrete form, and a fondness for word patterns that evoke musical tones and hence suggest a superior, even supersemantic language. Both of these

assumptions imply only a minimal awareness of the linguistic medium as an end in itself.

Faulkner came to think of the true poet, in short, as one who speaks not in a language of men, as Wordsworth believed, but in a language beyond men. When Faulkner stopped writing poetry and began to experiment with prose fiction, he equated the poet's language with one purer than words. The true poet aims for the "absolutely perfect" language, which is the "notlanguage" that we are expected to hear resonating above the sound of the actual words.

By consigning the hallmarks of the poet outside the reach of verbal language, Faulkner could readily speak of his own efforts with formal verse as "failures," and perhaps they were. But the concept of failure is an integral part of his notion of art-language in general: the poet is the ideal verbal artist, and his attempts to escape the constrictions of his medium are inevitable failures. Such a poet is a paradox; he pledges to say the unsayable.

Faulkner approached the medium of prose, then, with these two assumptions about art-language firmly in mind: the true poet fails because the word is a barrier to his inspiration; and a verbal fiction achieves its highest level of intensity when it creates the illusion that it speaks to the reader from some point beyond the very words that render that illusion. From purely a theoretical stance, Faulkner viewed the language of poetry and prose as discontinuous, a premise about language common to both the Romantics and the Symbolists. But in the day to day exercise of his craft, Faulkner saw the medium of language somewhat the way Laurence Lerner defined it in The Truest Poetry: language

is a continuum between the "poles of mathematics and dream."[2] Faulkner, it comes to this, apologized continually for his failure as a poet, but wrote a number of prose fictions that can only be called poetic--far more poetic than any of the verse he apologized for.

In his best novels, Faulkner's prose reaches the finer tones of meaning that he admired so in the poems of Keats, Mallarmé, Verlaine, and others. For all his interest in these poets, in fact, Faulkner's own self-consciousness about his medium is closer to T. S. Eliot's conception of the poet as primarily a verbal maker. The true Romantic artist, as Charles Feidelson points out, regards the most important aspect of his art as self-expression:

> To the true romantic, however faithful an artist he might be, the language of a poem could never take on this autonomous quality. However carefully elaborated, the words remain a self-expression, the vehicle of personal ideas or emotions; the literary work was formed in the writer's soul, and language was merely the instrument of expression.[3]

In spite of his frequent salutes in the direction of Romantic loyalties, Faulkner is not a Romantic. He is a language manipulator, an explorer of the patterns and meanings of words. His fiction may portray the verbal artist wrestling with the force of language--a traditionally Romantic crisis--but these artists are rendered in prose that reveals Faulkner's delight in language as a made thing, a fictive pattern, an imaginative world-of-words. His poetic language merits the same close reading traditionally given to the poem.

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[2]Laurence Lerner, The Truest Poetry (1960), pp. 220-221.

[3]Feidelson, p. 45.

The best of Faulkner's prose fictions involve speaker-poets like Quentin, Addie, and Rosa, who attempt to speak an impeccable language. Their tales are imaginative flights from the bonds of corruptible words; they live for us in a linguistic universe of their own making, and as such they represent Faulkner's own way of coming to terms with what David Lodge describes as the eternal dilemma of the verbal artist:

> . . . the writer's medium differs from the media of most other arts--pigment, stone, musical notes, etc.--in that it is never virgin: words come to the writer already violated by other men, impressed with meanings derived from the world of common experience. Thus, there is always a natural temptation to regard the writer as a man who tells us something, rather than as a man who tells us something by making something.[4]

An obsession with the word "virginity" and the "virginity" of words links Rosa, Addie, and Quentin together. They articulate the paradox of his art.

III

The dialectic of speaker-poets and symbolic discourse

Faulkner's quest for the impeccable language by a medium other than the lyric poem resulted not only in a number of highly poetic prose fictions, but in a remarkable cluster of poet-speakers who launch their own quests for that language. The dialectical relationship in which Faulkner frequently placed these fictive voices--relationships as varied as those we saw between Fairchild and Wiseman, Quentin and Caddy, Darl and Addie, and Rosa and Quentin--is a rhetorical device that Faulkner

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[4]David Lodge, The Language of Fiction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 47.

believes best renders the flavor of human speech. The verbal thrusts and parries between speakers breeds discord, open-endedness, and dramatic tension in the fiction; these encounters also generate a sense of discovery for us. We participate in the utterances we hear by sustaining both vocal parties to the dispute. The dialectic of fictive voices, in fact, is an epitome of the greater dialectic taking place between us as readers and Faulkner the artist. As Jean-Paul Sartre phrases it, ". . . the operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents. It is the joint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others."[5]

Faulkner's career as a novelist can be mapped rather accurately by the increasing skill with which he makes the spoken word clash within the dialectic. The more articulate the speakers, the more intense is the dialectic. The clashes between two poetic minds like Quentin and Rosa, for instance, draw our attention to the nature of the language they use; from them we know more fully that the word is not merely a medium for the telling, but a mysterious element--Feidelson's phrase "protoplasm" comes to mind here--in which the teller finds himself immersed, yet upon which he must impose some form of order, circumscribe some pattern. Words are like a well, a source both of renewal and danger; the artist can draw from it or fall in. Quentin drowns in words as much as he drowns in the Charles River.

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[5]Jean-Paul Sartre, What Is Literature?, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 41.

Faulkner's reliance on the dialectic as a rhetorical device for making language yield wordless insights says something about his traffic with symbolic language. Charles Feidelson, in his discussion symbolism and American writers, argues that the value of the dialectic lies in its ability to resolve verbal conflicts, to reunite "strands of thought that logic itself has separated."[6] The dialectic, he argues, draws its strength not from logic but from paradox, from verbal strife rather than agreement:

> Dialectic works backward from logical dilemmas by finding the more inclusive statement under which opposing concepts may be reconciled. It assumes that the conflict is entirely within the universe of discourse, that the problem is produced by the relationship of terms and does not involve a 'question of fact.'[7]

Both dialectic and symbolism stem from the same source--verbal discord--and both direct our eyes away from the "fact" and to the medium of knowledge, or, as Feidelson says, away from "the external correspondence of the medium to its internal coherence."[8] Faulkner's dialectics between speakers who themselves are verbal makers are dramatizations of the symbolistic imagination engaged in the act of living in the linguistic world it creates.

Rosa's language is symbolic. Her long dialectic with Quentin is the outward form of her own divided mind. Rosa's efforts to utter a poetic and unifying statement that would encompass all the conflicting

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[6]Feidelson, p. 67.

[7]Feidelson, p. 68.

[8]Feidelson, p. 69.

components of her tale becomes more urgent for her as she comes to feel that her listener is her antagonist and that he embodies the mental discord within her. Quentin's presence pressures Rosa into attempting to live in the unitive world of language. Her telling breaks loose from the claims of logical discourse, gathering intensity as it assumes the condition of symbolic language. As she speaks, Rosa gradually abandons the "fact" of Sutpen and seeks instead an overwhelmingly inclusive statement, a symbolic utterance, a poetic world that would say all by reconciling all the discordant strains that make up her telling. The following passage, I think, best represents the symbolic world which is her refuge and most poetic utterance. It is one of the richest passages about the vitality of language in all of Faulkner. Her image of the "prisoner soul" trying to free itself from the "miasmal mass" is also a poetic version of the verbal artist straining to escape from the fertile miasma that is language:

> Perhaps I couldn't even have wanted more than that, couldn't have accepted less, who even at nineteen must have known that living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before what-is-to-be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gash. Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either: not cowardice which will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, relicts the seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but only how to recreate, renew; and dies, is gone, vanished: nothing--but is that true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth, from which the dreamer, waking,

> says not 'Did I but dream?' but rather says, indicts high heaven's very self with: 'Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?' (142-143)

Rosa's vision of the nature of human life embraces the role of language in life. The seething "miasmal mass" is both process and language-in-process; it is "anonymous" because the verbal artist has not yet imposed upon its forming vision, which is the "spark, that dream" which "relicts" the miasmal mass. The soul of the verbal artist is a prisoner of language because his medium of words is shared by the anti-artist. The verbal artist must free himself from his own "prisoner arteries and veins" in order to reach "upward, sunward" for the "globy and complete instant of its freedom." The verbal artist can escape process by creating a poetic vision, an all-inclusive aesthetic, encompassing "all of space and time and massy earth." The "true wisdom" Rosa speaks of is symbolic discourse itself. The symbolistic imagination alone is capable of comprehending that there is a "might-have-been which is more true than truth," more true, that is, than the truth of logical discourse.

Rosa's poetic vision of the word as swamp, as formless miasma, represents one pole of Faulkner's philosophy of language. Addie's notion of the word as jar, as form without substance, represents the other pole. The dialectic tension between form and substance, jar and swamp, is the life-blood of Faulkner's prose, the "spark," as Rosa says, that redeems his art from the claims of space and time and massy earth.

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Silence and the Impeccable Language: A Study of William Faulkner's Philosophy of Language.

Dissertation directed by Richard Giannone, Ph.D.

Faulkner's best fiction dramatizes the phenomenon of language, and this study will attempt to extrapolate a philosophy of language from certain of his most linguistically complex novels. The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom! are informed by a paradoxical attitude toward verbal language as a medium of art, and this sense of paradox stems from Faulkner's desire to achieve the timelessness of art by means of the transient medium of language. In Faulkner's mind, the poet alone is capable of resolving the paradox. The poet, he says, speaks an "absolutely impeccable" language. What the poet says is eternal, because his language is.

Faulkner's notion of poetry as an absolutely perfect art-language is an index to his philosophy of language. His earliest efforts with verse display a deepening interest in achieving the illusion that the actual words on the page hint at a purer, wordless language beyond the edges of the actual poem.

Soldier's Pay and Mosquitoes, the subject of the first two chapters of this study, represent Faulkner's attempts in prose to

dramatize the paradox of art-language. Both books articulate assumptions about language that later on give life to his best novels --issues like the virginity of language, virgin speakers who are poets, the tension between language and silence, and the struggle of the verbal artist with his medium.

The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Absalom, Absalom! --analyzed in the last three chapters of this study--address themselves to the special problem of the verbal artist confronting the medium of words. Quentin, Addie, Darl, and Rosa are the speaker-poets of these novels. They represent variations of the verbal maker caught up in the crisis of creation. Each is obsessed by the word "virginity" and by the virginity of the word. Challenged by the transience of language, they demand a pure, impeccable language, one free from the pecca of accumulated and changeable meanings. They are moral and linguistic absolutists, and their quests for the impeccable language of silence are failures. But their failures are also poetic utterances, and these utterances probe the paradox of Faulkner's art.

Quentin and the other speaker-poets articulate Faulkner's faith in and deep skepticism of the creative energy of the word, his conviction that a literary artifice is equally timeless and transient, his reverence for the vitality of the actual word and for the hypothetical purity of silence, his belief that the word in the act of utterance is both a symbol of process and a mode of escape from the consequences of process. If Faulkner's philosophy of language is a paradox, it is because he sees paradox in the behavior of words and as a condition of the experience language expresses.

VITA

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